

A GAMIFIED ENVIRONMENT TO ENHANCE MOTIVATION ON 1ST GRADERS IN A
PRIVATE SCHOOL IN BUCARAMANGA

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Abstract

This research explores the impact of gamified environments on improving English language acquisition, especially on motivation and thus on the development of communication skills, among others. In the context of today's digital native learners, who are immersed in technology, traditional teaching methods no longer effectively maintain student engagement and motivation. First-gradeThe study was conducted at the Newport School in Floridablanca, Colombia, with a first grade class of 6-7 year olds. This project used action research and qualitative methods to determine how gamified environments improve motivation and engagement in learning English. The results contribute to broader efforts to innovate pedagogical practices and align English language instruction with the interests and needs of today's students.

Keywords: Gamified environments, motivation, engagement, communicative skills, digital native learners.

Resumen

Esta investigación explora el impacto de los entornos gamificados en la mejora de la adquisición del inglés, especialmente en la motivación y, por tanto, en el desarrollo de habilidades comunicativas, entre otras. En el contexto de los estudiantes nativos digitales de hoy en día, que están inmersos en la tecnología, los métodos de enseñanza tradicionales ya no mantienen de manera efectiva el compromiso y la motivación de los estudiantes. El estudio se llevó a cabo en el Newport School de Floridablanca, Colombia, con una clase de primer grado de 6-7 años. Este proyecto utilizó la investigación-acción y métodos cualitativos para determinar cómo los entornos gamificados mejoran la motivación y el compromiso en el aprendizaje del inglés. Los resultados contribuyen a esfuerzos más amplios para innovar las prácticas pedagógicas y alinear la enseñanza del inglés con los intereses y necesidades de los estudiantes de hoy.

Palabras clave: Entornos gamificados, motivación, compromiso, competencias comunicativas, alumnos nativos digitales.

Contextualization

This generation of students is changing the way we see the world. Currently, children have become digital natives, which, according to Marc Prensky (2001) are those people who have been born and raised immersed in the digital era, surrounded by technologies such as computers, internet, video games and mobile devices. That is why it is necessary to transform the way teachers teach, this means that teachers can no longer implement activities that probably worked years ago, because nowadays students get bored and demotivated very easily. To learn English or any language it is mandatory to have interest in acquiring it and especially in this context in which students do not see the need to acquire it because they know that in their immediate context Spanish is spoken.

Games are a form of mass entertainment that can attract students' attention and interest in learning English. Learners devote a large part of their playing, which explains why the implications they have on the cognitive, affective and social development of children and young people, as well as their possible educational uses, have gained prominence in recent times. Games in English have a high engagement potential which encourages and maintains the motivation to acquire cognitive skills and knowledge, since the needs of students of the new generations have evolved and are no longer satisfied with the traditional teacher-centered approach. In addition, this type of strategy is adapted to students' tastes and real context in which, like any child, they want to play using technology.

Rudis and Poštić (2018) showed that there is a definite relationship between games and the positive impact on English language learning, as this interaction develops the communicative skills necessary in language acquisition, encourages and leads players, in this case child learners,

to acquire two specific types of skills that games help to cultivate: receptive skills (reading and listening) and expressive skills (writing and speaking) providing players with new vocabulary and immediately providing them with the appropriate context.

Nowadays, students are engaged in playing and interacting with different platforms in which they play small challenges and missions, children must pass levels individually or in groups. An important fact is that these platforms are within the reach of all children, as they are simple programs that everyone can access.

Before we get deep into this concept, it is important to talk about Newport School where the project was carried out. It is in Floridablanca, a municipality in the department of Santander, Colombia. Located in the northeastern part of the country, it is part of the region known for its rich cultural heritage and diverse landscapes, it is a relatively small community, and like many such municipalities, it has a close-knit population with a focus on local traditions and community life.

