

THE CONTRIBUTION OF GAMIFICATION STRATEGIES IN EMERGENCY REMOTE TEACHING OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

The current pandemic context has caused new challenges. Due to this, reflections have emerged regarding school practices in the teaching-learning context, especially about Emergency Remote Teaching. Such system has been used as a strategy to maintain school activities during social isolation. Therefore, the aim of this article is to describe successful teaching-learning practices through gamification strategies applied by English language teachers in 3rd year of Elementary School classes. As the strategies presented here resulted in positive student-teacher and student-student interactions, they can contribute to the dynamization of the printed didactic material content and help engage students in the learning process.

Keywords:

Gamification. Teaching practice. English language teaching.

RESUMO

O atual contexto pandêmico tem feito emergir no contexto do ensino-aprendizagem novos desafios e reflexões sobre as práticas escolares, sobretudo no que se refere ao ensino remoto emergencial, prática utilizada como estratégia para dar continuidade às atividades escolares durante o isolamento social. Em vista disso, este artigo tem como objetivo descrever práticas bem-sucedidas de ensino-aprendizagem por meio de estratégias de gamificação desenvolvidas por nós, professoras de ensino de língua inglesa, em turmas do 3º ano do Ensino Fundamental. As estratégias aqui compartilhadas resultaram em positivas interações aluno-professor e aluno-aluno, contribuindo também para a dinamização do conteúdo apresentado pelo material didático impresso e engajando os aprendizes no processo de aprendizagem.

Palavras-chave:

Gamificação. Prática docente. Ensino de Língua Inglesa.

1. Introduction

Since the end of 2019 the world has been suffering due to the spread of COVID-19, which is a disease caused by SARS-CoV-2, known

as the New Corona Virus. Despite some advances in studies about this disease, which already caused serious damage to the world population, experts in several areas, among them Frij of Capra (2020), claim that the impact of this pandemic will be definitive in order to trace the course of the new century. According to them, this current moment will be recorded by history as before and after the pandemic crisis.

Hodges et al. (2020) asserts that contrary to some experiences, like well-prepared classes already planned and designed to be online, the Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) became a sudden alternative for schools, due to the pandemic circumstances, which will return to face-to-face format once the crisis is overcome.

In the transition from the physical classroom conditions to a virtual environment several challenges emerged. According to Cahapay (2020), “some schools have employed online tools such as Google classrooms and social media applications such as WeChat or WhatsApp to augment education from home.” These changes will be inserted into a new teaching style, using gamification and content digitalization capacity, in order to make them more accessible to students during remote classes.

In addition, the current situation is bringing many changes to modern life, such as online distance education, which is the focus of this paper. “There is a timely need to carefully think about the concept of learning space anew.” (Cahapay, 2020). We are experiencing unimaginable times where models of teaching and learning require radical changes and strategies should be thought of as a way to reduce inevitable learning losses.

This new scenario has affected the lives of many teachers and students around the world. According to Bozkurt et al. (2020) this process is more complex than what society comprehends because it involves more than simply uploading educational content. It is a learning system that provides learners agency, responsibility, flexibility and choice. It also requires careful planning, designing and determination to create an effective learning ecology.

According to Bozkurt et al. (2020) there is a difference between Distance Education and Emergency Remote Teaching, since the former was designed to be an alternative and flexible option for learners, while the latter is an obligation, which involves different priorities.

This was one of the greatest challenges that some teachers went

through. It was observed, in practice, at least two essential points in this methodological transposition process: the mastery of digital literacy practices and the ability to get the attention of these students once that virtually, they can easily avoid participating.

Considering this, in this paper the aim is to describe successful teaching-learning practices through strategies of gamification. The activities described in this paper were developed in 3rd grade of Elementary School classes, during English classes in a bilingual program. The intention is to focus on teaching practice situations and socialize some possible approachable activities in the digital classroom.

Therefore, we speak as teachers and researchers, bringing real methodological situations that we developed together. In this paper we will discuss about four (4) activities which involve different levels of difficulties and that were adapted from the didactic material to the digital universe.

Due to the current conditions, the concept of gamification emerged, little discussed but yet, so important, especially in foreign language teaching. We believe that many features of reality experienced in the current pandemic context makes us reflect deeper about the aspects of democratization regarding digital practices, especially in the educationfield, this is an aspect strongly defended in the BNCC.

