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GAMIFICATION IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSES: A COMPARATIVE STUDY WITHIN THE LWB-UFS CONTEXT

GAMIFICAÇÃO EM AULAS DE LÍNGUA INGLESA: UM ESTUDO COMPARATIVO NO CONTEXTO DO ISF-UFS

GAMIFICACIÓN EN CLASES DE LENGUA INGLESA: UN ESTUDIO COMPARATIVO EN EL CONTEXTO ISF-UFS

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ABSTRACT: Considering the need to engage and motivate English language students within the context of the Language without Borders (LwB) program at the Federal University of Sergipe (UFS), gamification or the use of game thinking and mechanics in real life contexts was applied in a class from a 48-hour course. In this paper, this gamified class is analyzed and compared to a non-gamified one. We also investigate how students perceive the experience in comparison to the regular classes. The methodology employed is a qualitative teacher-research based on action research. Finally, we conclude that even though 100% of the students think that the gamified class is better, they feel just as motivated in non-gamified ones.
KEYWORDS: gamification. English language teaching. Languages without Borders. Games. Action research.

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RESUMO: Considerando a necessidade de engajar e motivar os alunos de língua inglesa no contexto do Idiomas sem Fronteiras (IsF) na Universidade Federal de Sergipe (UFS), a gamificação, ou uso de mecânicas e pensamento orientado a jogo (*game thinking*), foi aplicada em uma aula de um curso de 48 horas. Neste artigo, essa aula gamificada é analisada e comparada a uma aula não gamificada. Também investigamos como alunos percebem a experiência em comparação a aulas regulares do programa. A metodologia empregada é qualitativa, caracterizada como pesquisa docente, baseada na pesquisa-ação. Por fim, concluímos que, mesmo com 100% dos alunos classificando a aula gamificada como melhor, eles se sentem tão motivados nela quanto em aulas não gamificadas.
PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Gamificação. Ensino de língua inglesa. Idiomas sem Fronteiras. Games. Pesquisa-ação.

RESUMEN: Teniendo en cuenta la necesidad de involucrar y motivar a los estudiantes de inglés en el contexto de Idiomas sin Fronteras (IsF) en la Universidad Federal de Sergipe (UFS), se aplicó la gamificación o el uso de técnicas y pensamiento orientado al juego a una clase de un curso de 48 horas. En este artículo, esta clase gamificada se analiza y se compara con una clase no gamificada. También investigamos cómo los estudiantes perciben la experiencia en comparación con las clases regulares del programa. La metodología utilizada es cualitativa, caracterizada como investigación docente, basada en la investigación-acción. Finalmente, encontramos que, aunque con el 100% de los estudiantes calificando la clase gamificada como mejor, se sienten igual de motivados que en las clases no gamificadas.
PALABRAS CLAVE: Gamificación. Enseñanza de inglés. Idiomas sin Fronteras. Juegos. Investigación-acción.

1 GAME START

The Languages without Borders (LwB) program – reshaped from the English without Borders (EwB) program decreed in 2012 through the Ordinance n. 1.466/2012 (BRASIL, 2012) – was stablished in 2014 with the Ordinance n. 973/2014 (BRASIL, 2014), considering the need to include other languages and to detail how the program could also be a teacher's formation space. Besides contributing to internationalization and university students' and staff's linguistic development (including pre-service language teachers), LwB also provides its teachers with experience and methodological knowledge. In the Federal University of Sergipe (UFS), the teachers are undergraduate language students who prepare and develop courses – with the guidance of their respective coordinators – considering the program's goals and principles. In this paper, we focus on the English language nucleus. Regarding it, there are weekly meetings in which all the parties involved (teachers and coordinators) discuss texts that address language teaching and learning, as well as the results of the face-to-face courses for which the teachers are responsible. Within this context, research – very often based on action-research (BURNS, 2015) – is produced aiming at understanding classes realities and changing them. This formation space, therefore, contributes not only to the development of language teachers, but it also fosters other researches in this field.

Through analysis of what happens in classes, LwB teachers are encouraged to "[…] theorize from their practice and practice what they have theorized" (KUMARAVADIVELU, 1994, p. 30). In this paper, we will focus on one of these experiences, which addresses the work with gamification in a class. After reflecting on the number of students dropping the face-to-face English courses LwB offers, we concluded that we had to explore other teaching possibilities that could help students to engage with the courses and to complete them. Gamification, the use of game concept in other contexts, was incorporated in a class of the course "English language varieties" for its potentiality to contribute to the solution of the above-mentioned issue. This paper aims to analyze this experience. To do so, we detail the process of planning the class and compare the gamified lesson to another one (non-gamified) from the same course to emphasize how similar (or different) they are. We also investigate how students perceive the experience, going through their answers in a questionnaire. The methodology we use is qualitative and characterized as action-research because it involves acting based on the results of the research that was conducted by people who are part of context where it took place (LAVILLE, DIONNE, 1999; BURNS, 2015; FERRANCE, 2000).

2 GAMIFICATION AND ITS DEFINITIONS: A LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Herger (2014), James P. Carse was the first person to relate life and game. However, Charles Coonradt – in his 1984 book "The Game of Work" – was the one who explored the topic more profoundly, highlighting what he considered key elements of a game. In spite that, the term gamification was coined years later, in 2002, by Nick Pelling. Caponetto, Earp and Ott (2014) explain that only in 2011 the word appears in the title of papers related to education. Initially, gamification is theorized and thought to be used in marketing and to motivate company employees.