Newport School is a private and bilingual school, in transition to calendar B, seeking to offer more academic opportunities to its students, since it is adjusted to the seasonal calendar of English-speaking countries, such as the United States and England, thus facilitating access to universities, school exchanges or school transfers. It is located in Cañaveral, a sector of high socioeconomic stratification in Floridablanca, with about 600 students between preschool (K1), elementary and middle school programs. Its teaching model is based on the use of authentic and real projects, based on a highly motivating and involving task or problem, directly related to the context, applying the PBL methodology, in addition to having an international curriculum, High Scope. It is a curricular approach methodology used in

preschool that promotes active thinking, planning, critical reasoning and problem solving, applied throughout the United States and in more than 20 countries around the world.

Its mission is focused on forming unique human beings, who understand the world and design their own destiny with a high critical and investigative sense, using technological tools, qualified personnel and at the forefront of methodologies for active learning. PEI Newport School (2024-2025)

Its vision is to position itself as an educational establishment in the IB world, bilingual preschool, elementary, middle school and high school recognized nationally and internationally for its innovative educational programs, its excellent performance in the educational processes, compliance with national and international standards and its social impact on the educational community. Observe what is described in the following link [PEI Newport School \(2024-2025\)](#)

Newport school has approximately 70 teachers, 30 co-teachers (assistants) and an interdisciplinary team made up of a psychologist, an occupational therapist, a speech therapist, a nutritionist, a wellness coordinator, and the administrative team. In terms of infrastructure, each level is conditioned according to the needs and ages of the students, but in general each classroom is equipped with a board, video beam, loudspeakers, chairs, tables, didactic and educational materials. In addition, the two school sites have a library, music room, art room, body expression room, and swimming pool.

This research was carried out in the first grade, (Stage 1 A and B) which has a total of 25 students, 11 girls and 14 boys, aged between 6 and 7 years. Active, participative students, with

great cognitive and attitudinal skills, who enjoy learning through technology and play. They are digital natives, which according to Prensky (2001), are students who have grown up in the digital age, surrounded by technology such as computers, internet, video games and mobile devices, and because of this, they have a different way of learning, processing information and communicating compared to previous generations, and with great practice in the use of these technological tools, as evidenced above in the ICT class, where constant use of technological tools such as tablets and computers is made.

Regarding the hourly intensity in English, first grade students have 5 hours per week and another 10 hours per week that are distributed as follows: 5 hours of math, 2 hours of science, 2 hours of social, 1 hour of ICT. Since 2021, it has been demonstrated that the students have not lost interest in learning the foreign language, some activities are developed because they will be graded, but not because of the desire or pleasure of doing them. When interactive games are brought to them, they participate for a while and then start talking about other things like games.

To end, this project was carried out on the first field proposed in RESEARCH AT LLEI “Teaching and learning of English as Foreign language” (Bonilla, Hernandez and Medina, 2017). This idea may change to traditional ways to teach English in classrooms, that is the reason why it belongs to Research macro-project 1 Innovate practices in English teaching and learning: practices of LLEI pre-services teachers and Subproject 1: Pedagogical innovations in EFL teaching and learning contexts.

Research Statement

To begin with, it is necessary to consider the problem raised from the teacher's concern when noticing that his students were not motivated in English classes, since their participation and commitment was low, their behavior was disruptive, as they did not follow class instructions and their attention was poor. Despite bringing different activities to the classroom such as songs, board games, didactic games to involve students in the foreign language, the expected impact has not been achieved, according to the class objectives, which aim to develop different communicative skills, such as listening, reading, writing, phonological awareness, use of language and speaking. See the Learning Objectives for the first trimester in the following link. [Curricular content Stage 1.](#)

In addition, students constantly talk during classes and other spaces about the games, especially online, that they have at home and sometimes ask the teacher to open those games in class.

On the other hand, there is evidence of interest in online games, specifically those that contain challenges or missions to achieve. On one occasion, for reasons beyond the school's control, virtual classes had to be given for two days, and the students lost concentration, since in the middle of classes and during breaks the students mentioned that they connected to play on different platforms.

This project will focus on motivating students to learn English through gamification and technology, using a playful approach that requires the use of all four language skills. In addition,

it is considered that they can work according to what they can produce (speaking and writing) and the vocabulary they will learn through others or themselves (listening and speaking).

Research Question

How does a gamified environment enhance first grade students' motivation in a private school in Floridablanca?