Thus, in an attempt to explain the objective throughout this paper, this study is organized as it follows: first, it deals with the concept of digital literacy and gamification, then it focuses on the didactic material and finally how the gamification process occurred, narrating the didactic purpose. The methodology used is bibliographic and expository, since it is a self-narrative of teaching practices (Pellanda; Boettcher; Pinto, 2017), understanding Freire's ideas that teachers are formed by their own practices and by the reflection concerning it. (Freire, 2004).

2. *Emergency Remote Teaching and Gamification*

Hodges et al. (2020, n/p) asserts that “online education, including online teaching and learning, has been studied for decades. Numerous research studies, theories, models, standards, and evaluation criteria focus on quality online learning, online teaching, and online course design”. Having its background based on theoretical and methodological construction, online education is now a reality experienced worldwide

and provided through the access of digital technologies.

However, online learning is a wide term for researchers in the education field. Due to the pandemic context the world did not have available time to prepare and develop structured learning strategies towards education, but it keeps trying to rearrange them, each in its own way.

Understanding that there is a difference between online learning and remote teaching, it's important to be aware that the first refers to the option of using technological tools to have classes, while the second is simply teaching in the same way as face-to-face but online, because of specific reasons. Therefore, the term Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) was chosen to be used in this paper. ERT brought great impact into world context considering educational practices. Among the numerous problems regarding this point of view, the lack of a cyber-cultural democracy (Canclini, 2005) must be the most important one.

Canclini (2005) also states that we live in an "Illusion" when we think that the internet and digital technologies are the same for everyone, everywhere in the world. What we can notice as a result of the ongoing scenario is that many students are excluded from the activities that are virtually promoted by schools.

Facing this sudden change of reality, the teachers' lack of ability to work with digital tools should also be considered. It brought a negative impact in developing more effective activities considering the lack of physical presence of the students, as it would be easier if the teacher could see the student's reaction to what is being taught.

Since dealing with online classes is a difficult reality in educational levels where students already have a certain autonomy in the learning process, it is much more serious when we talk about younger learners, as they are not autonomous and cannot manage, for example, with the commitment of attending classes at the assigned time, perform their activities at home, among other things.

Regarding teaching foreign languages, this impact is even stronger. How would it be possible to work with children and the necessary skills to acquire a second language without face-to-face interaction? How to draw the attention of these kids so that they can develop autonomy, be part of the process and learn? This challenge was experienced by us, foreign language teachers, while teaching students in the early years of

elementary school.

People who have had the opportunity to interact with physical didactic materials for foreign language teaching know that many proposed activities consider student-teacher or student-student interaction. It happens because these patterns of interaction help in developing all four skills: reading, writing, speaking and listening. Thus, the attempt to work with the physical book to teach a foreign language in the remote emergency context would be an unviable path since the material itself is not very informative and most of the times the learner cannot understand the instructions when working alone.

In this sense, facing a need to recover our methodological practices in order to be successful in the context of emergency remote education, the proposal of gamification is brought into this study, considering that such strategies proved to be fundamental in the process of practicing the language and skills, and also having students to interact.

According to Costa & Marchiori (2015 *apud* Deterding, 2011; Bunchball, 2010), Gamification can be defined as being a strategy supported in the application of game elements in non-game activities which are used to influence and cause changes in group and individual behavior. It is a phenomenon that sprang from the development of Information Technology (IT). Unfortunately, gamification, as discussed by Deterding et al. (2013), is often considered fad. In the current context, it is easily perceived as the teacher's resistance to the use of new technologies. The criticism presented by these authors is discussed here and this paper also finds it essential to strive for an inclusive education.

Above all, in Brazil, teaching activity is struggling to be valued. Sometimes this scenario is the root to methodological resistance and it is common to find teachers who lack the ability to handle technological tools. This is an important issue, since the world is becoming more and more high-tech. In this "new democracy", as Canclini (2005) states, the excluded are the ones that are not connected. In short, education professionals must improve this skill in order to keep up with modern life.

We intend to argue that, from our point of view, technology can not be seen as an enemy of the teaching practice, since it has too much to offer in terms of boosting teaching-learning practices, even in face-to-face context. What often happens is that the inability to handle such technology, even in face-to-face classes, results in its underutilization. Frequently, multimedia rooms or computer labs are underestimated and

underutilized, instead of being spaces to diversify literacy practices.

Bunchball inc. (2012) asserts that gamification can be applied in order to promote student engagement through games in which the focus is not in establishing winners or losers. This type of relationship is also called e-learning.

