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GAMIFICATION IN THE NON-COMPULSORY ENGLISH FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM TARGETED AT ADULTS

Student: del Pino Ordóñez, Marta

Tutor: Dr. Elena Alcalde Peñalver
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RESUMEN

La gamificación o juegos serios brindan la oportunidad de incluir dinámicas de juego en contextos no necesariamente lúdicos, como puede ser la educación. La introducción de la gamificación en las clases de inglés como lengua extranjera para adultos, podría ser una herramienta muy útil para ayudar al alumnado a adquirir la lengua mientras palia el absentismo y abandono, dos hechos que amenazan nuestras Escuelas Oficiales de Idiomas y, por tanto, nuestra educación pública.

En la actualidad, no existe mucha literatura sobre gamificación en enseñanza de adultos/as, pero a pesar de ello, se ofrece una extensa recopilación de información bibliográfica para poder analizar críticamente los datos obtenidos dentro de una clase expuesta a juegos serios durante un año académico. En los resultados, se intenta desvelar si la gamificación puede tener un impacto positivo en enseñanzas no obligatorias destinadas a adultos/as, si estos últimos están abiertos a ser jugadores/as dentro del aula y, por último, si el absentismo se podría reducir a través de estas dinámicas. Finalmente, se presentan una serie de consideraciones pedagógicas y conclusiones teniendo en cuenta estos resultados.

ABSTRACT

Serious games give the opportunity to use game elements into non-entertaining arenas like education. The introduction of gamification in the non-compulsory English foreign language classroom targeted at adults could palliate absenteeism and dropout figures that threaten our public Official Language Schools by offering an innovative teaching approach while helping language agents acquire English.

There is not much literature on gamification in adult teaching, but a deep extensive literature review is offered so as to critically analyse the data collected, within a classroom that has been exposed to gamification for a whole academic year, that will try to unravel whether gamification may have a positive impact on adult education, if these adult students are open to be players in the class and lastly, if absenteeism could be reduced by means of serious games. Finally, some pedagogical considerations and conclusions will be presented bearing in mind the results obtained.

1. INTRODUCTION

The current number of students enrolling in Official Language Schools is decreasing year after year. In fact, some national newspapers have brought to light that the enrolment rate in this public institution is falling in every autonomous community in Spain (Flores, 2021) and

that specifically, in Andalusia, there are around 35% fewer students if figures are compared to the ones registered in previous academic courses (Rodríguez, 2022).

Without a shadow of doubt, school dropout and absenteeism are two of the main concerns in this type of education and hence, it should serve as a turning point to make teachers reflect on the methodology being used over lessons that last no less than two hours and fifteen minutes per session. Bearing in mind the length, motivation of students who decide to devote their free time to learn a language becomes a crucial matter. Students that are driven to learn, especially those who are adults, tend to take part in activities to enhance their learning experience. For example, paying special attention to instructions, looking for interesting material or taking notes that may help them remember better, to name but a few. Evidently, all those actions mentioned will lead to better grades and implication (Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 2011).

Quite interestingly, some research has proved that inner motivation and emotions are tightly intertwined with each other and that, somehow, emotions are paramount when it comes to learning. In fact, emotions decide what our brain needs to pay attention to and consequently, affect what we can remember later. “It appears that the more powerful the feeling that accompanies an experience, the more lasting the memory” (Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 2011: 49).

Since motivation is a term which encompasses multiple variables, we will distinguish the four major sources involved according to Skehan (1989:49-50 cited in Madrid & Pérez Cañado, 2001):

- Learning and teaching tasks, which are part of the learner agent’s inner motivation. If they enjoy the activities taking place in class, they will be willing to attend it.
- Learning results, that is, positive outcomes are seen as rewards while mistakes could make their expectation decrease.
- Inner motivation, which covers different personal reasons why the students wish to learn this new language and that can range from the importance of English to become successful at any arena to the desire of being able to communicate when traveling the world.
- Extrinsic motivations are the external benefits or punishments received as stimulus.

Taking into account the information just mentioned, and understanding that tasks, that is, what takes place in the classroom, may affect our students’ desire to come to class, should capture teachers’ attention, so as to make them adapt the methodology used over the lessons to create memorable experiences for students. In fact, every time they join the class, it could

prove useful to connect with those stressed learners that have complicated, hectic lives and who attend the English Foreign Language class as a way to enjoy their free time and forget about their daily burden. Bearing in mind that the research proposed has been mainly classroom-based, we will focus on the first type of motivation that comes through the inclusion of different activities that may make students enjoy the lesson in order to avoid absenteeism.

In this vein, new fresh methodologies are breaking new ground while increasing meaningful learning lessons which try to fight students' apathy and lack of interest. Two factors that, if mitigated, would affect enrolment rate positively. Among the different cutting-edge methodologies that attract students, we find gamification, a growing technique that appeals to students and that is gaining ground and popularity without a break. Gamification can be seen as the perfect excuse to create and promote exceptional, avant-garde, meaningful lessons for students, while fighting boredom and loss of interest, which are two emotional states that directly affect absenteeism and school drop-out.

The main aim of this research is to show how absenteeism could be drastically reduced by means of gamification while boosting students' motivation at the same time. Promoting an innovative teaching approach like the one previously mentioned could have a decisive impact on the way students learn a second language in their free time. This study has been based on the assumption that the involvement of a gamified experience, lasting a whole course, could intensify students' motivation and avoid absenteeism while helping them to learn how to learn and promoting long-life learning at the same time. Through the following pages we will try to answer the following questions:

- Research question 1: Can gamification have any impact on adult language learners?
- Research question 2: Are adult language learners open to playing in their EFL class or do they believe it is a waste of time?
- Research question 3: Has absenteeism been reduced in this group compared to the figures registered in the previous course?

Many studies have displayed the great effects after having included some sort of gamified experiences in different lessons, subjects and educational stages (Figuerola Flores, 2015; New Media Consortium Report, 2014; Santamaria & Alcalde, 2019). However, little research is to be found in the field of non-compulsory English foreign language lessons targeted at adults. This showcases how important it is to research this field and at the same time, the necessity of looking for innovative methodologies that may attract and have an impact on students' performance and motivation.

This MA dissertation starts by presenting gamification following a sieve-like structure. Next, the research design will be unveiled, followed by a description of the gamification experience, a presentation of the information related to the instrument, context, sample and variables that have been taken into consideration. Then, the results and the pedagogical implications are displayed. These two last, connected to the limitations of the study, will lead to the lines for future research. Finally, the implications of the study are discussed and in the different appendices in which some information related to the serious game and the dynamics considered have been attached.

1.1. Literature review

In this section, I will present gamification supporting the content given on the references that I will provide in the very last section. Finally, I would like to push boundaries by researching gamification from the field of adult teaching, which I will state as a knowledge gap in the EFL teaching.

1.1.1 Why humans love playing

Games and playing are believed to develop, generally speaking, an inner motivation within the player, no matter the age or the situation. Therefore, these mechanics make players participate, be persistent and reach major achievements. To put it differently, it could be claimed that gamification tries to take advantage of this implicit motivational power users find in games, to make them have a greater experience towards what is being learnt or set as a goal. The motivation achieved through games has been researched from multiple arenas. Teachers, just like other professionals interested in these mechanics, need to be able to comb through the different aspects that conform a motivating game so as to create and design a gamifying experience that provides engaging affordances (Koivisto & Hamari, 2014 mentioned in Masrop et al., 2019).

Motivation moves players through different stages and needs. At the beginning, when the game is presented, they tend to look for information on the basic rules and how to play, once they have met this need, they look for ways to persist and finally win. Next, they need to feel they belong to their group. At this point, students want to feel comfortable with the game, the rules and their team, to discover that they can win the game proposed. Then, players will begin to search for new challenges and strategies to develop a major understanding of the game. The following step would bring an aesthetic need, that is, good graphics, music, sound effects, etc. Finally, they need to know that they are capable of doing anything within the game and the rules proposed (Siang & Rao, 2003). The fact that all these needs have to be considered in order to encourage motivation leads us to focus on how

important it is to prepare a well-balanced gaming scenario, in which everyone feels as part of the group while proposing achievable goals that are not considered too difficult or too easy.

Every time we talk about motivation in general, or the motivation that can be achieved by means of games, we need to bear in mind both, extrinsic and intrinsic motivations. Having the possibility to boost both of them in students is of paramount importance when it comes to students' performance, and much more, within a type of education in which lessons are not compulsory and probably the idea of learning a language is not on top of their priority list. Gamification is capable of promoting these two motivations by offering extrinsic rewards that can be part of the game such as badges, levels, points or superpowers to skyrocket students' involvement while fostering the mastery of the language, learning autonomy and group cohesion (Muntean, 2011).

Even if gamification can be seen as a new trend regarding teaching methodologies, especially among adult students, the truth is that it is not new at all, just as an example, it has been used for military purposes to make soldiers get ready for their final missions through different scenarios that simulated real battles (Bepi Entertainment, mentioned in Kapp, 2012). In fact, gamification, which describes the use of game elements in systems in which entertainment is not necessarily involved, has been playing a major role in areas such as marketing, politics, health and, of course, education. This has to do with the experience that it offers to its users in which the engagement, motivation and enjoyment have been proved to have soared (Ritcher, Raban & Rafaeli, 2015).