Regarding early definitions, in the 1980 decade, Richard Bartle described gamification as the transformation of something into a game. The most accepted definition for the term, even though it is not universal, is "[…] the use of game elements and game-design techniques in non-game contexts" (WERBACH; HUNTER, 2012, p. 20). This means that a gamified experience is not a game, and it does not have to include all elements of a game, but some of them. Given that, it is important to explore what games are.

Werbach and Hunter (2012), trying to define games, turn to Huizinga's "magic circle" concept. It refers to boundaries that mark a separation from the real world. When a player (voluntarily) enters the magic circle, he or she accepts the rules of this place and, consequently, forget about the ones from the real world. Games, therefore, would be everything that happens within the circle. Koster (2005, p. 34) criticizes this definition because it separates games and reality: "Games might seem abstract from reality because they are iconic depictions of patterns in the world. They have more in common with how our brain visualizes things then they do with how reality is actually formed. Since our perception of reality is basically abstractions." (KOSTER, 2005, p. 34).

The author's point is that players experience and perceive games in the same way they do with reality, so these "worlds" should not be seen as separate, just like games cannot be seen as unreal. Games, as the author contends, are puzzles that players feel challenged to solve, and when they do – that is, when they master the game – they have fun. In this sense, games are comparable to the learning process: players, like students, need to understand rules, test possibilities to solve problems which have to be challenging (not too hard and not too easy, or they can be boring).

Koster (2005) mentions some elements that make a game successful: preparation; players having opportunities to practice and get ready to face the ultimate challenge; a sense of space, that is, the place where the game happens; a solid core mechanic, strong and well-defined rules; a range of challenges; abilities required to solve tasks within the game; and skills to handle the situations students may face. To make a learning experience, the author adds other features: a variable feedback system, challenging problems that are not too easy or extremely difficult, and consequences to players' failures. Kapp (2012) summarizes a definition for games that includes more elements, such as a quantifiable outcome, that is, a concrete win or loss, and interactivity (players x players, players x game): "A player gets caught up in playing a game because the instant feedback and constant interaction are related to the challenge of the game, which is defined by the rules, which all work within the system to provoke an emotional reaction and, finally, result in a quantifiable outcome within an abstract version of a larger system" (KAPP, 2012, p. 9).

Gamification involves the use of some game elements to motivate people, even though it cannot be limited to that. Werbach and Hunter (2012) explain three types of gamification, although they address companies contexts. The first one is internal gamification, sometimes called enterprise gamification, which is used to change behavior in a company staff, that is, within a defined community. External gamification, on the other hand, aims to engage people outside the internal group. If we consider companies, these people would be the costumers. The third type the authors explain is behavior-change gamification which intends to encourage change of habits in a population.

Gamification also requires careful planning and game thinking in association with game elements. The sole usage of badges or points, therefore, does not make an experience gamified. In addition, "[...] the design process must consider creating extrinsic reward structures that do not negate intrinsic rewards, instructional objectives, and playability" (KAPP, 2012, p. 194). The process of game thinking involves a shift in perspective in the way participants see an activity they do frequently; elements of competition, social interaction, and game elements are incorporated, tight together through a narrative that is powerful enough to engage people

(intrinsically and extrinsically)[1]. As a narrative structure, Busarello, Ulbricht and Fadel (2014) explain that games immerse players in a cognitive experience, capable of bringing in emotions. In games, players are able to "live" the narrative, not just watch it happen, like they would do in movies, for instance. When playing, they must make decisions, act as protagonists, and change the course of the story. Players need to feel like they control the narrative; however, their actions within a game (or gamified experience) are limited to the rules stablished and to a predefined plot. Therefore, "[…] the sense of autonomy is always somewhat illusory" (WERBACH; HUNTER, 2012, p. 34).

3 THE REAL WORLD BEHIND THE GAMIFIED EXPERIENCE AND HOW THE CLASS WAS ANALYZED

3.1 RESEARCH CONTEXT AND PARTICIPANTS

The research took place within the LwB-UFS context. In this program, it is possible to offer English courses that last 16, 32, 48, or 64 hours, and, in this specific case, we are going to analyze a 48-hour one, which was offered in 2019. LwB-UFS actions are open to the academic community, from post and undergraduate students to the universities' staff, which is why the participants in the course under analysis are part of this public. Their ages vary a lot, from 16 to 50; however, most of them age from 18 to 23, and only one was 50 years old. In order to enroll in the course, they had to take a placement test – TOEFL ITP, an English proficiency exam, or the placement test of My English Online, an online English course, both part of the LwB activities. With the results of one of these two tests, students' level of proficiency is measured, and they can be placed in the face-to-face courses. The program follows the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and offers courses to people who are basic users (A2), intermediate users (B1), and upper intermediate users (B2). The course we analyze here was addressed to B2 students.

The course, as the name suggests, explored English language varieties, to prepare students to recognize different accents, dialects, and idiomatic expressions, as well as to negotiate meanings and deal with cultural differences. All of that considering the program's commitment to contribute to internationalization in public universities. The course was designed within LwB-UFS methodological principles and only the 22nd class (the last one before the evaluation) was gamified. It was a review that aimed to reinforce the features of the varieties discussed throughout the course, because students' evaluation would be a presentation on a variety they chose.

3.2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of UFS, number 3.624.007, as it involves the participation of human beings. Data was collected through a questionnaire which will be further discussed later in this section. We also analyze class materials, such as PowerPoint presentations and handouts containing exercises that can be found in LwB-UFS archives.