Zichermann & Cunningham (2011) and Vianna *et al.* (2013) defend that gamification is an interesting suggestion to problem solving, to increase motivation and consequently to engage the audience. Busarello (2016 *apud* Seaborn; Fels, 2014; Vianna *et al.* (2013) state that Gamification does not limit to game traits usage, but also consider its use to problem solving and to engage and motivate a certain audience. It does not necessarily mean joining a game, but using its most efficient elements to generate the same benefits of playing a game itself.

A very interesting aspect of gamification is the comprehension of the teaching practices designated to the learning process that should be constantly adjusted to the individual's reality. In this sense, nothing is more coherent than drawing on this proposal to try to expand the limits of physical didactical materials and engage students in the context of English as a foreign language, bringing them back to the process of scaffolding knowledge and also building autonomy (Freire, 2004).

This paper was written in a report format in which the writers took action in developing new ways to interact positively with students. Those processes are described along this piece, as we, teacher-researchers, found these approaches throughout our own praxis (Freire, 2004).

3. *Development of the activities*

In this section, we have discussed how the adaptation and/or gamification of the activities occurred in 3rd year of elementary school classes. This report has been organized so as to show an example of each skill developed during the natural process of learning a second language, in this case, English. Four activities have been mentioned, one for each of the following skills: Writing, Speaking, Reading and Listening.

1.1. *Writing*

The objective of this activity was to enhance writing skills and

reinforce vocabulary. The improvement of the writing skill can expand students' vocabulary and improve their grammar quality. Indeed, writing involves more than joining words together, it implies organizing ideas in a meaningful way. According to Myles (2020), “formulating new ideas can be difficult because it involves transforming or reworking information, which is much more complex than writing as telling”. This implies that writing can be one of the most challenging abilities, especially for kids working on second language acquisition.

At the moment this activity was proposed, we were studying the parts of bedroom and its objects. In the textbook there were some pictures of furniture found in a bedroom and their names were next to the images, scrambled. For this activity, students should guess the name of the furniture, unscramble the words and write them correctly. The pictures shown in the book were a way to guide students' answers to the correct furniture names, just checking the letters and looking at the picture, they could easily guess.

In order to change this activity into a game, we used the Wordwall⁷³ platform. This platform allows the creation of interactive and printable activities. It means that the same activity done online can be printed. It is important to mention that the printable version is not always available, it depends on the chosen template. Some templates also allow the addition of pictures. In this specific template, however, pictures could not be added which made the activity more challenging compared with the one on the student's book. To share activities with students we generate a link once the game is created. The link is sent to the students and they just click on it and go straight to the activity.

According to the Wordwall website description “interactives are played on any web-enabled device, like a computer, tablet, phone or interactive whiteboard”, which implies that the student can play individually or guided by the teacher with students taking turns at the front of the class.

To do this activity we chose a template called “unjumble”. As seen in the following picture:

⁷³ <https://wordwall.net/>

Picture 1: Game unjumble.



Source: <https://wordwall.net/play/2919/524/881>.

Students received the link of the game that led them to a black-board image on the screen, with random letters written on it. The students had to move the cursor using their computer mouse if they were in a computer. As previously said, it is possible to play on a cell phone or tablet. In this case, instead of a mouse, they could use their fingers in order to unscramble the letters and form the right words. When the letters are in the correct order, it turns yellow and the student can move on to the next scrambled word. They can only go to the next word if they organize the previous one. What makes it challenging and more engaging to the students is the fact that it has a clock counting the time it takes to finish and a leaderboard. They can also check the leaderboard at the end of the game to see theirs and their friend's results. It motivates students to be successful and brings more meaning to what they are doing, not only completing an activity but challenging themselves to be faster and more precise.

It is worth mentioning that any activity created in the Wordwall platform can be made public and shared with other teachers. We can also

take available activities and apply them to our students likewise, we can modify the available activities building upon it.

Changing this activity to be done online became more interactive because students did not simply write the words on a paper in their books, but they could order the letters just by moving them on the screen without any picture to help them. The only guidance they had was the topic which comes written on the screen before they start the game.

It is clearly notable that the main purpose of the activity remains the same. The words arise from the same semantic field and the aim is to organize the letters to form words. But changing this activity into a game brings more challenge to the students, once that the platform does not allow the addition of pictures in this specific template and they are working against the clock.