According to Bürger & Ghisleni (2019, cited in Masrop et al., 2019), teachers all around the globe have been fascinated by how the wealthy gaming industry has been growing over the years. Even if the main purpose of playing is being entertained, the actual design behind a game is made by different procedures and a complex system to try and engage players. Nowadays, traditional teaching methods do not seem to be useful enough to keep motivation to learn and to foster students' engagement. That is why, assuming this phenomenon, edutainment and serious games may come to the fore so as to help learners be engaged throughout their learning process.

1.1.2. The difference between games and serious games

Gamification tends to be seen as simply playing. However, a well-structured game is not easy to elaborate and may even be seen as challenging for both the designer and the players. These serious games help learners to use the skills acquired and their knowledge by understanding this new language in which different feedback is received. In this sense, serious games lead to a quicker learning process, permitting its use in complex subjects (Ružić & Dumančić, 2014).

Game-based scenarios, also known as serious games, are created to pursue real knowledge sharing in different social fields such as: science, health care, marketing, or education, among others. In this sense, we could say that gamification can be described as the use of game elements for other than enjoyment or pleasure. “Gamification and serious games offer an enjoyable way to solve real-world problems” (Ritcher, Raban & Rafaeli, 2015).

Over the last years, serious games have proved that learning through game rules or game elements is, in fact, a reality. Actually, these games lead to better results, in terms of students’ progress and motivation, than edutainment, also known as educational entertainment or isolated ludic games for educational purposes, does. The reason is that serious games are student centred, so learners become the main protagonists in the given story or context (Sánchez, 2021). When we talk about the story of the game or the context, we establish the bases of the game itself, in other words, how students connect by the challenges, rules, interaction and lastly, the feedback received. All these elements in a serious game make emotions arise (Ružić & Dumančić, 2014), and it is indeed emotions what make experiences memorable and long-lasting in time.

According to previous research, it could be concluded that even if games and serious games may share some characteristics, these two terms are not synonymous and do not involve the same level of commitment from both parties, teachers and students.

While ludic games in education, or edutainment, can be described as those entertaining activities used to promote learning in an isolated environment in which there is no need for context, story or exploration, among other elements; gamification or serious games, on another note, means applying complex game dynamics to achieve learning outcomes. That is, the use of elements found in games while thinking of activities and results which are not games or related to the action of playing (Kiryakova et al., 2014)

1.1.3. Gamification in the EFL classroom

Research has proven that gamification promotes enriching experiences among students and their learning process. In addition, they make learners collaborate with peers and learn by doing. This happens simply because we tend to remember much easily what we have experienced and repeated. Something that has made us interact with peers and create a bond with them thanks to sharing a story that promotes a deep reflection and understanding. In fact, in most serious games, we find repetition, reflection, a story, (inter)action, and an emotional bond. All these aspects clearly lead to improved motivation, cooperative learning, self-reflection and avoiding the fear of failure, since gamification involves simulation and

practice, meaningful learning, learning for life, and finally it makes the world a better place by learning to respect rules (Sánchez, 2021).

Gamification has been in the spotlight in the field of English as a foreign language for some years now, this is simply because it has been demonstrated that communicative language activities and students' encouragement and performance have been enhanced by the implementation of this methodology (York & William, 2018). In fact, most researchers agree that the level of language acquisition, among students having experienced a gamified methodology, had overcome the degree of achievement of students facing traditional methodologies.

Bringing game dynamics as a vehicle to teach English will involve a greater level of students' participation, cooperation, group cohesion, creativity and positive academic outcomes. The instant feedback received is clearly linked to students' motivation and performance. This is so, simply, because they feel capable of overcoming the different challenges proposed, and, evidently, this fosters their enthusiasm while in class, which will finally drive learners to a most advantageous learning experience (Santamaria and Alcalde, 2019).

Some learning areas such as: cooperation, experiential learning, self-image, motivation, constructive competitiveness, autonomy and error tolerance, are extremely boosted when applying serious games in the classroom, of course, having a positive effect in the students' attitude towards their learning process (Foncubierta & Rodríguez, 2014).

Thus, introducing gamification to the English foreign language classroom has never been more necessary. Over recent years, the information and communication industry has brought a great deal of technological tools to try and push students to engage with lessons. In fact, such is the impact technology may have on education that in 2018 the *Programme to Improve Digital Competence among teachers and students* (PRODIG) came to light as an option for Andalusian educational centres to update their methodology and equipment in favour of education. Later, partly because of the educational situation during the pandemic, this programme became compulsory for all educational stages and centres and was called *Digital Competence Transformation*. To meet the challenges and needs posed by our education system, teachers are encouraged to take courses to learn ICTs in order to teach students how to use technology wisely and, at the same time, warning about the dangers it may entail, especially among teenagers. By the same token, Official Language School Teachers are expected to teach how to use digital tools to their students, even if they are not digital natives, while they obviously teach the target language.

We, as teachers, should take advantage of all the resources available to help our students become digital users to make them resourceful people in a world that is, technologically speaking, constantly changing. It is our duty that they do not become part of the following generation who finds problems when trying to withdraw money from ATMs or any other minor action so necessary in the real world. This is not the only advantage ICTs may entail, these applications and ludic tools make lessons much more appealing to students by offering them new learning scenarios that can scaffold a lesson by proposing different levels and linguistic competences. In addition, most of these tools can be used outside the classroom. Thus, promoting learning to learn and long-life learning (Santamaria and Alcalde, 2019).

When teaching languages, some may argue that technologies or active methodologies, such as serious games, should not be part of the learning process, even if it is stated in the rules and regulations that cover our curriculum, and will excuse themselves to avoid using contemporary methodologies such as gamification by saying that their students are too old to be interested in technologies or games. Michael Matera (2015) described the most common myths that should be vanished in favour of education and serious games (Table 1):

Myths	Facts
Games are just to play and entertain, they do not bring any educational challenge and so, lack educational rigour.	Games go hand in hand with motivation, and can be used to clarify difficult areas and acquire new, challenging content.
If I use badges or points to reward my students I am gamifying.	The combination of a number of game mechanics helps create memorable experiences that take students beyond the traditional class in which the teacher is the main protagonist and the student a mere receptor of information.
It is really easy with children. It does not work for me, I teach adults.	Gamification works at all levels, educational stages and subjects.

You need to have a soft spot for games to gamify your class.	You do not have to be a great player to start.
Students' motivation should be pursued by themselves, it is their duty to be motivated.	Looking for a reason to come to our lessons (in their free time if they are Official Language school learners), skyrockets students' motivation.
Gamification is simply playing.	Gamification is focused on the course exploration, its content and the class, rather than in the act of playing.
We do not have enough technological resources to gamify.	A gamification experience can involve high, low or no technology at all.
Games bring too much competitiveness, which is not positive.	Positive competitiveness can foster cooperation and make students look for their best version as learners.

Table 1. Myths and facts regarding gamification (Matera, 2015)

All in all, teachers should be willing and ready to meet all the requirements posed by our society and our education system, which are constantly evolving. In this sense, serious games and ludic games are great tools to be used in the classroom as a way to improve students' performance in the language and to help them become citizens of the 21st Century.

1.1.4. Gamification in adult education: how to make it work

When we think of playing we tend to think of children, because we assume they are hardwired to enjoy these activities. However, when it comes to adults, we are likely to believe that games are not part of their routine and so, they are no longer interested in them. Much on the contrary, despite understanding that adults' role in society may be now more serious than the one a child may have, it is also true that they set their free time to get involved in organised games and sports, others simply enjoy watching others play and some others, quite interestingly, imagine scenarios in which they pretend to be other people. What is more, adults use language to entertain even when newspapers are issued, sometimes through the use of puns and comic strips. The same happens with marketing campaigns in which specialists make their brands memorable through the use of language and entertainment (Cook, 2000).

Some adults think negatively of games because they connect them to simply enjoying, and in their hectic lives, it means wasting time or not being productive. However, playing and games contribute to the most complete kind of learning process. “Play operates as more than a creative urge; it also functions as a fundamental mode of learning” (Elkind, 2008).

In the case of English as a foreign language classroom, we can see how learning languages and English in particular is seen as an essential achievement in all walks of life. That is the reason why most of the students who decide to enrol in Official Language Schools are over eighteen years old. As an example, in 2022 the average age of the students enrolled in the Official Language School Lucena is 38,7 years old. This makes teachers’ duty a bit more challenging and demanding, since they are expected to cater for their necessities while boosting their motivation. To do so, including new methodologies like gamification can help promote students’ interest in the class.

Research highlights that the number of those engaged in games is increasing daily. In fact, it has been studied that 26% of people interested in this methodology or mechanics are above 50 years old (Sitzman, 2011). Bearing this percentage in mind, we can have a look at all the board games we find at superstores and the recommended ages printed on their boxes, most of them are aimed at players from the age of 6 to 99 years old, or simply state an age to start playing, but do not point out when to stop doing so. Thus, it can be inferred that all humans are capable of playing. Generally speaking, adults will connect playing to their childhood experiences when they played at special times with their families and friends and subjectively, they will feel they are having some quality leisure time even if they are mainly learning. In other words, uplifting their mood in their classroom time.