This is a qualitative research, considering that we do not intend to measure or quantify data, but focus on analyzing an experience subjectively (LAVILLE; DIONNE, 1999). It is also classified as teacher-research which is an inquiry conducted by teachers who are both researchers and practitioners, ending the separation between a teacher and a researcher. Teacher-research takes place in teachers' working place and can drive acting on it, based on scientific findings (FREEMAN, 1998). Considering that this research involves acting in the context where it took place, it is an action-research: "Action research involves a self-reflective, systematic and critical approach to enquiry by participants who are at the same time members of the research community. The aim is to identify problematic situations or issues considered by the participants to be worthy of investigation in order to bring about critically informed changes in practice" (CORNWELL, 1999 *apud* BURNS, 2015, p. 188).

First, we identified a problem: students were dropping LwB-UFS courses, in general. Considering that, we thought of ways to engage and motivate them to continue the LwB-UFS courses. Gamification, for its association with motivation (CAPONETTO; EARP;

[1] Regarding these types of motivation, intrinsic refers to motivation that comes from inside a person; that is, one acts or engages in an activity because he or she wants to be part of it. The event is an end itself. On the other hand, extrinsic motivation is action moved by the outside world. People perform activities because they want rewards; the event is a means to get something else. Considering gamified experiences, the challenge is to stimulate both types of motivation, especially because, sometimes, rewards can ruin intrinsic motivation (BUSARELLO; ULBRICHT; FADEL, 2014).

OTT, 2014), was one of the possibilities adopted. We have designed a gamified class and collected data to analyze the effects of the experience. Based on the results, we might change our practice.
The analysis procedure is to compare two classes, one gamified and the other non-gamified, and discuss students' perception on the gamified experience. At the end of the gamified class, students received the following questionnaire[2]:

1- Compare this class to the previous ones. How do you evaluate it in a scale from 0 to 5, 0 being much worse and 5 much better?
0 1 2 3 4 5
2- If you wanted to recommend this class to a friend, what would you say?
3- Did the phases you had to go through to get to the final objective encourage your participation in class?
4- Did you feel more, equally, or less motivated in this class, in comparison to the others? Why?
5- Would you participate in a full course in the format of this class? Explain why.
6- Do you think you participated more in the activities today (or had more interest to participate)? Why?

Students were free to answer or not these questions, and they did not have to identify themselves, that is, writing their names in the questionnaires was optional. In the following topic, we present and discuss students' answers and analyze and compare the classes. In the following topic, we start discussing the design process of the gamified class, addressing issues related to gamification in a language course. We explain the elements of the gamified class, discussing the ideas and theories that support their use in the class. After that, we discuss the non-gamified class and compare it to the gamified one.

4 THE GAMIFIED CLASS: DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

> *Se educação é mudança, essa mudança deve ser viável no próprio recurso que se usa para implementar a aprendizagem.* (LEFFA, 2014, p. 14)

Cani *et al.* (2017) explain that the Brazilian Ministry of Education recognizes games as a means to teach. Gamification has been used in schools to facilitate and make learning more pleasant and to change behavior, among other things. Regarding language learning, Cani *et al.* (2017) analyze three digital games: Lingualeo, English Grammar All Levels, and Learning 2 Talk. They all share the same approach to language: behaviorism. This means that language is often approached without context, the exercises are mechanical, and learning happens through repetition. The results are similar to the ones Leffa (2014, 2016) finds when analyzing Duolinguo, an application (app) that aims at translating the Web, but it is used to learn languages. It focuses on translation and repetition and language is fragmented, taken out of context. The author concludes that language, in the app, is being taught in the same way it was many years ago, which is a methodological setback, even though technology used in this app is very advanced. Therefore, he defends that "(1) technology must stablish dialogues with language teaching; (2) language teaching must stablish dialogues with technology; and (3) what matters is how technology is used" (LEFFA, 2016, p. 153, our translation)[3]. That being said, in the class under analysis in this topic, we were careful to approach language in a contextualized way and as a means to construct meanings and to negotiate differences. We have also encouraged the social construction of knowledge, having students discussing through the target language – English – to learn together and to achieve the gamification goal collaboratively.

Kim (2015, p. 30) highlights that there are some aspects we should consider before we start to design a gamified class. The first one is a clear goal, which is the reason one decides to gamify a lesson. In our class, we aimed at increasing students' engagement which could diminish the number of students dropping out courses if proved to work in this class. The second thing to consider is "at whom the gamification is directed and what the characteristics of the target group are." Our class was directed to people aging from 16 to 50 years old who were currently working and/or studying at UFS. And, even though there are different types of players, we have planned a collaborative gamified experience where students would need to work together to succeed in the given tasks. Kim

[2] The questions were translated from Portuguese to English, as well as the answers we reproduce in this paper.

[3] Original text: "(1) a tecnologia precisa conversar com o ensino de línguas; (2) o ensino de línguas precisa conversar com a tecnologia; (3) o que interessa não é a tecnologia mas o uso que se faz dela" (LEFFA, 2016, p. 153).

(2015) also calls attention to other varieties, such as gender, age, culture, and academic performance. Finally, we should consider the learning content, which, in our class, was to revise the English varieties approached during the course.