1.2. Reading

Reading is an important skill in today's society where information emerges from diverse places in different ways. Reading is necessary for understanding information and instructions while also improve vocabulary. Melby-Lervåg & Lervåg (2014) says that most studies regarding reading comprehension skills indicate that it seems to be more important for second-language learners than for first-language learners. Such information brings an alert regarding reading development during English language learning and which strategies to use to improve children's interest in today's context.

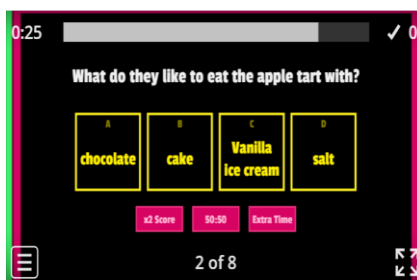
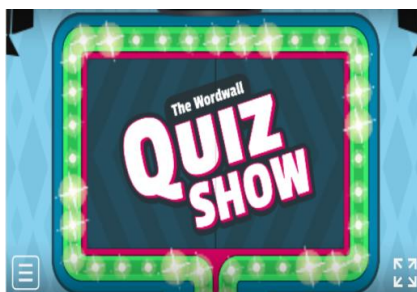
The didactic material suggested an activity that consisted of reading a comic before answering questions about the text. Since the goal was to adapt the task using gamification, the students were invited to role-play the dialogue, instead of simply reading it. In the story, there were 6 characters and each student represented one of them. Teacher did not choose students, they volunteered to participate. After the role play, some superficial questions were asked to check if students understood the story.

As they answered these questions, the next step was to take a quiz. The quiz was created in the same platform as the writing activity, the Wordwall. However, as mentioned before, the platform allows us to choose among different templates. To do this activity we chose the quiz show template.

The Wordwall platform describes the game show template as “a multiple-choice quiz with time pressure, lifelines and a bonus round.” There is also a leaderboard with the names of the 10 best players on the match. During the game show quiz some bonus cards are offered and the player can gain or lose points. The cards appear after some questions, they are upside down, students click on them and see what they have got as a bonus.

To engage students in the reading activity and stimulate their interest, the teacher said that after reading they would be led to a quiz about what has been read in the story. At this point students knew what to do because they had already done some similar activities, using the same template, the quiz show, as follows:

Picture 2: game quiz show.



Source: <https://wordwall.net/play/2933/372/724>.

What makes this activity more challenging in comparison to the book's purpose is that in the book students only had to read and answer some questions about the story. Since this is the most common way to

refer to a reading activity, it might not call the students attention, while role-playing the lines and answering the questions in a quiz-like activity may be more interesting for them. It also brings more meaning, as they have a reason to pay attention and participate, because they wanted to be the best at the end of the activity, and see their names in the leaderboard.

1.3. Listening

Listening activities are the most challenging ones to keep students engaged. They need concentration and focus, which sometimes make it difficult for some kids. Listening to somebody speaking in a foreign language can be hard to understand and it could be an issue during the learning process. However, insisting on practicing this skill is necessary because it provides input, deals with the vocabulary structures of the language and helps in developing speaking.

The task suggested by the textbook was listening to a dialogue and answering a few simple questions about it. Since this kind of activity is very common, they do not seem interesting to students. For this reason, the following adjustments were made:

First the teacher asked questions on what students were about to hear. Then the audio was played three times so that the students would have to search for specific information in the story, guided by the questions previously asked. Listening activities in remote classes are even more challenging not only for the students, but equally for teachers, especially while dealing with kids. To keep them engaged, they were warned that they would have a game after what they were going to listen to.

The listening comprehension activity was developed in a platform called: Nearpod.⁷⁴ It is defined as “an instructional platform that merges formative assessment and dynamic media for collaborative learning experiences”. in their own website. There are many activities inside this platform, all of them with the same purpose, to get students engaged.

One of these activities is known as “Time to climb”. This game is a quiz in which the students choose an animal character to run a race to the top of the mountain. For each right answer their character climbs according to how fast they answer the questions. There is a time pre-

⁷⁴ <https://nearpod.com/>

viously set to answer each question (10 seconds), but it can be modified by the teacher for more or less time. When the questions are finished, there is a podium showing the three best places in the match. Teachers can choose between student-paced, where each student can take their time and control the activity, or teacher-paced, where the teacher controls the activity and is able to go back and forth at any time. For little kids we strongly recommend teacher-paced because they can easily get lost.

The mentioned game was the one chosen to gamify the listening activity from the book. For this, the teacher has to share a link, and a code if the student is using a cell phone, before accessing the activity. The layout is also appealing as shown in the images below.