There is no literature on what adults expect from a gamified experience. However, Matera (2015), explains that if some theories are put into practice, gamification can work at any educational level and subject. The following aspects need to be considered:

According to Bartle (1996 as mentioned in Matera, 2015), there are four main types of players we can find in our class (Figure 1), and all of them will be more interested in some elements of the game to keep their motivation. Thus, a deep understanding of their needs has to be considered.

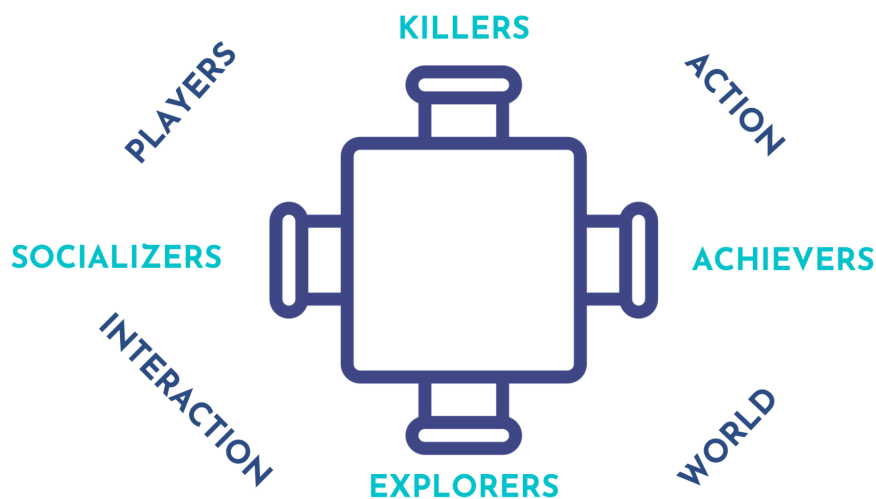


Figure 1. Richard Bartle's type of player theory.

Source: Adapted from Matera (2015)

Normally, every learner has a mixture of the four categories that we are going to describe in depth (Matera, 2015) and it is the teacher's duty to discover through students' behaviours their main interests in order to develop all kinds of elements that will meet each student's needs.

- Achievers' main goal is to solve all the challenges successfully to get all the possible rewards. Being deeply interested in obtaining points, rewards and levels. They are extremely motivated through prestige and recognition. They are somehow engaged through a collection of items and love to complete all the stages within the game. Furthermore, a classification system will keep them really entertained and encouraged.
- Explorers may seem disinterested in the game at the beginning, because they will be trying to understand the rules and all the hidden features in the serious game. Their rhythm is driven by curiosity and, sooner than later, will be completing and discovering all the mysteries and secrets in the game.
- Socializers are more attracted to sharing time with peers than actually winning. The game will be their perfect excuse to interact with other people. Hence, cooperative games are extremely enthralling to them.
- Killers, on their part, are looking forward to competition. Their main goal is to eliminate those who can beat their group. Evidently, they cannot stand losing and desire victories over partnership. To attract this kind of player, competitive games should be brought to the lesson.

Once we have thought of who will be part of our games and their interests, it is also recommended to bear in mind four main areas following John Radoff's model of player motivation (Figure 2).

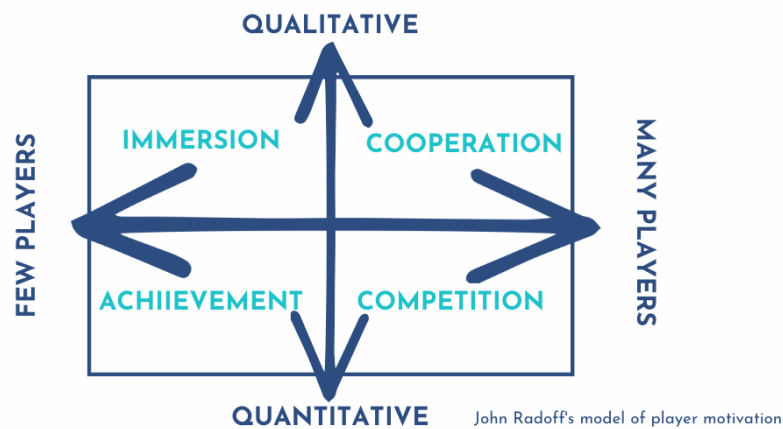


Figure 2. John Radoff's model of player motivation.

Source: Adapted from Matera (2015)

- Immersion is achieved by designing a world that allows students to create and explore while making them the protagonists of the story.
- Achievement is what we offer to learners, the possibility of mastering some knowledge, in this case, English. Helping students develop the different communicative language activities by providing them with different feedback within the game.
- Cooperation promotes altruism, group cohesion and feeling of belonging by working together to unveil the game.
- Competition among groups of students fosters the creation of a close-knit group and authentic cooperation by all the interaction that it implies.

Next, just before designing the game, Zichermann and Linder (2010) showcased how the model SAPS could trigger motivation as a marketing approach to cultivate customer loyalty, which is very similar to what we are supposed to achieve in our lessons: student loyalty. SAPS is an acronym that stands for *status, access, power and rewards*. These four aspects, when included in gamification, are said to improve motivation among learners deeply (Matera, 2015).

- Status is achieved by offering constructive feedback in which students can track their progress, for example, by means of rankings or badges.

- Giving access to special “events”, especially if these are restricted to special conditions, is linked to a higher student’s commitment towards the gamification experience and so, language learning in particular.
- Power or the feeling of being the main character in the game is one of the most appealing features in a gamified experience. Providing them with the opportunity to make decisions or getting new skills that will lead them to new chances or actions within the game. These skills, when scarce, become extremely desirable and valuable.
- Rewards have always been linked to success and achievement. Most teachers tend to think of chocolate or sweets, that is, goodies which are not part of the game, to engage students and make them compete. Notwithstanding, it is quite surprising the fact that the kind of reward that players are more likely to be interested in is that one in which they obtain new tools to play or any feature that can make them prosper and advance within the game itself (Matera 2015).

Once the game designer has taken into account how to include the characters, the four main areas: immersion, cooperation, achievement and competition; and the SAPS model, they have to follow certain steps to actually design the story. The aforementioned actions include the creation of a story within a theme and a setting in which the characters can play by presenting them a conflict so that action is required. Apart from these, Matera (2015) highlights the importance of making room for as many of the following mechanics as possible to achieve real gamification:

- Experience points (EP), used to quantify the player’s progress within a game. They offer status and work with other mechanics such as enhancements and rankings. However, they are useless in an isolated way.
- Levels display the player’s position within the game. They foster status, access and power and may be a perfect complement to experience points. Even if they deeply motivate achievers, if used just on their own or simply with experience points they turn into an ineffective tool.
- Rankings can come in handy to show players or groups of players’ positions. They provide status and keep players motivated.
- Items, such as badges, rewards, skills or, anything that a player can use as an enhancer or an extra ability. They give the designer an opportunity to personalise the game by offering different, distinct features to each player. The downside is that their creation is highly time-consuming.

- Temporary enhancements supply players with a seasonal strength for their character. Offering status, access, power and so, action. However, they must be delivered carefully in order not to overpower some players and provoke a feeling of unfairness.
- Groups, thought as alliances among players. They create strong bonds among students. Thus, creating group cohesion and triggering participation among those less interested in the game simply because it makes them work collaboratively.
- A bargaining chip can be any item, be it physical or digital, that can be accumulated to get a benefit or exchanged by different items or rewards. Although its inclusion demands advanced game mechanics to work, it satisfies those who desire status and power.
- Minigames and mini challenges put most of the game elements together. They are in charge of spicing up the experience by arousing a creative space to keep high levels of motivation. They need to be varied to avoid boredom and repetition.
- Life jackets, also known as scaffolding. It is paramount to offer ways to help those who get behind find opportunities to progress. They are an outstanding tool to make the game experience a bit more competitive by giving the possibility of winning to all players.
- Player vs. player battles or championships are events that make players or groups of players fight to get a higher status. They add a real possibility to fail, which may unleash an excess of competitiveness if it is not controlled.
- Group discoveries are proposals for all the players to work together to overcome a challenge or problem. As it can be implied, group cohesion and the feeling of success are deeply boosted since it implies fun while cooperating.
- Temporary or seasonal events are moments created within the game for a limited time only, they bring the possibility of refreshing the game when it is losing impact. When they are well planned and announced, they arouse curiosity and status and they are the perfect mechanic to create bonds among students.
- Penalisations are the perfect tool to balance your game and also to make learners know the importance of following the rules. They trigger high commitment to avoid these sanctions that should not be linked anyhow to their final grades or marks.
- Hidden secrets or Easter eggs, will make learners desire to explore and discover the whole world prepared for them. They skyrocket status, access and power and are part of a story or legend for the ones searching for them. Evidently, after a hidden secret is

found, it brings a reward for the player. When hiding these secrets, we need to make sure that it is neither too easy or difficult to find them.