In order to design a gamified experience, Kapp (2012) shares an outline of what a gamification design document should have: overview of concept, outcome, instructional objectives, description of character or characters, description of the game environment, description of the game play, reward structure, look and feel of the game, technical description, and project timeline. The author addresses online experiences, so some of these steps were ignored in the design of the class under analysis in this paper. The overview of concept of the gamified class regards aspects already mentioned: goal, target audience, game theme and the type of game. Concerning the latter, the class incorporates a social game, which promotes interaction among students since, as the outcome, they should try to save an English variety from extinction; for that, they need to know and remember the features of each variety they had previously studied in the course. This is aligned with the instructional objective of revising the varieties discussed in the course. To achieve these goals, students become characters. They are English variety protectors, the last people on Earth, and they must protect their variety (each of them is responsible for one variety), otherwise people will forget its existence. Gee (2003, p. 51) defends that "all learning in all semiotic domains requires identity work. It requires taking on a new identity and forming bridges from one's old identities to the new one." Therefore, there is a relation between learning and identities which he categorizes in three groups: virtual, real, and projective. The first one corresponds to the character one takes on in the virtual world. Differently, the real-world identity is who the player is in the real world, or who the player *are*, considering that we have many identities (students, Brazilian, etc.). The third identity plays "[…] on two senses of the word 'project', meaning both "'to project one's values and desires onto the virtual character' […] and 'seeing the virtual character as one's own project in the making, a creature whom I imbue with a certain trajectory through time defined by my aspirations for what I want that character to be and become (within the limitations of her capacities, of course)'". (GEE, 2003, p. 55)

This identity is marked by the interactions between the virtual and the real identities. In games, players can make choices and change the course of the narrative (being active and reflective) so the identification is more powerful. In the class, students had to become English variety protectors, this identity interacts with who they are in the real world outside the classroom. By becoming characters, they get to make choices and change the narrative (within the limits stablished) more freely and securely because the stakes are much lower; they are not making the choices, their characters are. This helps lowering affective filters, that is, students get more comfortable to make mistakes, which is important in a language learning environment.

The game environment is the classroom, but the idea is to travel the world looking for a safe place where they can build a community and keep the varieties safe. Most of the narrative happens in Hong Kong, the only safe place left on Earth.

The play of the game – another aspect of the gamification design document Kapp (2012) – is what happens in it. In this class, first, students get the variety they have to protect in a raffle. After that, they have to retrieve information on some of the features of the variety and take notes on them. Then, the next step is to get a means to travel to a safe place: an airplane. To get it, they need to play a game and get right answers. They are divided into two groups. The teacher plays songs from different countries. One group is responsible for guessing which language is used in each song; the other has to name at least one country in which the language is used as the official one. If the team's answers are right and synchronized, they get the point. They need 10 right answers. There is another challenge for them to get the airplane in case they do not get it in the first: they have to name two countries from each inhabited continent in the world. Once they have the airplane, they move on. The mission now is to discover the safest country left to go. They must read a text and answer some questions about it to decide what the safest place is. Then, they discuss to decide. Here are the options the text presents: Finland, Oman, Hong Kong, Iceland, and United Arab Emirates. Every time they choose a place other than Hong Kong, they see that it is not possible to go there because they have been destroyed by natural disasters. The choice of the place was previously made, but they have the feeling that they can choose. In a game, players need to feel autonomous, even though it is illusory to some extent (WERBACH; HUNTER, 2012). After discovering that Hong Kong is the only place possible, they need to find out further information about it to get prepared to go on this new adventure. To do so, they need to listen to a recording of an interview with one of its former citizens and answer some questions about it to ensure understanding. They take the airplane and land, but, to enter the place, they need to win another challenge: in pairs, they must get 5 out of 10 right answers to

questions related to vocabulary (idiomatic expressions and dialects) discussed throughout the course. Once they enter the place, they have to vote on some co-habitation rules, deciding the two most important values of the community. See the Figure below:

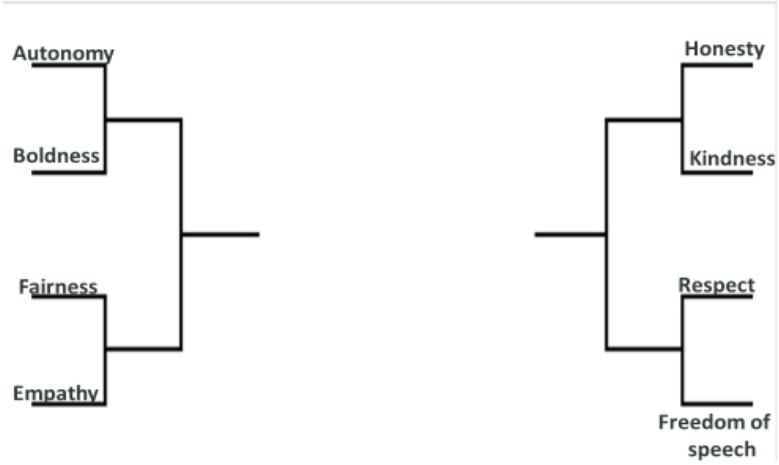
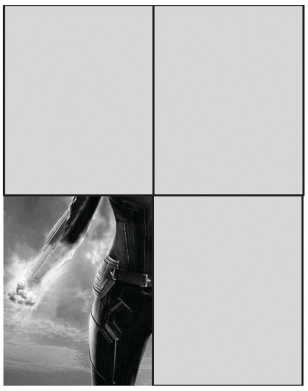


Figure 1: voting in the most important values
Source: authors' elaboration

The next step is to take the notes from the beginning of the class and improve them by doing a quick research in their notebooks, handouts they got in each class or the internet. Then, they tape the notes on the wall and everybody walks around and reads them to keep the memories of the varieties alive. After people have studied the varieties, each of them faces the final challenge to see if their variety is safe: one person will seat in a chair; the teacher will write the name of a variety on the board. Everybody has to make the person guess the variety, by explaining it. If people manage to explain it and the person guesses, the variety will be safe. It is important that they do not get their own variety, because they all need to know the features of each one.