Research Objectives

General objective

To determine how does the use of gamification enhances students' motivation in a private school in Floridablanca?

Specific objectives

- To analyze student's perceptions towards the gamified learning environment.
- To determine student's motivation to learn a language while using a gamified environment.
- To identify the contributions of a gamified learning environment in language competence.

Literature Review

This literature supports this research to have a clearer idea of the subject, through the explanation of the key concepts, theoretical frameworks, and previous studies that provide a deeper understanding about the use of a gamified environment in education.

Nowadays, students are more demanding in terms of the use of technology in their daily lives, since they are tools that most of them have grown up with and have at hand, but they do not know how to take advantage of them. It is considered that due to the pandemic, students are mostly motivated with online games, according to studies conducted by (NietoEscamez and Roldán-Tapia, 2021; Rincon-Flores and SantosGuevara, 2021). it was demonstrated that gamification favors the relationship between attention, participation and performance, while promoting the humanization of virtual environments created during academic confinement, therefore this research idea aims to encourage students and reinforce their English language skills using online gaming platforms.

In a recent study at School San José de Castilla I.E.D. Bogotá (Guerrero, 2020), it was found that fifth grade students, strengthened their English skills by 20% through technology-mediated activities such as songs, drawings, karaoke and so on. Students were motivated to want to learn English in a different and dynamic way. The following induces that, while students are motivated with activities different from those they used to do in class, the percentage that they can improve English skills will be significant according to the type of skills that are developed.

Likewise, a study, Pratista, G. (2023) explored the perception in the teaching and learning process of students when using a platform such as ClassDojo, which incorporates gamification principles to foster student engagement and motivation. It was evidenced that ClassDojo

significantly enhances online learning experiences by promoting healthy competition and increasing fun. The results reveal that two key elements of ClassDojo, the dots and the avatars, are the main motivators for students in English classes. Students showed increased motivation and engagement as they worked to accumulate points, and avatar customization also proved to be an attractive feature. These results suggest that both points and avatars play an important role in motivating students and enhancing their engagement in the L2 teaching and learning process.

Games are the most frequently technological product used by students. Studies conducted by Rideout et al. (2022) and Rideout & Robb (2021) mentioned that teenagers' students who game are playing an average of two-and-a-half to three hours each day (this includes playing on video game consoles, mobile devices, and computers), and even children eight and younger are spending an average of 23 minutes gaming daily, mostly on mobile devices. Current's teachers face great challenges in education, since the way to impact students in these times is more demanding due to the progressive use of technologies, in the same way it is reiterated that learning a language must be with constant motivation and innovation.

On the other hand, Bacca, E. (2018) points out the importance of offering students, within the teaching of a foreign language, a pedagogical and didactic panorama of a significant nature, which covers students' needs and innovates the learning styles, which is why it mentions ICT as pedagogical tools. These allow students to learn a second language, not only from its linguistic components, but also from communicative aspects that influence interaction and the negotiation of cultural meanings, in the recognition of the different ways of conceiving the world. Facilitating cultural exchange and opening the doors to knowledge of other perspectives of the world is what English teachers should aim for in their classes through interaction with other people through the target language.

It was found in a study Cardenas, et al., (2020) conducted with vocational higher education students, in a technical college in Lota, Chile and the impact of Kahoot (and GSRS in general) on the English as a foreign language (EFL) of (EFL) students. The research was conducted in three sections assessing vocabulary, grammar and written expression. Students were given 60 minutes to complete the tests. To explore students' perceptions and attitudes towards the use of Kahoot in the English classroom, a survey was thought to be most appropriate. The survey used in this research is an adaptation of different instruments used in previous research on the same topic. The survey included 30 items broken down into four different dimensions. The four dimensions are enjoyment, engagement, motivation and usefulness of learning.

This study found that both the experimental and control groups improved their scores from pretest to posttest, but the experimental group using Kahoot showed a significantly greater increase. The dimension of "Fun" was the most positively rated, supporting Iaremenko's (2017) view that fun is essential in game-based learning.