- Exchanging shops or any way for students to exchange their bargaining chip. It expands the idea of taking part within an economy. Even if it may be used with any other mechanics, it requires the design of items or rewards to be “bought”, this might be seen as the most difficult part of the game creation for adults, since there is still not much literature on it.
- Routines that offer the possibility of getting low or small rewards; these are repetitive actions or activities that promote small successes made by students. It encourages learner agents to master certain areas of what is being learnt.
- Memorable battles, these can be escape rooms or breakout games that build up high expectations since students are turned into “heroes” that will solve a problem and/ or unveil a solution. These are a group of correlative linked enigmas that lead players to the opening of a room in the case of an escape room (Chen, 2015) or a box in the case of a breakout game. The greatness behind these mechanics is that they are developed within a context and a story told and are a great tool to be used in the class in order to promote cooperative learning and to engage students through interaction and socialization (York and William 2018). Due to the amount of hours these experiences demand to be successfully created, they just may take place two or three times per year and should be created with high precision so that they are exceptional and not too uncomplicated or extremely arduous in order to avoid a lack of interest (Santamaria and Alcalde, 2019).

2. THE SERIOUS GAME INTO PRACTICE

Before moving onto the methodology, I will display the main bases for the serious game proposed, its aims and objectives, how it was presented, its process and the elements involved. Having all the aspects mentioned in the previous section in mind and all the elements Madera (2015) states for a serious game to be successful, the gamification presented at the beginning of the year was entitled “Destroying Villain PC”, in this case, PC stands for “Pruebas de Certificación” since the students would face a certification exam at the end of the academic year. This gamification experience lasted the whole academic year. Before the game started students were asked to choose the superhero or superheroine that would represent them throughout the course and the different elements were introduced to them in class.

They were presented with the instructions while superhero music was played, the main topic involving the game would be superheroes/ superheroines and battles, the reason behind it is that after having been administered a questionnaire on their likes and interests, a great percentage of them were interested in action movies, games, and this kind of literature. Once they arrived at class, the instructions of the game (Appendix I) were displayed and printed in colour on every desk. The first rule that was explained to the students was that all the rules could change throughout the game in order for it to be flexible, and that it could be easily adapted to all the students and course moments and, especially, to make sure that those game dynamics not working properly could be removed or exchanged by others that could approach the students and the learning environment in a better way.

In every unit, learner agents were given the opportunity to develop a superpower that could help them have a say in their lessons in a different way, by means of a secondary mission in which the improvement of a different communicative language activity was boosted, a special piece of writing, research and deliver of a recorded speech on a specific topic like mental health or a mediation activity, to name but a few. All these activities would have in common the fact that they would not be compulsory. However, since they brought the possibility of getting a superpower the percentage of participation in each one of them was really high.

Regarding the superpowers to be obtained. A wide variety was created, for example, “clairvoyance” that would give them the possibility to discover where and when some special gemstones would be hidden or “hypnotic intelligence” with which they could get the teacher prepare a lesson on a special difficult topic for them, or one that sparked their interest for a different reason. These superpowers would be ranked into different levels, one, two and three. Depending on the level of the superpowers achieved, they could have access to different exchange shops as well.

In addition to the superpowers already mentioned, in every unit, Iron Man would be hidden somewhere, for example behind a QR code at the end of a document that was uploaded into the blended learning platform, used to share extra and reinforcement material with the students. This was a way to make sure students would check every single document shared with them. Hence, improving their reading skills on a daily basis. Once they discovered this special figure that would disappear once the unit was over, they would have to “fight” with him in a special quick mission and would have to send some evidence to the teacher in order to get this superpower, for example listening to a video and answering some questions related to it. The difference between these superpowers and the ones already

mentioned is that the latter would involve stealing a partner's superpower, duplicating it or having the possibility to get a past one. Thus, avoiding a static game.

Apart from these dynamics, that could be easily be seen as mere badges, every lesson would include at least an edutainment task, this is, an educational game that could give them the opportunity to acquire some bargaining chip, in this case, pieces of kryptonite, that could be after exchanged at different shops. The amount of kryptonite would be displayed on an Excel Google spreadsheet that would be shared with them and that would be updated instantaneously so that we could see a present ranking every day. To avoid violating the policy protecting personal data, on the first day, as it has been mentioned at the beginning, they would be asked to choose a superhero or superheroine and they would upload on a Google Document the image of their character that would be later used as reference for the different rankings and groupings. It might be argued that just high achievers would have more opportunities to get kryptonite. However, the games and activities proposed offered different ways to get currency, trying to cater for diversity. What is more, in some cases, it was even left up to fate. As an example, in one of the games, basket head (Figure 3), learners would be asked to wear a basket on their head and catch as many balls as possible, each one of the balls would be connected to an idiomatic expression, an advanced vocabulary word, a piece of kryptonite or several pieces, a gemstone, etc. Once the game was over, each team's possessions would be updated and they would have to prepare a short speech including that advanced vocabulary in an appropriate context.



Figure 3. Basket head. (Retrieved from <https://flyingtiger.com/>)

Moving onto the shops presented in which the bargaining chip can be exchanged, there were two options at the beginning of the game; a basic shop with simple elements that would give them access to buy, for example, extra time to prepare an oral presentation or the possibility of handing in a piece of writing three days after the deadline just by exchanging

some pieces of kryptonite that would be subtracted from their total amount. In addition, after a month and a half, a second shop was released in which pieces of kryptonite and superpowers with different levels would be used to have access to more useful rewards for them. After some months, the time that students would need to get some of the rewards was analysed and could somehow discourage students from trying hard to get it. Thus, a new element and kind of shop was introduced, they were called “magic stalls” and they were magical because they changed and lasted for a limited time. Thus, the elements on sale would be upgraded every two weeks. In this case, kryptonite was not the bargaining chip used, but gemstones, these could be found in five different colours and could be got easily in class through different daily tasks and routines, each gemstone would be linked to a specific reward in the shop and sometimes, students would join forces to get them all. To make things easier, the instructions were updated and together with the different shops, they would be uploaded into the online platform so that they decided which items they would need more and would like to get.

Rewards, bearing in mind that Official Language Schools are not compulsory and neither is attendance, was the hardest part to develop. The most difficult part was to think of items that could make learner agents want them. Since the average age of these students was 37 years old and they had hectic schedules and family responsibilities, mind maps, short lists of vocabulary or idiomatic expressions or tips on how to excel at the different language activities they would face in the final exam, resulted into the most popular rewards to get and really made students motivated to keep playing and attend a really high percentage of the lessons. As it can be imagined, the higher the level of the superpower they had achieved and the greater the number of pieces of kryptonite, the more complete and fruitful the reward would be.

Finally, at the end of each term, learners would encounter a breakout experience, especially designed for them. In each one of these, at least a listening task, a reading activity and some vocabulary revision missions would be included. Kryptexes, locks, invisible ink, ciphers and mazes, to name a few, were used to make the experience much more enjoyable. Normally, an image of the topic and the date, or a small object with the date would be used as a bait, to boost students’ participation. The last memorable battle, was entitled “Destroying Villain PC: the final battle!” (Appendix 2) and took place right before the certification exams, this experience made them feel self-confident the day of the test, laugh and share some moments with their classmates to release the normal anxiety before sitting it.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Instrument

The research design has been mainly qualitative. Proposing an example of primary research, and within it, of survey research, since a mixed questionnaire with open and close questions has been administered to a group of students currently studying at an Official Language School, after having been involved in a gamified experience over the whole academic year, so as to analyse to what extent this game may have brought a positive experience among students, while giving them voice to highlight the aspects they found more interesting and the features that, in their opinion, should be modified.

Questions (Appendix III) encompassed items related to the effectiveness of learning English by means of gamification, which of the five communicative language activities they thought had been fostered the most and to what extent they thought this serious game was motivating. Certainly, there are clear limitations in relation to this survey and the sample analysed because of a lack of time and participants availability. However, it might be considered a valid instrument as a classroom-oriented research project that might lead to new unknown insights to improve their learning experience and to answer the research questions exposed. The questionnaire was created using Google Forms and delivered to students online. To ensure their participation, they were asked to fill it in class, making sure that anonymity was granted throughout the whole process. Lastly, they were asked for permission to use the results for research purposes. Despite the grassroot nature of the results obtained, the statistical figures from the survey have been triangulated at a really basic level, with the qualitative data to be found in the different open questions.

3.2. Sample and academic context

This methodological proposal was conducted in a group of 22 students at the Official Language School Lucena (Andalucía, Spain) who were attending C1.2 lessons, from all sexes. The language learners under study were between 17 and 54 years old and it is important to highlight that the nature of the lessons offered at this scope of education are non-compulsory although recommended to students in order to achieve successful academic results.

The class analysed belongs to a mixed course in which fifty percent of the enrolment rate is devoted to in-service teachers who desire to update their English mastery. The other half, plus the vacancies not covered by teachers can be enjoyed by anyone over the age of sixteen years old. In this case, 25% of the students were teachers in primary or secondary education while the remaining sample was formed by teenagers, employees, self-employed

and unemployed students. 68% of them are female and regarding the age, they range from 17 to 54 years old. Interestingly, each one of the students has a different educational background and a different language level, although in general, they are really fluent and are highly motivated to reach the level. Lastly, regarding their origin, 80% of the students are from Lucena while the remaining 20% drive from towns nearby where there is not an Official Language School.