The reward structure consists on getting what they need to save their variety (airplane, entering the city). They get feedback on their answer instantly since the teacher will be there to show it. In this class, we used a PowerPoint presentation, so that the answers could be displayed there. The look and feel of the game and the technical description were ignored because they do not apply to this gamified experience. The final aspect pointed out by Kapp (2012) is the project timeline. This class was planned to last 2 hours, so students can play the whole gamified experience within this time limit.

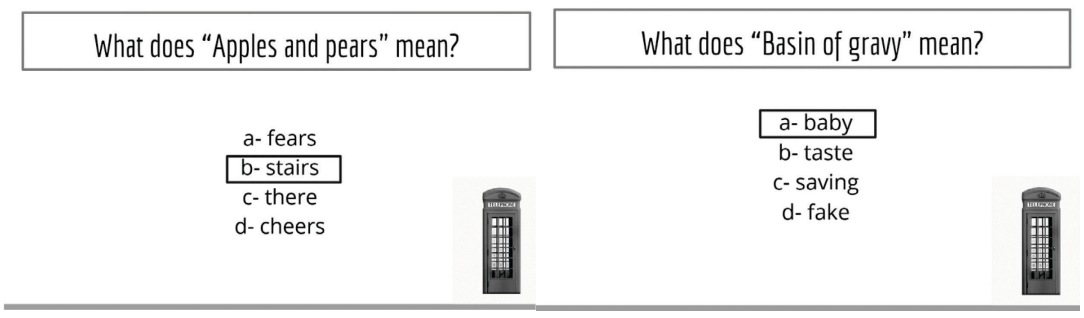
In the class, students do a reading activity, a listening one, work on vocabulary, speaking and retrieve information on the English language varieties discussed in the course. All of that as part of a narrative and some challenges to have students engaged. Henceforth, we address a non-gamified class, contrasting it to the above-analyzed one. This class is part of the same course and regards England and some of its varieties, especially Cockney English. It starts with a game, similarly to the gamified class, given that the use of games in specific moments of a class does not turn it into a gamified experience. English classes in LwB-UFS usually start with a warm-up which is often a game that involves competitions among teams because we believe that when we establish a fun learning environment, in which students are connected to the language, the learning process is more likely to succeed, due to the motivation that is enhanced. For the warm-up, two teams were required, and entirely covered images were shown to students. Their mission was to guess what movie character was in the images. To do that, they had to remove the cover. Pieces of the cover were removed every time they got an even number when they rolled the dice. If students got it right in their first attempt, they got 20 points. In their second, they got 15 points. In their third, 10 points. In the fourth, 5 points. Below we show how the game looks like in a PowerPoint presentation.



Captain Marvel

Figures 2 and 3: non-gamified class warm-up
Source: authors' elaboration

The movie characters in the game are Captain Marvel, as illustrated in the image above, Katniss Everdeen, Luke Skywalker, Jay Gatsby, Malorie Hayes, Hermione Granger, and Harry Potter. Students are asked, after playing the game, from which movies the last two characters are. The answer is Harry Potter. This is a link to the next activity which consists on watching a scene from "Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone". Before students watch it, they do a vocabulary activity to learn the meaning of some words used in the scene. Before checking the answers, students have to discuss them in pairs. After watching the scene and answering some comprehension questions, they have to watch it again, but this time they have to focus on the pronunciation of some words/expressions, that were highlighted by the teacher (e.g.: Hermione saying "that's better"). Then, students are asked to identify the accents which are varieties of British English, one of them is Cockney English, the main focus of the class. The teacher asks what they know about it. They listen and answer comprehension questions about an audio in which people talk about the features of this variety. Before, they learn some vocabulary that is used in the audio. Next, they discuss the following questions, which are both connected to the listening activity and a link to the next one: why do you think the working-class did not want the ruling-class to understand them? Would you use the Cockney rhyming slang? Why (not)? In which situations? Do you watch movies in English with captions or dubbed? If you watch movies in English, do you pay attention to people's accents? Do you know of any movies in which the actors and actresses had to speak in a different accent from the one they normally spoke? To keep everything linked, the teacher shares that 'Audrey Hepburn had to speak different varieties of British English in the movie "My fair lady"' because they will watch a scene from the movie in which a phonetics professor agrees to a wager that he can make a flower girl who spoke in Cockney English (Audrey Hepburn's character) speak in the formal variety. They have to answer some comprehension questions and discuss the social reasons that make people want to change their accents. Finally, from the fact that the character's original variety is Cockney, we address the Cockney rhyming slang in which a word is replaced by another one or a phrase that rhymes with it. Students have to work in pairs, and the teacher shows them some of the most commonly used Cockney rhyming slang. They have to guess what they mean by choosing the best rhyme.



Figures 4 and 5: Cockney rhyming slang activity
Source: authors' elaboration

There is another linking activity. Students are shown some options of movie or series characters, and they have to point out which one(s) speak(s) in British English. Then, the class ends with another game: students work in two teams. One person from each group

seats on a chair, close to an eraser. The teacher says the name of a movie or TV show. Whoever gets the eraser first gets the chance to answer who the main character of the movie is. If the person does not know the answer, he/she will have 30 seconds to discuss with the group. If the person still does not know, the other group will have the chance to answer. The winning group is the one with more right answers.