"Engagement" also scored highly, with engaged students showing greater curiosity and focus. The "Motivation" dimension also demonstrated positive results, with many students motivated by the competitive aspect of Kahoot. The "Utility for Learning" dimension, though the lowest, still showed that students felt Kahoot helped them retain information and better understand the content. Overall, the study suggests that Kahoot can enhance student's performance by creating a more engaging and motivating learning environment. Cardenas, et al., (2020).

Here's an improved version of your passage with enhanced clarity, coherence, and formal tone. However, the research process undertaken has indeed been just that—a process—marked by a long-term trajectory of pedagogical and cultural transformation. What has emerged is a breakthrough, a rupture that begins to challenge established paradigms. This refers to the fact that the current proposals focus solely on designing educational online games for students, serving as a reference for future research and curriculum development deadlines (Galvis, 2011).

The research of Rahmani, E.F. (2020) argues that some important advantages that the use of innovative strategies brings to second language learning are to improve, through stimulation, learners' performance in terms of attention, memory and concentration, to involve learners in their own educational reflection process, and to foster greater autonomy, motivation and skill development.

Similarly, Moral-Álvarez (2017) focused on video games as a learning tool for teaching the English language was found. He concluded that students are an excellent resource because of the motivation that the games create. This work bets on finding video games that are of daily use and not those that are destined to learning the language, because it indicates that it would not be innovating; on the contrary, teachers would continue betting on traditional teaching, since this type of game only puts revealing theoretical things adapted to an interactive format. From the foregoing, it is inferred that it is necessary to find a video game with the students, different from those that people use, like Duolingo, Busuu, among others and determine the way in which it will favor the learning of the foreign language.

Theoretical Framework

Digital natives

According to Evans C & Robertson W. (2020) Mohammed Bennis, (2022) and Reid, L. et.; (2023), a digital native is a person who was born or grew up immersed in digital technologies, and they are an integral part of their daily life, who instinctively know how to use it. In addition to being true digital natives, they possess a distinctive mix of attitudes, beliefs, social norms, and behaviors that will shape changes in education.

Digital natives perform more effectively when they are connected and networked. They feel confident in their ability to learn due to their seamless access to digital information. They favor visual content such as graphics, videos, and presentations over text-based material, which they find less satisfying. As a result, this generation of students often displays reduced interest in traditional lectures and passive forms of learning.

Gamification in education

Gamification is related to gameful experiences, gamefulness, and games in general, and it integrates the game elements, mechanisms, and principles that lead to games being fun, challenging, interesting, and engrossing into contexts that are not related to games to improve end-users' engagement, motivation, and experience (Deterding, 2012; Deterding et al., 2011; Seaborn & Fels, 2015).

Healey (2018) suggests that gamification is initially designed with psychological principles in mind. Healey also highlighted that gamification involves both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, which drives individuals to act, such as engaging with learning content, and to seek

rewards. These motivations are rooted in Self-Determination Theory (SDT) proposed by Ryan and Deci (1985). According to SDT, motivation is shaped by three fundamental needs: (1) autonomy, or the feeling of control over one's actions, (2) competence, or the sense of skill development and mastery, and (3) relatedness, or the feeling of connection with others. Fulfilling these needs leads to increased interest, enthusiasm, and confidence, which in turn fosters improved performance, persistence, and creativity—qualities that are essential for learners (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Healey, 2018).

An analysis of 32 qualitative studies Bai e al., (2020) identify four key reasons why learners enjoy gamification: (a) it can generate excitement; (b) it offers performance feedback; (c) it fulfills learners' desire for recognition; and (d) it encourages goal setting.

To create a gamified learning environment, these experiences typically include various game elements such as rankings, a way to establish competition and provide feedback on performance by comparing users to each other; levels, stages or milestones that users must progress through; Points, the fundamental unit of measurement in gamification. Users earn points by completing tasks, achieving goals, or making progress in each activity.

Points serve as both a reward and a metric to quantify achievement; rewards, tangible or intangible incentives given to users for reaching certain milestones, completing challenges, or achieving goals; badges, visual symbols of achievement, representing a user's accomplishments or skills; challenges, tasks or obstacles that users must overcome to progress in the gamified system; and storytelling that involves using narrative elements to create an engaging context or framework around the user's experience.

