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INNOVATIONS IN LANGUAGE EDUCATION: EXPLORING GAMIFICATION AND BEYOND

BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

International Scientific Conference
10. November 2023, Slovenia



Faculty of Organisation Studies in Novo mesto, Slovenia

in collaboration with Trabzon İl Milli Eğitim Müdürlüğü (Türkiye),
Trabzon University (Türkiye), Fatih Sultan Mehmet Anadolu Lisesi
(Türkiye), Istituto Di Istruzione Superiore "G.I.A. Pira" (Italy),
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Innovations in Language Education: Exploring Gamification and Beyond

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Editor: Prof. Dr (PhD, USA) Anmarie Gorenc Zoran, Full Professor

Technical editor: Vesna Grabnar

Design and cover: Karin Zamida

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A NEW APPROACH IN ENGLISH EDUCATION: GAMIFICATION

Gamification applications activities to be carried out within the scope of our project (Augmented Reality, Virtual Reality, Web 2.0 Tools, Artificial Intelligence, Mobile Applications, Digital Games, Interactive Games, Stories and Activities), by making students' English lessons richer and more enjoyable, thereby improving feelings of stress, anxiety and lack of self-confidence in English lessons. We aim to reduce the level of failure in English lessons and increase their motivation to learn English.

With this project; In addition to increasing their knowledge, skills and competences in English, students will have the opportunity to improve their skills of regulation, thinking and social skills while they learn English. We aim to deal with daily life problems that require problem solving and decision-making skills in a more comfortable way.

The aim of the Project:

- Providing students with a fluent and fun learning environment with the gamification method and practicing what they have learned, at the same time, offer the opportunity to discover
- To give students self-confidence with fun gamification applications that put the student at the center,
- To integrate gamification applications to English course outcomes and to create gamified learning environments,
- It is to produce innovation on the value axis with gamification method and to contribute to the development of problem solving skills in students.

More information about the Erasmus+ project "A New Approach to English Education: Gamification" is available at the project website: eugamification.com.



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PARTNERS OF THE PROJECT “A NEW APPROACH TO ENGLISH EDUCATION: GAMIFICATION”

Faculty of Organisation Studies in Novo mesto, Slovenia, Trabzon İl Milli Eğitim Müdürlüğü (Türkiye), Trabzon University (Türkiye), Fatih Sultan Mehmet Anadolu Lisesi (Türkiye), Istituto Di Istruzione Superiore “G.I.A. Pira” (Italy), Agrupamento de Escolas de Miranda do Corvo (Portugal)

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GAMIFYING LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION: INSIGHTS FROM TEACHERS

Servet Çelik Trabzon University, Türkiye

Bilal Karaca Trabzon University, Türkiye

Gökhan Çepni Trabzon University, Türkiye

F. Zeynep Er Trabzon Provincial Directorate of National Education, Türkiye

Yasemin Karaca Trabzon Provincial Directorate of National Education, Türkiye

Mehmet Emre Kazancı Trabzon Provincial Directorate of National Education, Türkiye

Maja Pucelj Faculty of Organisation Studies in Novo Mesto, Slovenia

Anmarie Gorenc Zoran Faculty of Organisation Studies in Novo Mesto, Slovenia

This study explores the perspectives of language teachers on the integration of gamification into language instruction and its subsequent impact on student engagement, motivation, and language proficiency. Through a series of open-ended questionnaires, data were collected from a diverse group of high school teachers who had implemented gamification in their language teaching practices as part of an Erasmus+ KA201 project. The open-ended questionnaires were designed to capture various experiences, perceptions, and observed impacts of gamification on students' language learning experiences. The thematic analysis revealed a significant enhancement in language proficiencies across various domains, encompassing written and oral communication, auditory comprehension, and creative narrative construction. Teachers noted that gamification not only deepened students' cultural understanding and proficiency in using Web 2.0 technologies but also created a vibrant collaborative learning environment. Gamified elements in language lessons increased student motivation and engagement, often sparking a competitive spirit and heightened participation.

Challenges encountered by teachers included apprehension about potential misinterpretation, linguistic barriers, and difficulties in engaging students from diverse cultural backgrounds. However, these were overcome through active participation in language practice, the use of various digital tools, fostering teamwork, and gradually building confidence among students. This approach led to an observable shift in student attitudes towards language learning, characterized by increased engagement, reduced anxiety in expressing opinions, and a keen interest in technology.

The study also highlighted the evolving role of teachers in gamified learning environments. The transition from direct instruction to facilitation emphasized the importance of student autonomy and self-directed learning. Using gamification as an innovative assessment tool emerged as a significant finding, indicating its potential in evaluating student understanding and involvement. Integrating gamified elements into language courses enriched the learning experience, suggesting a need for curriculum design incorporating these elements. Teachers' professional development in Web 2.0 technologies and game-based learning strategies was identified as crucial for effective implementation. The study underscores the importance of preparing educators for the challenges and opportunities presented by gamification in language teaching. The study underscores the need for thoughtful integration of gamification into language education. It suggests that gamification can transcend traditional pedagogical approaches when implemented strategically, making language learning more immersive and effective. The findings also point to the importance of training teachers in gamification techniques, aligning gamified activities with curriculum goals, and developing assessment strategies that can accurately measure the impact of gamification on language proficiency.