Regarding the variables, in this case, taking into account the quantitative data collected, three of them will be highlighted:

- The dependent variables:
 - The students' perception towards gamification and the motivation associated to it
 - The students' motivation to go to class in order to obtain all the possible rewards
- The independent variables:
 - Sex
 - Occupation
- The moderating variables:
 - Age

The main objective behind the questions that relate students' motivation to attend lessons and improve their mastery in English language and gamification tried to unravel if the latter may have a positive effect in adult students' engagement and participation or, if quite the opposite, it could lead to aversion or distrust in this kind of learners. Furthermore, with the data obtained and the qualitative answers I will try to respond to the research questions proposed in the first section.

4. RESULTS

According to the first research question *“Can gamification have any impact on adult language learners?”*, when classifying the answers to the question *“Do you think that the gamifying experience “Destroying Villain PC” was motivating?”*, we can clearly see that there are no learners in disagreement with the fact that the experience has been motivating, which is a positive result by itself, since it could be concluded that there are no students who believe that this approach has been negative whatsoever. However, if paying attention to the different age groups, the number of participants surveyed who have chosen “Extremely Agree” are directly proportional to the older they are, which means that, far from accepting it

as an obstacle, adult students assess gamification as a highly motivating learning tool (Figures 4 and 5).

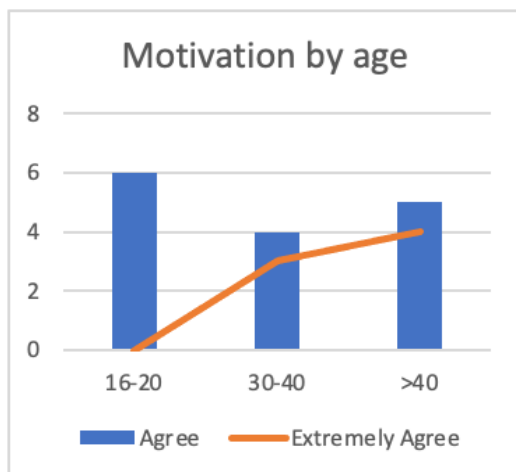


Figure 4. Motivation by age

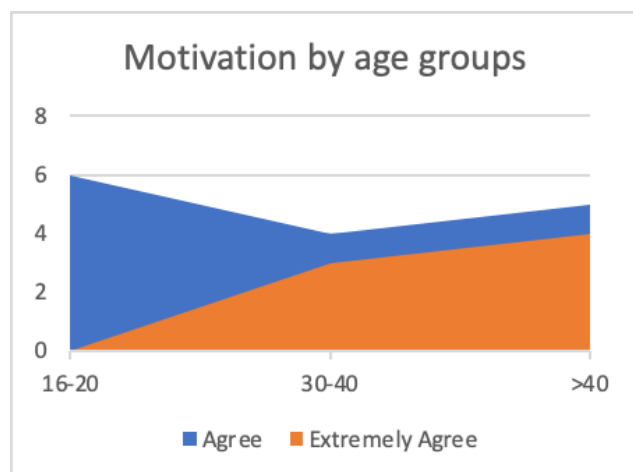


Figure 5. Motivation by age groups

In addition, with the intention of delving deeper into the fact that gamification may have a relevant impact in adult students' motivation, I have used one of the independent variables by separating the answers by sex. The questions administered will be the dependent variables and lastly, as a moderating variable I will introduce age, which will let me analyse if serious games have a greater effect on a particular sex, bearing in mind the age, or if the tendency is similar in all of them.

As it can be seen (Figure 6), at first glance, the results between male and female participants are quite similar. Although the answer "Extremely Agree" is slightly higher among women, the difference is not relevant so as to affirm that gamification has a different influence on sex. Nevertheless, in the following lines, I will also introduce the age of the participants in an independent analysis.

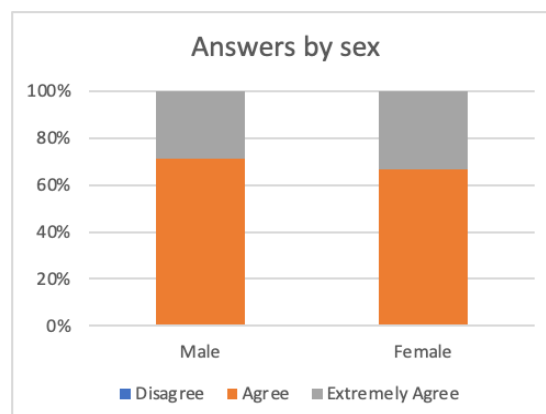


Figure 6. Answers by sex

In the graphic (Figure 7) in which female students' answers by age group are contrasted, it can be clearly highlighted that the older these students are, the more engaging they understand gamification as a learning approach in the English class. However, in the case of male students (Figure 8), it can be observed that in the oldest group of students there is a decrease in the number of “Extremely Agree” answers. In any case, it should be noted that it does not provide meaningful information because the sample of this age group does not let us determine precisely if the increasing tendency displayed in the previous age groups could be maintained among male students over the age of forty, since there is just one student belonging to this age group. What could be stated is the fact that the greatest perception of motivation takes place among students between the ages of thirty and forty, so the peak of greatest positive impact is produced among entirely adult learners.

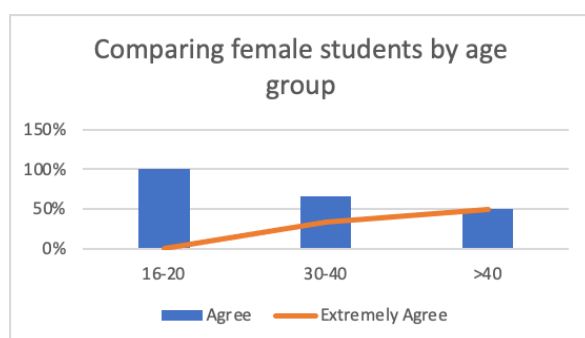


Figure 7. Female students by age

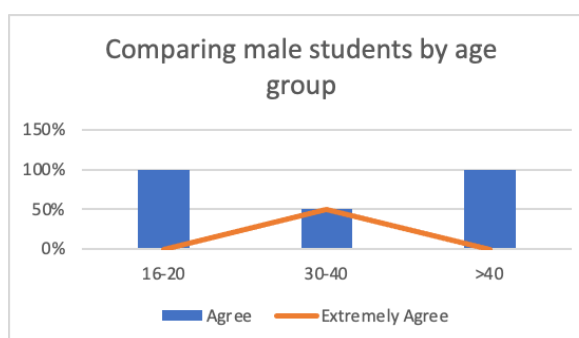


Figure 8. Male students by age

Taking into consideration all the aforementioned, it could be concluded that the feeling of motivation triggered by the different game dynamics in the lessons depends by no means on the participants' sex, but quite surprisingly, in both groups a rising tendency can be detected just as age increases.

Regarding the question *“Were there days on which you did not feel like coming to class, but you did because you could get benefits through the proposed game?”*, I will separate the answers by age, to understand to what extent the possibility of getting rewards is seen as a bait by students of different ages. Hence, making them attend lessons despite not wanting to.

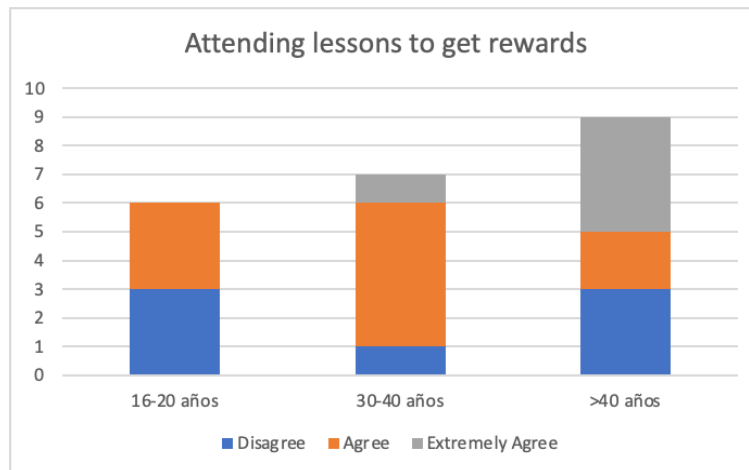


Figure 9. Attending lessons to get rewards

Paradoxically, half of the teenage students surveyed (Figure 9) stated that obtaining rewards was not a reason to feel motivated to go to class, while just one of the adult students among thirty and forty years old shares the very same opinion. Regarding learners over forty, six out of the nine surveyed participants “Extremely Agreed” with the statement. From these conclusions, it should be underlined that for the great majority of the language agents asked, gamification entails some motivation that pushes them to go to class even on days when they could feel physically shattered or mentally tired.

Introducing the independent variable of occupation, will help us enquire into the answers obtained from the students, so as to determine whether this aspect is even more decisive than age itself, that will be treated as a moderating variable again.

At first glance, the largest level of motivation to attend lessons derived from the benefits that could be obtained in class is observed among unemployed students (Figure 10), in which all the enquired agreed or extremely agreed with the assertion previously presented. This can be naturally understood as quite logical, since for an unemployed person, language learning could be felt as their main duty or task outside their home. In addition, it could also provide them with greater opportunities of finding a job.

