Chapter 3
Gamified Curriculum and Open-Structured Syllabus in Second-Language Teaching

Alexia Larchen Costuchen
Polytechnic University of Valencia, Spain

ABSTRACT
This chapter provides an example of a secondary-education curriculum tailored to increase 21st century students’ motivation in second-language study by integrating digital learning into the classroom. The proposed syllabus is competency-based, open-structured, and promotes active learning within the constructivist paradigm. The research focus of this chapter suggests raising discussion on the practical benefits this type of curriculum design has on learning. The accompanying challenges that institutions face will also be addressed. The legal framework was based on public-school policy, the autonomous regulations in the Valencian Community, Spanish National Legislation, and the International Guidelines of the Council of Europe. The syllabus content is supported by such programs as Quizlet and Anki App for vocabulary acquisition; Kahoot, Socrative, and Jeopardy App for reading comprehension and grammar work; and Augment and HP Reveal for visuospatial stimulus via augmented reality. Web-based platforms such as Adobe Spark, Explain Everything, Nearpod, Padlet, and Canva, among others, were applied for digital story-making, videocast, interactive presentations, discussion boards, graphic-novel writing activities, etc. It should be noted that this design is just one of various options, that the current educational system in Spain is expecting curricular changes and that digital technology and internet-based resources need to be constantly checked for updates.

INSTITUTIONAL BACKGROUND
According to Fan and Wolters (2014), high-school dropout has become one of the most significant educational problems, resulting in high costs not only to individuals but also to society. In Spain the rate of early school leaving reached 17.9 percent in 2018, the highest number in Europe. The 2014–2020, the National Plan to Reduce Early School Leaving applied such measures as increased vocational training,
teacher training opportunities and qualification requirements. Consequently, policy makers, practitioners and researchers are also constantly looking for new ways to improve the curriculum in Spanish schools.

The institution where the experimental syllabus was utilized is a public school in Valencia located in one of the city’s areas with a strong immigrant presence and a multicultural environment. Recently the school facilities were renovated and Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) were introduced to facilitate the students’ better development of the key competences that need to be acquired. Most of the school’s students come from low- and middle-income families which may cause teachers to experience difficulties owing to diverging levels of academic knowledge. To address this issue, the school contributes with such projects based on real life as the Farming Land Integration Project (Programa Huerto), aimed at difficult students with behavioural problems, and the Language Integration Project (PASE), a programme for foreign student backgrounds who experience difficulties learning Spanish as a foreign language. The school also offers a wide range of extracurricular activities for students and their parents such as: psychological tutorials for parents, excursions, sport and artistic events for students. This school represents an opportunity where educators may play a more important role in improving students’ professional prospects than the family environment.

The proposed syllabus addressed a group of students from the first year of secondary education, twenty-six learners aged around 12 years. According to the theory of cognitive development (Piaget, 1936; Piaget and Inheldner, 1958) at this age adolescents are in the formal operational stage and develop abstract thinking and deductive abilities. Emotionally they are increasingly concerned about their identity and, look for social acceptance from their peers, while hormonal changes cause worries and mood changes. In some cases, teachers may find it challenging to deal with students at this age, which is why this syllabus suggests helping the group with psychological scaffolding in order to increase their cognitive knowledge through intellectual stimulation with new technologies.

In accordance with the national education system, the CEFR standard of English in the first year of secondary education in public schools is A2. Most of the learners are originally from Valencia, Spain and have Spanish as their native tongue, with a good operational knowledge of Valencian (the regional language). A minor part of the group is of Latin American or Pakistani origin which creates another challenge of curricular and cultural divergence. As schools do not divide students into levels for English classes, teachers have to work with mixed-ability groups (Gordon, 2010), i.e. groups of students who are in the same grade but have different levels of knowledge of the subject. Bremner (2008) pointed out that mixed-ability classes do not just contain students with different abilities, but students with a range of learning styles and preferences. Therefore, the general goal of this syllabus was to increase students’ motivation by establishing class objectives such as positive atmosphere and by encouraging students to participate and express their needs through a variety of creative activities optimized for the digital age generation.

**BACKGROUND**

Although the national government establishes the main course requirements, the Spanish educational system is characterised by regional decentralisation and there are changes in the 17 autonomous communities. Educational legislation is continuously striving for improvement in order to reduce school dropout, raise the country’s employment rates and repair the damage inflicted by the 2008 economic crisis in Spain. Historically, since the end of the Franco dictatorship and the adoption of the 1978 constitution,