The research provides unique qualitative insights into the implementation of gamification from the direct experiences of language educators across a range of geographic regions. While the sample size is limited, the richness of the subjective accounts reveals nuanced perceptions of the benefits, challenges, and best practices associated with gamifying language instruction. By eliciting detailed narratives, the study underscores the importance of understanding teacher experiences, as they are crucial facilitators in harnessing the potential of gamification. Their first-hand struggles and discoveries in adapting activities and lesson plans can inform training programs on effectively equipping teachers for this teaching shift.

While the current study is exploratory, the conclusions advocate for more empirical work on quantifiable learning gains, the development of standardized frameworks for implementation, and comparative analyses of gamified versus traditional instruction. There is also a need to investigate the relationship between improved motivation and actual proficiency growth. Longitudinal data could provide richer insights into the sustainability of impacts. Overall, by elucidating teacher perspectives, this research meaningfully expands the discourse on gamification as a promising innovation in language education.

In conclusion, this study advocates for a gamified transformation in language education to better cater to the evolving needs of learners in the digital age. It highlights gamification's role in enhancing language proficiency, student motivation, and engagement, offering valuable insights for curriculum designers, educators, and policy-makers in language education.

Keywords: gamification, foreign language teaching, teacher perspectives, language proficiency, curriculum design, digital technologies, educational innovation, collaborative learning.

BRIDGING WORLDS: IMPACT OF CROSS-CULTURAL PROJECTS ON ATTITUDES TOWARDS CULTURES AND DIVERSITY

Servet Çelik Trabzon University, Türkiye

Bilal Karaca Trabzon University, Türkiye

Gökhan Çepni Trabzon University, Türkiye

F. Zeynep Er Trabzon Provincial Directorate of National Education, Türkiye

Yasemin Karaca Trabzon Provincial Directorate of National Education, Türkiye

Mehmet Emre Kazancı Trabzon Provincial Directorate of National Education, Türkiye

Maja Pucelj Faculty of Organisation Studies in Novo Mesto, Slovenia

Anmarie Gorenc Zoran Faculty of Organisation Studies in Novo Mesto, Slovenia

This qualitative research explores the impact of cross-cultural project involvement on the development of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) among educators. Amidst an increasingly globalized educational landscape, the ability to navigate cultural boundaries is not just beneficial but essential for effective education. This study delves into how inclusion and engagement in such projects can influence educators' attitudes toward diversity, acquire new skills, and integrate these learnings into their teaching practices.

The research gathered insights from six high school students with recent experience in cross-cultural projects by leveraging open-ended questionnaires. A content analysis of the responses uncovered a shift toward greater acceptance and a more profound appreciation for cultural variances. The participants articulated an evolution in their perceptions, revealing an augmented openness and inclusivity in their approach to cultural differences.

The findings showed improvement in collaborative abilities among the students. There was a clear advancement in their technological adeptness, aligning with the demands of modern educational settings. Moreover, the participants were eager to use these cross-cultural experiences in their educational curricula, suggesting a readiness to transcend traditional teaching methods in favor of more globally conscious approaches.

Despite these positive developments, the study identified challenges in stimulating colleague engagement with innovative educational tools and methodologies. This resistance underscores the need for continued advocacy and structured support for educators adopting and adapting to new teaching approaches.

ICC is not merely an add-on to the educational process but a fundamental component that merits deliberate and systematic incorporation into teaching strategies. The study advocates for a sustained commitment to professional development in this realm, emphasizing the need for educators to be equipped with the skills to foster ICC among their students.

The research also highlighted the transformative potential of cross-cultural projects in enriching the educational experience. Participants reported that these projects facilitated a more holistic understanding of global issues and encouraged applying critical thinking skills in diverse scenarios. This aligns with contemporary educational philosophies that prioritize developing global citizens prepared to engage with the complexities of an increasingly interconnected world. Additional research into the long-term impacts of project involvement would be valuable, as the current data represents a snapshot soon after the experience. A longitudinal approach tracking participants over months or years could reveal whether enhanced ICC is sustained over time or if ongoing professional development is needed. It would also be informative to directly measure the effects of improved educator ICC on student outcomes, intercultural sensitivity, and global citizenship.

Furthermore, the study's outcomes suggest a ripple effect, where the benefits of ICC extend beyond individual educators to their students and the broader educational community. Educators who personify intercultural understanding model and transmit these values to their students, potentially influence a more inclusive and culturally responsive education system.

The research calls for a discourse of current teacher training programs, highlighting the necessity for curricula more reflective of society's multicultural tapestry. It encourages integrating structured opportunities for educators to engage in cross-cultural projects, fostering a vibrant educational environment with cultural exchanges and learning opportunities.