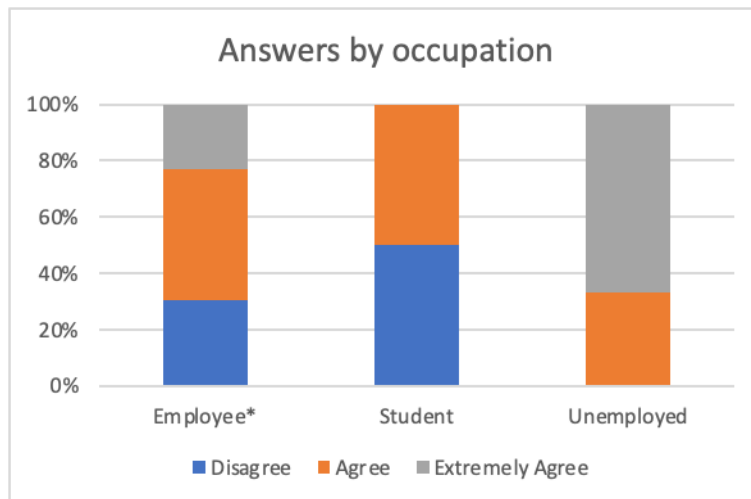


Figure 10. Answers by occupation

In relation to the students, similar results to the ones obtained by the age group between sixteen and twenty are displayed, probably because most of the surveyed participants belonging to this age group are also students. Lastly, 31% of the employee participants disagree with the statement given, which might be considered quite reasonable since, many jobs together with family duties or responsibilities, may pose a setback to attending lessons.

If we introduce the moderating variable of age and we start analysing employees (Figure 11), we can notice an interesting tendency taking place especially within the older age group, in which there is an increase of answers “Extremely Agree” and a drop of the answers “Agree”. Apart from this, the fact that there are no teenagers in complete disagreement and that there is a 100% of students in agreement is owed to just having one participant belonging to that age group currently working, the rest of the learning agents belonging to the younger age group are students

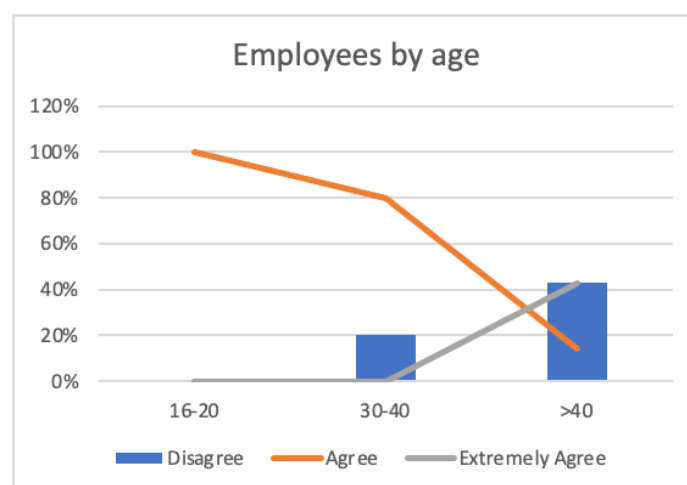


Figure 11. Employees by age

Regarding the graph of students by age group (Figure 12), it can be easily seen that most of the students belong to the first age group, since most adult learners are employees or unemployed. Notwithstanding, the entirety of negative answers stating that rewards do not involve any motivation to attend lessons belong to teenagers while, on the contrary, all the adults who are studying agreed that the rewards that can be obtained through the gamification experience exposed are engaging enough to make them go to class. Again, we can highlight the fact that despite occupation, gamification is highly intertwined with adult students to avoid missing class.

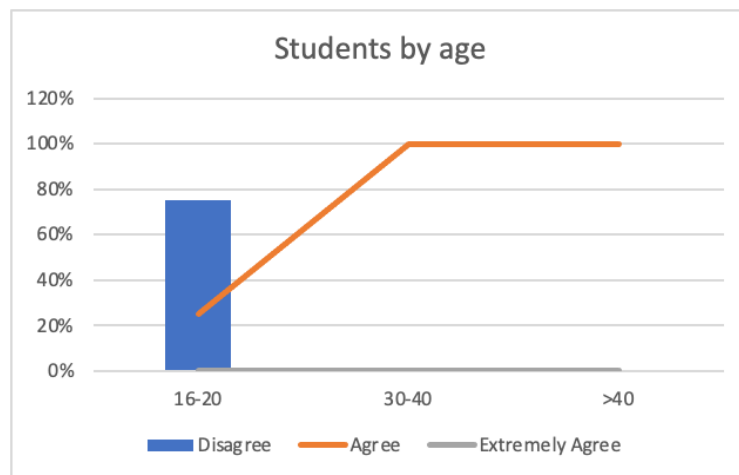


Figure 12. Students by age

Finally, within the unemployed group (Figure 13), as it has already been explained generally, no learner agent has shown disagreement with the fact that serious games are a stimulus to attend lessons and, if we pay attention to the two age groups belonging to adults, 100% of them marked "Extremely Agree" as their answer.

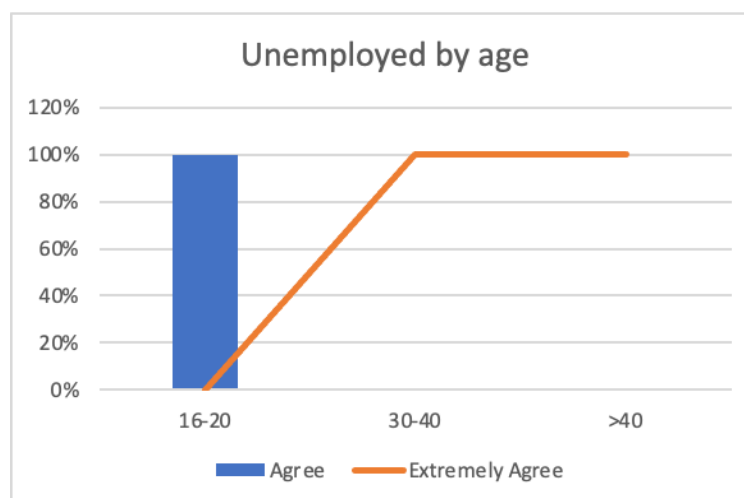


Figure 13. Unemployed by age

Bearing in mind all the information previously showcased, it can be concluded that even if there are some jobs that may have an effect on the students' motivation to attend lessons, gamification, game dynamics and rewards need to be considered as a clear spur when it comes to avoiding missing class and participating actively in lessons. Not only does this feeling grow and is intensified as learners are older, but also it does not diminish anyhow among adult students.

Moving onto the second research question: *“Are adult language learners open to playing in their EFL class or do they believe it is a waste of time?”*. Even if 95,45% of the students stated that they had never been taught through gamification before (Appendix IV), when they were asked if they thought that the gamifying experience “Destroying Villain PC” was motivating, 68,18% of the enquired agreed with the statement and 31,82% of students extremely agreed. No negative answers were found among the students. In fact, even if some teenagers said that it was not a reason to make them feel motivated to go to class, when they were asked if they thought if it was an effective way of learning English, 100% of the students answered positively, just like the totality of them remarked the fact that they would like to find gamification in the future since they do not consider it a waste of time.

In the following table (Table 2) some of the reasons why students think it is an effective way of learning English are fleshed out:

Qualitative answers
- Yes. It always is. It's widely known that the learning process is more effective when it's done in a fun way as students do not "realize" they are learning or revising contents they already know. And it's also more motivating for them. - Yes, It really is. The reason why I find the gamifyng experience very effective to learn is because playing is funny and it leads to satisfaction, self-control, communication skills and increases motivation and responsibility. - In my opinion it definetely was effective, especially because non-compulsory teachings need to be entertaing to not feel like a burden. - Sí, porque es una forma divertida y alejada de la educación tradicional. Y es una forma de reconectar con tu niño interior. - Sí, estar motivado y entretenido siempre ayuda.

Table 2. Qualitative answers about the effectiveness of gamification to learn English

In addition, if we pay attention to their answers when asked how they would describe the gamifying experience, their answers were really positive overall (Table 3).

Qualitative answers
- It was fun, engaging, unique, motivating, and it reinforced the relation among classmates. - Motivational, fun, enthusiastic and tremendously addictive. - Me gustó, estaba motivada a conseguirlo. - Fun, fulfilling and different. - Enriquecedora.

Table 3. Qualitative answers about how students would describe the gamifying experience

As I wanted to get some more insight on what to improve about the game, students were also surveyed about what they liked most about the game (Table 4), what they thought that should be improved (Table 5), their favourite reward (Table 6) and if they preferred pieces of kryptonite or gemstones (Table 7).

Qualitative answers
- It was funny, we shared with mates, we had to get missions, I wanted to go to class always, we laughed a lot, without realizing It, we learned a lot. - The variety of challenges, the secondary missions' hunt and the interaction with our classmates. - Ser recompensado por trabajar y esforzarte cada día. - I loved the secret missions.

