Chapter 5

Gamification for Technology-Enhanced Language Teaching and Learning

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores gamification as an innovative pedagogical strategy in language learning with the use of technology. The authors examine the construct of gamification, arguing for the need of a clear definition as many authors use various terms interchangeably. The dynamics, mechanics, and components to conform a gamified learning experience are presented. The chapter describes current research and teaching experiences on gamification and technology-enhanced teaching and learning. Two approaches are identified: the use or design of gamified apps and gamified learning experiences designed entirely by teachers and implemented with the help of different technologies. Some tools and platforms for gamification are discussed and recommendations on how to implement a successful gamified teaching intervention are provided. Two approaches to researching gamification are also proposed.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, gamification has become a recurrent methodological strategy in the field of education (Kim, Song, Lockee, & Burton, 2018), and the area of foreign language teaching is not an exception (Pujolà & Herrera, 2018; Reinhardt, 2019). There are more and more teachers who, in the search for resources to enhance students’ engagement, introduce several elements of games to their teaching together with the use of technology (Goethe, 2019; Siemon & Eckardt, 2017). The origin of this trend

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can be traced back to the vast popularity of video games that caught the attention of experts in different areas of knowledge such as business and education. These experts examined the use of game elements in non-game contexts with the intention of applying them in their own areas (Kapp, 2012; Marczewski, 2013; Werbach & Hunter, 2012). Both the results of these studies, and the emergence of new technological applications have triggered moves toward the implementation of gamification in foreign and second language learning and teaching. Gamification is conceived as a didactic methodology, the central purpose of which is to offer a learning experience that generates students’ engagement and interest (Tulloch, 2014). Over time, within the language teaching tradition a wide variety of games have been used for the development of communicative competence (Lee, 1979; McCallum, 1980; Wright, Betteridge, & Buckby, 1984). While the learning goal of these games may vary widely (e.g., prompting authentic oral practice in the process of playing, facilitating vocabulary retention, or providing controlled practice of some grammar points) what they all have in common is that teachers employ them in an attempt to make the learning experience enjoyable.

The use of computer games for educational purposes has also contributed to the integration of playful components in language classes or in virtual language learning environments (Peterson, 2013; Reinders, 2012; Reinhardt, 2017; Sykes & Reinhardt, 2012). Simulation games have been particularly popular in language teaching and learning (Crookall & Oxford, 1990), not surprisingly, given the importance of language use in meaningful communicative interaction for second language acquisition (Canale & Swain, 1980). From the perspective of both psycholinguistic and sociocultural theories of language learning, simulation and computer games hold great potential for language learning in that they engage learners in situations that will allow for negotiation of meaning and/or collaborative dialogue (Peterson, 2009). A different approach has been the development of computer games designed specifically for language learning (e.g., Sørensen & Meyer, 2007). In these educational games, also known as serious games, a specific learning need is targeted and a game is designed around this goal.

In the area of informal learning, there is a growing use of massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPG) in L2 learning (Jabbari & Eslami, 2018; Sundqvist, 2019). In these video game contexts, the actual need to be successful playing them prompts students’ motivation and interest to improve their language skills (Thorne, 2008). Different studies have demonstrated that the use of digital games in teaching-learning processes has generated positive effects (Whitton, 2014) such as an increase in students’ confidence levels when communicating in a foreign language in digital environments (Reinders & Wattana, 2014), as well as the development of communicative competence (Mawer & Stanley, 2011). Finally, open ended simulation worlds such as Second Life provide tools and objects that can be useful for teachers seeking to design game experiences for their students, and some studies have looked into the potential and benefits of play within these environments (Bell, 2009; Edwards, Rico, Dominguez, & Agudo, 2010). However, the learning curve for their use together with the technological challenges these environments present mean that these venues have not developed as anticipated.

There is a long tradition of the use of games in L2 teaching and learning, which continues to grow as new technologies open up the repertoire of available games. However, the use of games is not the same as gamification; gamification presents a different approach making use of successful game elements and mechanics in the design of teaching and learning experiences. Gamification opens up new opportunities for application in a variety of virtual learning environments (VLEs), from e-learning systems to virtual worlds (Goethe, 2019). Gamification has been undertaken with enthusiasm in the area of education, and its use is also expanding in language teaching and learning. However, there is still little research published in this area.