The classes in this course start and end with a game, in the first case to motivate students for the class, in the second to make them want to come to the next ones. Sometimes, there are also games in the middle of the class, like the rhyming one. Ogawa (2007, p. 4, our translation) defends the importance of playfulness in the classroom, "[…] games, for being ludic activities, get space as an ideal teaching tool, as far as they aim to stimulate interest in students of any age, when assisting them to differentiate multiple social roles and increasing their self-confidence. Games also develop their perception on their role and their place in a social and historical context".[4]

Games are greatly beneficial and motivating, so they are often used in English classes within the LwB-UFS context; however, the sole use of games in a class, does not make it a gamified experience. Another similarity between the non-gamified and the gamified classes is the link. In the first case, there is care for connecting one activity to the next one, so the class flows better, and everything happens as part of a context, a theme. This is similar to what happens in the gamified class because there is a narrative, and every action must be connected and lead to a final objective. Both classes also have feedback for students and share the same approach to language: language as means to construct and negotiate meaning. Therefore, they have many aspects in common. Fardo (2013 *apud* CANI *et al.*, 2017, p. 462-463, our translation) explains that classes and games share similarities.

> Gamification can promote learning because many of its elements are based on techniques that instructional designers and teachers have been using for a long time. Characteristics like distributing points for activities, presenting feedback, and encouraging collaboration in projects are goals of many pedagogical plans. The difference is that gamification provides a more explicit layer of interest and a method to stitch these elements together to achieve similarity to games, which results in a language that is more familiar to those who are inserted in the digital culture. As a result, they reach objectives in a way that is apparently more pleasant and efficient.[5]

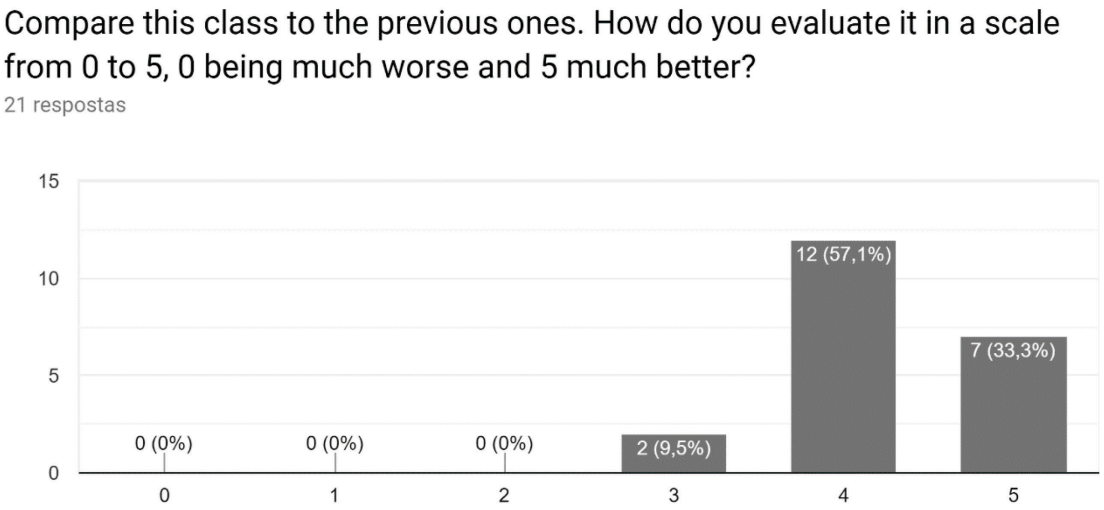
Game features are used in classes, so they share similarities. In the non-gamified class, there are explicit games which make it more akin to the gamified class. Students perceived the resemblances, as we will show it henceforth. In the subtopic below, we show the results from the answers given in the questionnaire. We reiterate that the participants were enrolled in the course and experienced both classes which were analyzed previously in this paper.

4.1 PLAYERS' PERSPECTIVE

The questionnaires were distributed to students at the end of the gamified class, and they decided whether they wanted to answer it or not. There were 31 people in the classroom; 21 of them answered the questions. Regarding the first question, as we show in the graph below, most participants (57,1%) have chosen 4 in the scale, 33,3% have put 5, and 9,5% 3.

[4] "Os jogos, por serem atividades lúdicas, ganham espaço, como a ferramenta ideal da aprendizagem, na medida em que visam estimular o interesse do aluno de qualquer idade, ao auxiliá-lo a discernir os múltiplos papéis sociais e a aumentar a autoconfiança em si mesmo e em suas capacidades, além de desenvolver sua percepção sobre seu papel e seu lugar no contexto social e histórico" (OGAWA, 2007, p. 4).

[5] "A gamificação pode promover a aprendizagem porque muitos de seus elementos são baseados em técnicas que os designers instrucionais e professores vêm usando há muito tempo. Características como distribuir pontuações para atividades, apresentar feedback e encorajar a colaboração em projetos são as metas de muitos planos pedagógicos. A diferença é que a gamificação provê uma camada mais explícita de interesse e um método para costurar esses elementos de forma a alcançar a similaridade com os games, o que resulta em uma linguagem a qual os indivíduos inseridos na cultura digital estão mais acostumados e, como resultado, conseguem alcançar essas metas de forma aparentemente mais eficiente e agradável" (FARDO, 2013 *apud* CANI *et al.*, 2017, p. 462-463).