Table 4. Qualitative answers about what students liked most about the game

Qualitative answers
- I like group dynamics, but the Game focused on individual rewards. I feel like maybe adding group missions por rewards could make It even better. - Maybe not improved but worked harder, that is, more variety of grammar-centered activities as adults like that. - Tener todos un objetivo común, no sólo individual. Por ejemplo, ir derrotando entre todos a algún "villano/a". - Yo no entendía bien los beneficios o cómo usarlos, el día que se explicó no fui a

clase.

Table 5. Qualitative answers about what should be improved about the game

Qualitative answers

- Above all the care, motivational attitude and affection of my teacher. Then the game process itself and to realize everything I was learning in a funny way.
- More time to hand in assignments.
- The tips on how to do certain tasks were a great help.
- Las infografías.
- Las estructuras esenciales de C1.

Table 6. Qualitative answers about their favourite reward

Qualitative answers

- Gemstones, because with them I could get very useful resources to use in my exercises and exams.
- Gemstones, because the rewards they gave were very useful.
- Gemstones porque se optaba a recompensas mayores.

Table 7. Qualitative answers about why they preferred kryptonite or gemstones

Finally, regarding the communicative language activity (Figure 14) that learners thought had been fostered the most, 81,81% of the students said that speaking skills had been the ones, while 18,18% thought writing skills were the most favoured ones.

Points scored

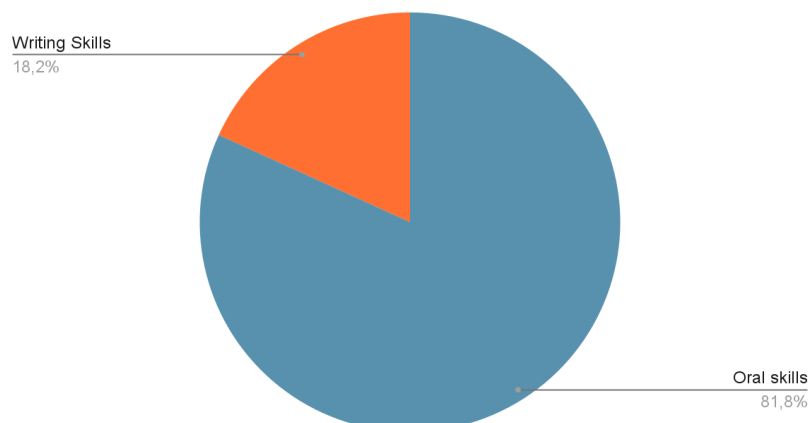


Figure 14. Communicative language activity most fostered by gamification

Lastly, in order to answer the third research question: *“Has absenteeism been reduced in this group compared to the figures registered in the previous course?”*. I have extracted the statistics gathered by the Head of Studies at the Official Language School Lucena in order to analyse the tendency, comparing school absenteeism of that very same group when they were enrolled in C1.1 level and after gamification in C1.2. The numbers show a decreasing tendency, observing how a 27,58% of absenteeism in C1.1 was reduced to a 4,35% in C1.2.

The gamification experience lasted the whole academic year and the majority of the language learners felt thrilled and enthusiastic about the different game dynamics that took place. The results displayed above give answers to the questionnaire mentioned in the instrument section and have been used to study their impressions and thoughts about the methodological approach taking place in class.

Particularly enthralling are the results in which adult students seem to be more motivated by gamification than even teenagers, just as Koivisto & Hamari (2014, mentioned in Masrop et al., 2019) glosses it, game mechanics create an inner motivation in players that pushes them to participate in order to get all the possible achievements. Hence, it could be claimed that gamification, and in this particular case, “Destroying Villain P.C” has been successful within this particular group of students to take advantage of the motivational power that players find in games.

In fact, if paying attention to table 2 in which students give their opinion on the serious game proposed, we can see how the majority of answers are positive, underscoring emotional outcomes: *“Yes, It really is. The reason why I find the gamifying experience very effective to learn is because playing is funny and it leads to satisfaction, self-control, communication skills and increases motivation and responsibility”*; *“In my opinion it definitely was effective, specially because non-compulsory teachings need to be entertaining to not feel like a burden”*; *“Sí, porque es una forma divertida y alejada de la educación tradicional. Y es una forma de reconectar con tu niño interior.”*; *“Sí, estar motivado y entretenido siempre ayuda”*. If we flesh out these answers, we will see that aspects related to emotions, just like connecting to their inner child, having fun, feeling entertained or forgetting about their daily burden, to name but a few, come to light. Interestingly, they are not focussing on just their academic results, or their linguistic outcomes. This could lead us to state that just as Wlodowski (2017) highlights it, memorable experiences are normally accompanied by lifelong memories, and our brains are trained to focus on emotions. Hence, emotions play an important role in the class and will help us keep students engaged in our lessons.

Last but not least, the fact that absenteeism has been reduced in this class is an extremely important aspect to fight the negative tendency in which less and less students are enrolling our public Official Language Schools over the last few years, both in Spain and Andalusia (Flores, 2021 and Rodríguez, 2022). If lessons are motivating, engaging and unexpected for students, students will be willing to attend them. It is crystal clear that in a context in which lessons are not compulsory, we, as teachers, need to make an extra effort to keep our learners entertained, in order to boost their class attendance. Even if the sample provided is extremely limited, it might bring a spark of enthusiasm that could prove how this emerging teaching approach could contribute to glossing over the negative trend above exposed.

5. DISCUSSION AND PEDAGOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The aim of this study was to present a groundbreaking teaching proposal for the English as a foreign language classroom at non-compulsory education targeted at adults, that is, Official Language Schools in Spain, and to evaluate the possible beneficial results serious games may bring to their learning experience.

As it has been displayed in the previous section, the greatest percentage of learners showed a positive mindset towards the inclusion of gamification in the English class and have reported feeling more motivated while boosting their speaking skills, than if traditional teaching methods had been used. Even if the results could not be generalized whatsoever due to the limited segment analysed, the experience has proved to be effective, for this group of students, in terms of increasing their motivation, active participation in class and class attendance while promoting cooperative learning, socialization and long-life learning.

Finally, polishing the serious game, in order to include more of what they enjoyed and trying to make the experience perfect for them, should also be taken into consideration. Administering different questionnaires throughout the whole academic year could give us some longitudinal information that could help us improve our gamification on the spot.

In fact, a greater emphasis should be placed on the access to rewards, since most students have felt more encouraged by gemstones that gave immediate benefits than pieces of kryptonite that could just be enjoyed in a longer-term. Thus, balancing difficulty and the possibilities of acquiring pieces of kryptonite should be observed. Furthermore, paying attention to the fact that all the players have completely understood the game dynamics and instructions should not be left unseen, since in this kind of education, an inconsistent class attendance is usually the norm. Additionally, it must also be underscored that enrolment in Official Language Schools is open up to December if there are vacancies to cover. This could

mean new students and players could be added to the experience throughout the first school term, so a periodic revision of the instructions would be advisable.

6. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The sample analysed is very restricted both, numerically and geographically speaking, since just a mixed-questionnaire has been administered and studied in depth. By having different variables analysed, some data has been triangulated at a very grassroots level taking into consideration the statistical results and the qualitative insight gathered from the open questions.

Nonetheless, data collection is restricted to just a group of students and could have benefited from a cross-sectional research in which more groups of students and teachers had been surveyed as well. Besides, the number of variables could be wider in order to be able to triangulate data in depth.

Besides, even if questionnaires have proved to be a great tool that may be used to pinpoint the participants' impressions and feelings in the English as a foreign language classroom, we should not disregard the fact that their reliability and validity could be questioned. Just as Oller (1981, cited in Madrid & Pérez Cañado, 2001) points it out, the "desire for social approval" effect may be understood as a hazard within any type of questionnaire, it involves participants not being completely honest about the information provided, but instead, modifies the answers by trying to flatter the inquirer. Thus, it would be sensible to contrast the results obtained from the questionnaire with classroom observation and some other unbiased instruments. Furthermore, administering the same questionnaire several times throughout the academic year, as it has already been mentioned, could result in interesting outcomes that would help consider students' evolution, achievement and engagement at different moments.

7. LINES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In connection with the previous ideas, there is much that could be said about this topic, and so much more data analysis could be carried out. In fact, replicating the study in different levels, (those leading to certification exams and those in which language learners just promote to the next level), working with a greater sample, including a combination of quantitative and qualitative research while allowing a wider number of variables to be analysed over a longitudinal study, could result in more types of data triangulation and hence, more reliable results.

There is little to disagree with the fact that gamification could be applied to all the different levels at Official Language Schools that encompass certification and non-certification levels. Even if some teachers may argue that certification courses should be focussed just on test-based tasks, the truth is that, for this C1.2 group of students, gamification has meant an absenteeism drop that led to outstanding certification results, obtaining 95% of the students taking the exam a C1 diploma. Analysing the results in a greater sample could bring the possibility of comparing and contrasting the different results, finally obtaining highly reliable results. It would be vital as well to extrapolate this teaching approach to all the different languages taught at the different schools in Spain and discover whether substantial differences are to be found between coastal and inland schools or between rural and urban areas.

Lastly, adapting the experience to suit online or blended learning courses in order to provide these students with immediate feedback while enhancing interaction in environments in which these aspects are naturally less strengthened, could be analysed and results could prove if serious games could bring a positive impact in these learning-teaching atmospheres.