Picture 3: Game time to climb.



Source: <https://share.nearpod.com/vsph/m9DBSjSFMu>.

This type of challenge engages students as they want to be the first one to reach the top of the mountain and get the trophy. One important information for this activity to be successful is that the students must be aware that there will be a game after listening to the audio, so that they will be motivated to pay closer attention to what they hear and learn through this.

1.4. Speaking

Without communication skills students will never be able to speak fluently. In a second language, it is not easy to structure sentences, put words together and reflect about a subject. The speaking skill is often neglected at the beginning of the learning process since it is mostly focused on structure and acquiring vocabulary, especially in online classes.

The only way to develop speaking is by practicing. But, how to encourage students to speak in a language that is not their own and communicate without worries? Encouraging students to speak has become even more challenging in online learning. They find themselves on their comfort zone, behind the cameras and do not feel obliged to participate in something that is not convenient to them, such as speaking in a foreign language.

As an example of a speaking activity, a game was created based on an image taken from the student's book. The image is related to the vocabulary they were studying (*bedroom*).

To create this game another website was used, it is called: I'm a puzzle.com⁷⁵. Using this website, we can use any image to create a puzzle. It's possible to insert a photo, take any image⁷⁶ from google, and share this with students and friends. It's possible to choose among easy, medium, difficult and hard levels. After uploading the image and choosing the level, a link is generated and the puzzle is ready to be shared.

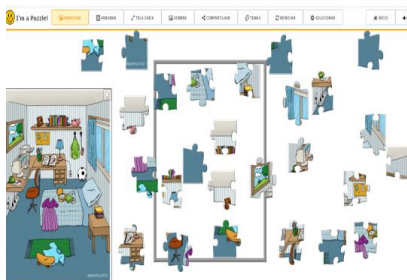
The first step for the students was to put a puzzle together, then they go straight to the speaking part. As soon as they finish the puzzle, they are allowed to turn on their microphones and speak, as long as they use English language. They could say anything about the picture, describe the bedroom, say the names of the objects, colors... etc.

Picture 4: Game puzzle.



⁷⁵ <https://im-a-puzzle.com/>

⁷⁶ https://petragaleria.files.wordpress.com/2007/11/2007_quarto_baguncado_messy_room.jpg



Source: https://im-a-puzzle.com/eu_sou_um_quebra_cabecas_5kTq4oCh.puzzle.

What makes this activity strongly successful is the fact that most of the students love puzzles and can finish them really fast. The students indeed get motivated by using the microphone and speak, they do not realize that the purpose of the task is to have them speaking. For them, it was just a form to tell their friends that they finished first than the others. This way the process of improving oral skill happens more naturally, as the students feel more comfortable other than under pressure.

2. Conclusion

This paper aimed at describing successful teaching-learning practices through strategies of gamification. The activities described in this work were developed in classes of the 3rd grade of Elementary School, during remote English classes in a bilingual program. The intention was to focus on teaching practice situations and share some possible approachable activities inside the digital classroom.

Several difficulties were discussed throughout this experience report. The most important was the teachers' lack of digital literacy, since the need to use technological devices was sudden due to the pandemic scenario. Most of the school staff was not prepared to teach online, nor were the students. It caused a delay in delivering content in classes, as in most of them the teacher had to spend a long time trying to explain how to use the tools to students. Parents may also be included here, because most third graders are not autonomous enough to follow the classes alone.

Another point taken into consideration was planning for instructions. The students often faced troubles with internet connection, or even

using a device that does not help, such as cell phones and tablets. In some cases, there are online platforms with the interactive textbook already digitized. This is not enough, though, as instructions in a foreign language tend to be confusing even for independent students. It means that it is not only a matter of having the page of the physical book on the screen, it requires some adaptations so that it would be effective and attractive.

In order to create a better learning environment, increasing the interaction between the students and the teacher, the physical didactic material was adapted by means of gamification. The students were motivated by competing with peers or even by completing a task and receiving symbolic prizes, such as the right to use the microphone (*in speaking lessons*). This changed the recurrent pattern of Emergency Remote Teaching and became a tool used to involve students.

In summary, the approaches and methodologies developed here made learning effective and there was no loss for the students. It is noticeable that using electronic devices may be tiring, so the more fun the lesson, the more exciting it is.

It would have been enriching if this work could have collected the students' feedback, but that would require approval of the ethical committee. The purpose here was to start a discussion in new approaches and methodologies for Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) and also show that there is still a long path to cover.

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