Graph 1: Comparing gamified to non-gamified classes
Source: graph generated in Google Forms, based on participants' answers

The graph shows that all of the participants considered the gamified class better than non-gamified ones. Even though they share similarities, the gamified class has a more familiar language to the ones who are immersed in the digital world and play games. That is why they seem better and easier.

When talking about the class, six of the participants described it as fun, ludic, exciting, interesting, or relaxed:

> Student 1: It was a very *fun* class, we could talk a lot.
> Student 2: It is a great experience of contact with a foreign language, classes are *relaxed* and very *interesting*.
> Student 3: The class was super *exciting*.
> Student 4: We learned and absorbed more because almost all of the activities were practical, and classes were delivered in English in a *ludic* way.
> Student 5: It was *fun*, instructive and brought knowledge previously unknown for me.
> Student 6: It was a *fun* class, games motivated participation. (Excerpts from participants' answers which were translated from Portuguese to English)

The words these students have chosen to describe the class are associated with positive emotions. Student 4 defends that he or she learned more because activities were fun and made them use the language in communicative situations. Student 1 also highlights the practice of speaking and being able to use the language in class. Other six students mention the use of the language and stress its practical use in an environment that is "favorable to practice English, besides being relaxed and stimulating learning" (excerpt from student 7's answer, our translation). Two of them mention that the gamified class was a good way to revise the content.

The words "interesting" and "dynamic" appear in the answer of other six participants who also highlight that the class was very interactive, considering that they had to work and make decisions together. The latter was mentioned as something challenging by another student:

> Student 9: Unconventional, appropriate if you want to or like to get involved with a group; in this case it is excellent, but it can be challenging if you have problems with introversion (excerpts from student 9's answer which was translated from Portuguese to English).

Participating in a class that requires interacting with other students can be difficult for introverted people; however, it is necessary in an English class. Gamification can help in this process for making the context more relaxed and fun. Becoming characters also helps, considering that students might feel more open to try and make mistakes in the target language. Other students confirmed the opinion expressed by student 9, who highlighted the involvement that is perceived with this kind of class, but these pupils did not mention any possible setback as a consequence; in fact, they describe the interactions as one of the reasons why the gamified class was motivating, as we display in the following quotes:

> Student 4: [the phases they had to go through to achieve the final goal] they make the class more exciting and *create a sense of collectivity* which you want to be part of.
> Student 10: Exchanging information with my colleagues was super important. (Excerpts from participants' answers, our translation and highlight).

When asked if the phases they had to go through to get to the final objective encouraged their participation in class, 90.48% (19) of the students said yes. One of them said no, but did not explain why, and another one said, "kind of, because I could not really relate to the phases, they seemed a little pointless" (excerpt from student 11's answer, our translation). He or she does not go further in the explanation. We suppose that the student prefers a different kind of game, considering that there are different types of players - killers, achievers, explorers, and socializers[6] (HERGER, 2014) – or the narrative did not catch his or her attention.

52.38% (11) of the participants felt more motivated in this class than in others. They explain that there was more group work, interaction in this class and students were participating more. Student 1 said that "in this class, for things to happen, they really had to participate and give their opinions" (excerpt from student 1's answer, our translation). He or she felt autonomous to make decisions that would really affect the narrative, like the game needed them to participate so that the tasks could be accomplished. Student 11, although he or she answers that the phases were "kind of" motivating, felt more motivated in the gamified class, due to the final goal: saving him or herself in order to save the variety. Student 7 attributes his or her motivation to the theme: they were the last survivors on Earth with the mission of saving the varieties. The other 47.62% (10) of the participants felt equally motivated in comparison to non-gamified classes. They explain that they always feel encouraged to participate.

> Student 4: Almost every class has a fun dynamics and I leave satisfied.
> Student 2: The dynamic parts [of the class] are very fun and the theoretical parts are quite interesting, I think that mixing both makes the classes perfect.
> Student 3: I feel equally motivated, because the classes always have games.
> Student 12: All classes have dynamics that are nice. (Excerpts from participants' answers, our translation).

These 47.62% (10) seem to believe that both the gamified and the non-gamified classes are fun and engaging, because both promote their participation, are fun, and involve using games. Nonetheless, considering all answers, students tend to find the gamified class more motivating. For student 3, having games in the beginning (warm-up) and end of classes, like it usually happens in LwB-UFS courses, is enough to motivate her. Only one participant (student 13) justifies his or her answer by saying that he or she is indifferent towards games.

Concerning the question "would you participate in a full course in the format of this class?", 90.48% of participants said yes. They explained that learning English would be funnier, more dynamic, and practical. Student 4 stated that "[a gamified course] is more productive than just listening to the teacher explaining things in the same [traditional] way" (excerpt from student 4's answer, our translation). Student 4 seems to be talking about a class in a behaviorist model, in which the teacher explains, and they have to listen quietly. This kind of class is not considered productive by student 4, he or she prefers to be part of a class where he or she works more actively. We highlight that there are games which approach language from the behaviorist perspective – see Cani *et al* (2017)

[6] Killers play games to fight others; they are very competitive and like to play individually. On the other hand, "achievers are players who want to gain points, levels, equipment, virtual goods, and anything else that gives them a measure of progress and success" (HERGER, 2014, p. 106). The explorers like to understand the game world, exploring it. Finally, the socializers like to meet people and play with them; what matters the most is interaction. Herger (2014) highlights players have features from all of the above-mentioned types, but some of them prevail.

and Leffa (2014; 2016), which means that only using gamification does not necessarily result in pedagogical changes regarding the language learning process. When designing a gamified experience, teachers need to think about how they will approach language and balance gamification and language teaching; otherwise, they will be repeating the same teaching practice in a different way.