8. CONCLUSION

Through this MA Dissertation the effectiveness of serious games and the different mechanics they have to offer in a group of students at a C1.2 level of an Official Language school has been analysed. The research has showcased that gamification brought about positive outcomes on students' motivation. Most of them have presented a high degree of satisfaction towards the experience.

According to the most motivational elements, gemstones were highlighted as the most desirable ones since the rewards to be obtained through them were more immediate so they would feel satisfied shortly after. On another note, some students underlined the need to understand the game instructions from the very beginning. In this vein, it is important for teachers at non-compulsory education to understand that their students miss lessons from time to time, so making sure all of them are in class when the instructions are given is key and a recurring revision of them should be of paramount importance.

It is also paramount to notice that regarding this group of students, the older the language agents are, the more enthralling they have found the experience. Hence, far from understanding that games are just for children, in the case of this type of formal education in which, students who decide to enrol in English lessons, devote part of their free time to attend class, class attendance should be fostered by offering an entertaining atmosphere in which

students can unwind from their daily burden. Hence, promoting engaging activities and boosting their communicative skills while socializing becomes keystone.

This research, even if limited, could serve as a base for future studies on the field of gamification for adult English foreign language learners in light of the surprising results obtained. In fact, the power behind gamification would not simply foster English language learning in different scenarios, but would offer a completely different approach to teaching in which amusement and gratification would instantly trigger motivation among adults. Who said that adults would not want to play?

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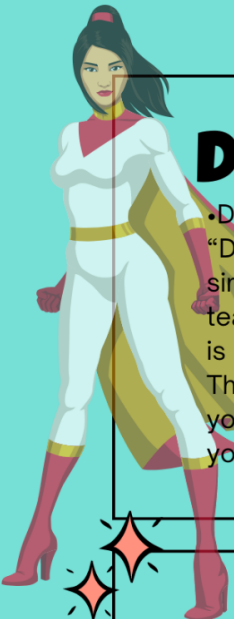
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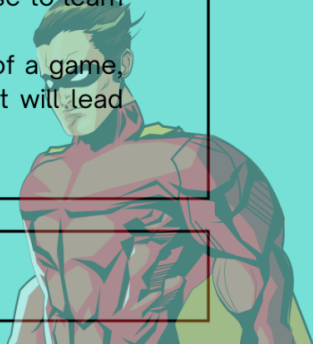
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DESTROYING VILLAIN PC

•Dear students I want to welcome you to our adventure: “Destroying Villain PC”. This year, you will learn much more than simple contents, you will experience long-life learning. Over my teaching years, I have discovered that having a purpose to learn is key and playing is always fun, no matter our age. That is why, my aim this course is to make you part of a game, you will be able to unlock different levels/ items that will lead you to success.



STARTING RULES



- This year, we will be superheroes, and you may want to win pieces of green kryptonite and or gemstones. When you get them, you will be able to exchange them to get different superpowers or immediate rewards:
 - Time to prepare a monologue
 - Having the possibility to hand in a piece of writing three days after the deadline
 - A piece of an example of a type of text
 - Five slang expressions to boost your speaking skill, etc.



MISSIONS & IRON MAN

- We will have daily missions and secondary missions (one per unit) to be able to get green pieces of kryptonite.
- In every unit you will be able to find Iron Man hidden somewhere around Google Classroom, he may have prepared a special activity for you to do, if you complete his mission successfully, you will have the possibility to get into his special shop and get something that will make you get advantage of what the rest of the superheroes may these medals or superpowers will be limited to just that unit, so make sure you try to get them.



REMEMBER

- The rules of the game might suffer some changes throughout the year.
- More superpowers can be added to the exchanging list.
- I will be adding extra information about the game on Classroom, so that you can all check your pieces of kryptonite, your gemstones and the superpowers you can get.
- Three different shops will be available for you to exchange your kryptonite and gemstones. The exchanging rules can be consulted in the folder titled "shops" on Google Classroom.

Marta del Pino Ordóñez - C1.2 - EOI Lucena

DESTROYING VILLAIN PC

THE FINAL BATTLE

VILLAIN PC HAS BEEN USING THE DARKHOLD (A BOOK OF SPELLS) TO SPREAD A TYPE OF ENERGY THAT KEEPS THE POPULATION STRESSED, ANXIOUS AND SUFFERING FROM SLEEP DEPRIVATION.

THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES HAVE CALLED DIFFERENT GROUPS OF SUPERHEROES TO DECODE THE CYPHERS THAT WILL DESTROY THAT BOOK FOREVER.

Appendix III

1. Sex
 - a. Female
 - b. Male
 - c. Non-binary
 - d. Prefer not to say
2. Previous qualification
 - a. Primary education
 - b. Secondary education
 - c. Vocational training
 - d. University studies
3. Occupation
 - a. Unemployed
 - b. Student
 - c. Employed (employee, self-employed, freelance, civil servant, etc.)
4. Age
 - a. 16-20
 - b. 20-30
 - c. 30-40
 - d. 40-50
 - e. Over 50
5. Had you ever been taught through gamification in English as a Foreign Language class before?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
6. Do you think that the gamifying experience "Destroying Villain PEC" was motivating?
 - a. Extremely agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Disagree
 - d. Extremely disagree
7. Were there days on which you did not feel like coming to class, but you did because you could get benefits through the proposed game?
 - a. Extremely agree

- b. Agree
 - c. Disagree
 - d. Extremely disagree
8. Do you believe it was an effective way of learning English? Explain why
- a. Yes
 - b. No
9. Which of the five communicative language activities was fostered the most in your personal opinion?
- a. Speaking skills
 - b. Writing skills
 - c. Mediation skills
 - d. Reading skills
 - e. Listening skills
10. How would you describe the gamifying experience?
11. Would you like to find gamification in your lessons in the future or not?
- a. Yes, I would love it
 - b. No, I consider them a waste of time
12. What did you like the most about the game?
13. What do you think could be improved about the game?
14. Which was your favourite reward?
15. Did you prefer pieces of kryptonite or gemstones? Why?

Appendix IV

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K
1		Sex	Previous qualification	Occupation	Age	Had you ever been taught through gamification in the English as a foreign language class?	Do you think that the gamifying experience "Destroying Villain PEC" was motivating?	Were there days on which you did not feel like coming to class, but you did because you could get benefits through the proposed game?	Do you believe it was an effective way of learning English? Yes? No? Explain why	Which of the five communicative language activities was fostered the most in your personal opinion?	Would you like to find gamification in your lessons in the future or do you consider it a waste of time?
2	Participant 1	Female	University studies	Employee	40-50	No	Extremely agree	Extremely agree	Yes	Speaking	Yes
3	Participant 2	Male	University studies	Student	30-40	No	Agree	Agree	Yes	Writing	Yes
4	Participant 3	Male	Secondary education	Student	16-20	Yes	Agree	Disagree	Yes	Speaking	Yes
5	Participant 4	Male	University studies	Employee	30-40	No	Extremely agree	Agree	Yes	Speaking	Yes
6	Participant 5	Female	University studies	Employee	30-40	No	Agree	Agree	Yes	Speaking	Yes
7	Participant 6	Female	Secondary education	Student	16-20	No	Agree	Disagree	Yes	Speaking	Yes
8	Participant 7	Female	Vocational training	Unemployed	30-40	No	Extremely agree	Extremely agree	Yes	Speaking	Yes
9	Participant 8	Female	University studies	Student	40-50	No	Agree	Agree	Yes	Writing	Yes
10	Participant 9	Female	University studies	Employee	40-50	No	Agree	Disagree	Yes	Speaking	Yes
11	Participant 10	Female	University studies	Employee	40-50	No	Agree	Agree	Yes	Speaking	Yes
12	Participant 11	Female	Secondary education	Unemployed	16-20	No	Agree	Agree	Yes	Speaking	Yes
13	Participant 12	Female	Vocational training	Unemployed	40-50	No	Extremely agree	Extremely agree	Yes	Speaking	Yes
14	Participant 13	Female	Vocational training	Employee	30-40	No	Agree	Agree	Yes	Writing	Yes
15	Participant 14	Female	Vocational training	Employee	40-50	No	Extremely agree	Extremely agree	Yes	Speaking	Yes
16	Participant 15	Female	Vocational training	Employee	40-50	No	Extremely agree	Extremely agree	Yes	Speaking	Yes
17	Participant 16	Female	Secondary education	Student	16-20	No	Agree	Agree	Yes	Speaking	Yes
18	Participant 17	Male	University studies	Employee	40-50	No	Agree	Disagree	Yes	Speaking	Yes
19	Participant 18	Male	Secondary education	Employee	30-40	No	Agree	Disagree	Yes	Speaking	Yes
20	Participant 19	Male	Secondary education	Employee	16-20	No	Agree	Agree	Yes	Writing	Yes
21	Participant 20	Male	University studies	Employee	30-40	No	Extremely agree	Agree	Yes	Speaking	Yes
22	Participant 21	Female	University studies	Employee	40-50	No	Agree	Disagree	Yes	Speaking	Yes
23	Participant 22	Female	Secondary education	Student	16-20	No	Agree	Disagree	Yes	Speaking	Yes
24											
--											