Overall, this study makes a meaningful contribution to the literature on intercultural education and communication. The conclusions underscore the immense value of cross-cultural exchange in fostering openness, empathy, and connection across divides. Promoting structured cross-cultural engagements and continuous professional development is a promising avenue for cultivating educators to adapt their teaching in diverse settings.

Keywords: intercultural communicative competence, cross-cultural projects, foreign language teaching, pedagogical innovation, teacher professional development, cultural diversity in education, collaborative learning, technological proficiency in teaching.

GAMIFICATION IN EDUCATION

Antonin Vacek Mise HERo s.r.o., Poland

Gamification plays a transformative role in language education, involving the integration of game elements into educational contexts. It is an umbrella term that needs to be distinguished from "Serious Games" (Gamified UK, n.d.). While both share aesthetic, structural, and user experience aspects, they differ in purpose: gamification applies game-like elements in non-game contexts like education or business to enhance engagement, whereas Serious Games are designed primarily for purposes other than entertainment, with specific learning or training objectives.

Gamification design is integrated of storytelling, personal and team accomplishments, progress mechanisms, instant feedback, visual tracking, leaderboards, and managing time pressure and limitations. Creativity, autonomy, ownership, avatar creation, and customization are also key elements. Social aspects like engagement, friendship, and social gifting are significant in gamified learning. Additionally, gamification may employ exploration, mystery boxes, and FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) to engage learners.

It is important to consider diverse player profiles (philanthropists, players, free spirits, achievers, killers, socializers, etc.) and preferences (explore, create, compete, collaborate), as outlined in Marczewski Player Types (see <https://www.gamified.uk/user-types/>) or Amy Jo Kim's Social Action Matrix (Marczewski, 2015; Tondello, et al., 2019). For successful educational outcomes, it is also key to understand the four freedoms of gamification of the presentation, emphasizing the freedoms to explore, fail and retry, team dynamics, and identity choices, underlining the creation of a safe and engaging learning environment.

Gamification and its effective integration in educational settings are particularly highlighted in successful projects such as the Skill Up Game Erasmus+ project, for adult trainers, developed by CIK Trebnje (Slovenia), Mise HERO s.r.o. (Czech Republic), Beti Institute (Lithuania), I&F Education and Development (Ireland), and Fundacion Aljaraque (Spain), and in the MISE HERO PROJECT.

The effectiveness of gamification depends on the implementation strategy. Focusing on specific modules and incorporating feedback enhances impact. It is important to collaborate with schools for practical testing and refinement, asserting that gamification signifies a major shift in teaching methodologies, leading to more engaging, effective, and inclusive learning environments.

Keywords: Gamification, Education, Skill Up Game, MISE HERO PROJECT, Player Typologies.

DIGITAL DESIGN THINKING IN EFL TEACHING

Nives Kreuh University of Applied Sciences Utrecht, Archimedes Institute, The Netherlands

Today's world is characterized by the rapid growth of the cyber world and artificial intelligence. Progress in development neuroscience and thus in our understanding of the learning process has imposed demands on educators to better prepare generations of young people for the ethical and social dimensions of the use of existing and incoming digital technologies.

As an individual moves not only in the real world but also in virtual, a further concern for security, ethics, proper communication and the recognition of the authenticity and reality of the information obtained, as well as the concern for digital identity. This raises the needs for students to be digitally literate.

However, research shows, that students, for example, can solve problems according to the instructions given, but are unable to solve problems creatively and critically assess the information obtained; only 12% of students participating in the ePirls 2016 study achieved the advanced level of digital literacy. The research 2nd Survey of Schools: ICT in Education showed that students seem to be most confident in the digital competence areas communication and collaboration and least confident in the digital competence areas related to problem solving and digital content creation.(European Commission 2019). Additionally, the same research emphasises that continuous professional development is key for teachers to integrate digital technologies into their teaching practices. If digital competence of teachers is to be boosted, it is of high importance that policies and actions support all types of participation and engagement in professional development and other forms of professional learning (European Commission 2019).

Consequently, when designing the new programmes for future language teachers and courses in modern foreign language teaching (teacher education), we relied on constructive alignment and used the TPACK model (Technological, Pedagogical, and Content Knowledge), which highlights three components of the teacher's knowledge: technology, content and didactics (Koehler and Mishra 2009). We used authentic tasks and problem solving through technology, critical thinking to support the development of digital literacy through relevant content (and the final work into which the reflecting and critical use of ICT in work and instruction was included to focus on challenges in education and prepare our future teachers to better support their learners and

prepare them for life. We also relied on the European Framework of Digital Competences of Educators, DigCompEdu (Redecker 2018) to better understand and address the competences that teachers need to have in connection with the development of learners' competences. We included them as an integral part of the Learning Outcomes Framework since it is important to assess them as well.

As a result, students were able to design and teach their lessons during the internship by integrating digital literacy in the foreign language teaching. The recommendation for the future is to share the innovative practice among all departments of the faculty and connect more with the school to evaluate the outcomes and make them sustainable.

Keywords: modern foreign languages, digital literacy, digital design thinking, teacher education, evaluation.

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