Other participants mention more benefits that come with participating in a gamified course:

> Student 7: If applied correctly, gamified classes "gamification" can favor the learning process, create closer tights, improve team work, and favor the environment as a whole.
> Student 5: I believe that it is an important format to relieve stress and in the way content is taught. (Excerpts from participants' answers, our translation).

The other 9,52% (2) of participants said that maybe they would participate in a gamified course. One of them (student 1) stated that he or she does not know if he or she would be always in the mood to go to gamified classes; meanwhile, the other, student 9, explained that "even though it is an interesting format, I don't believe it works for every audience, because some people have problems with interaction, which is my case, this happens often but nothing that won't be cured with lots of incentive to participation LOL" (excerpt from student 4's answer, our translation). His or her argument that gamification is not suitable for every audience is in consonance with Kapp's (2012, p. 14):

> Too often the learning profession embraces a new concept as the answer to all learning problems and overhypes the concept to the point of backlash. It is important to approach the gamification of content and learning carefully and methodically. If gamification is seen as a panacea and applied to every single learning event, it will quickly become trivialized and non-impactful. Stay focused on using gamification for the right learning outcomes.

Therefore, gamification is not a magical solution to every problem in teaching; it might work in some situations, but it will not work in others. This is why a gamified class has to be carefully planned, and the context where it will be applied has to be thoroughly considered.

Regarding the last question - "Do you think you participated more in the activities today (or had more interest to participate)? Why? – answers vary. 47,62% (10) said yes, and justified mainly by saying that it was fun, they felt like the class needed them to participate to happen and they had to work as a group. Student 6 explains that "everyone was focused on the dynamics, so I felt less self-conscious about participating" (excerpt from student 6's answer, our translation). So, the class made him or her more open to try to use the language, because the focus was on the challenges and on achieving the final goal, not on people's mistakes. Meanwhile, student 5 said that "the competitive environment stimulates every group to give their best to learn the content and, hence, achieve the final objective" (excerpt from student 5's answer, our translation).

28.57% (6) said no to the last question and explained that the other classes are just as motivating as the gamified one, considering that there are games and different activities to engage them. The other 23,81% answered that they do not know or that their participation was the same as in other classes.

4 FINAL WORDS BEFORE THE 'GAME OVER'

The use of game elements and game thinking in real life contexts, gamification, is not something new and particular to the education field; in fact, it started to be used in companies. Designing and applying gamification often involves changing behavior and motivating people to participate in an activity; the experience explored in this paper is no exception. Considering the high number of people dropping LwB-UFS English courses, gamification was applied so we could analyze if this would help changing the scenario. A gamified class was designed including a narrative, characters, an apocalyptical setting, and some challenges to be faced in order to achieve the ultimate goal: saving English language varieties from being forgotten. The game thinking was aligned with language

teaching approaches that are already used in LwB-UFS classes. Language was dealt with as a means to negotiate and construct meanings. Students had to use English to decide, for instance, the values of the community they were building in the gamified class. Since they had to work as group, they needed to discuss and make decisions, using the target language. Gamification can be designed to stimulate competitions; for example, students having to work alone to be the first ones in a leaderboard. We, however, decided to make the class more similar to a social game in which students would have to help each other to achieve a common goal. First, because we believe that language is constructed socially and through interaction. Second, because, in classes, they need to learn how to deal with differences and how to negotiate them. And, third, because students need to get in touch with a logic that is different from the individualism that neoliberalism holds, and which is so spread in our society.

When comparing the gamified class to a non-gamified one, we found many similarities, such as the use of games, constant feedback, activities linked to one another, and the same language concept. The similarities confirm what Fardo (2013 *apud* CANI *et al.*, 2017) defends: game techniques have been used by teachers for a long time, that is why they are so familiar. Gamification, nonetheless, is language with which students – mostly emerged in the digital world – are more familiar. One example is the fact that, although there was no mention to the word gamification neither in class nor in the questionnaire, students recognized that it was a gamified class, as many of them used the term in their answers.

All students said that the gamified class was better than the non-gamified ones; the most mentioned reasons for them to like it were that it is fun, promotes interaction and makes the environment more relaxing. Assuming a character's identity was not cited as a reason to make students more comfortable, they explained that the focus on going through the challenges to get to the final objective made them forget their concerns about making mistakes, especially when speaking. They also highlighted that they felt like their participation was essential in the gamified class, because they had to make decisions and change the course of the narrative. They sensed autonomy, although their actions and choices were limited to the predetermined rules and possibilities. Even though most of them said they would participate in a whole gamified course, only a little bit more than half of them (11 out of 21) stated they felt more motivated than they usually were in LwB-UFS non-gamified classes. That happened because they felt equally motivated since both types of class were fun and engaging, due mainly to the use of games and dynamic activities.

In conclusion, gamification can make students more motivated and engaged, as well as comfortable and more open to try and, often, make mistakes in the classroom. What we found out, however, was that LwB-UFS classes were just as motivating, due to the use of games in the end, beginning and sometimes middle of classes and to the care for connecting activities in thematic classes.

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