They improve students' problem-solving skills, games help enormously to develop cognitive skills, especially in childhood, in the same way that other children's games do, or even more. In adolescents they enhance curiosity to learn, favor certain skills (both social and personal development and reasoning or problem solving related to real life), allow the development of different cross-cutting areas of the curriculum and reinforce self-esteem.

In addition, Blatherwick et al. (2017) mentioned other important competencies that are developed in gamified learning environments, such as communication, information and media literacy; collaboration, teamwork and leadership; creativity and innovation; computer and ICT literacy; professional and learning autonomy; and intercultural understanding. Therefore, as this generation is inundated with technology, adaptation is necessary. This adaptation includes the use of technology or becoming familiar with it.

Gamification strategies used in educational environments often referred to as gamified learning experiences, aim to create a state of play in students. This is achieved when the teacher incorporates game elements into the learning environment. Emerging from game mechanics, gamification has been progressively explored in schools. When applied effectively, it increases motivation and encourages students to participate more actively in their academic tasks, as it is a self-interest strategy at this age.

In countries with high educational standards, such as Ukraine, Poland, the United States, China, and the Netherlands, educators are well aware of gamification and have applied it, including English teachers who have achieved significant results (Glowacki, et.,, 2018; Rothwell & Shaffer, 2019; Antonaci, et al., 2019).

One of the most common resources where gamification is observed are video games, because

they involve systems of rules and mechanics that players navigate through various controls to achieve goals or explore stories, creating engaging and immersive experiences from simple puzzles to complex virtual environments. As video games have evolved with more intricate graphics, interactive elements, and storytelling, a diverse range of genres and themes has developed to engage a broader audience.

According to different studies, gamification offers great educational possibilities. For example, a meta-analysis by Sitzmann and Ely (2011) with more than 55 studies showed that simulation games could improve self-efficacy by 20%, declarative knowledge by 11%, procedural knowledge by 14%, retention by 9% and transfer by 5%. Meta-analyses have found small to moderate positive effects of serious games on reading vocabulary (Thompson & von Gillern, 2020), and natural science (Riopel et al., 2020). Thus, video games have become a common tool in educational settings, particularly for academic learning.

Technology In The EFL Classroom

Digital technologies are dramatically altering the definition of literacy, and the skills required to fully engage in our increasingly digital society. The way educators incorporate technology into their teaching has become a major focus of interest. Developing digital skills is now viewed as an essential part of education that schools must address in a structured manner. For those learning a foreign language, the application of educational innovations such as technology is particularly beneficial. Technology usually provides a vast array of learning materials, such as authentic texts, eBooks, podcasts, downloadable exercises, video games, music, films, and more. Consequently, there are now numerous opportunities for both teachers and students to make comprehensive use of online resources.

English is the ideal language for expressing and communicating on different technological platforms and is used by people all over the world. Thanks to the application of technology, particularly cell phones, in today's schools, students learn more quickly and easily. Crucially, the use of technology encourages students to want to learn English, as it creates a real need for them to communicate with others through video games, or social networks. In the 21st century, technology is a powerful tool to help teachers teach English and students learn English, and as an educator it is important to understand the purpose of exploiting technology in the classroom.

Motivation In EFL

Gardner (2014) explains that “motivation” is a complex and abstract concept used to explain human behavior; on the other hand Anjomshoay Sadighi, (2015) mentions that motivation is a complex human construct that has long posed difficulties to those who try to understand and explain it.

Second language learning, particularly in a classroom environment, is strongly influenced by students' levels of intrinsic motivation. Motivation plays a critical role in language learning, alongside factors like intelligence and linguistic ability. It is defined as the total of an individual's efforts, their drive to learn the language, and their positive attitude toward the learning process (Anjomshoa and Sadighi, 2015). With its many different interpretations, it is evident that motivation is multifaceted and context-dependent, making it an essential factor for second language learners to consider. For example, some foreign-language learners may show less interest in engaging with native speakers of the target language, while others may feel the opposite (Al-Awawdeh & Kalsoom, 2022).

In the educational setting, motivation helps foreign language learners focus their attention on a key goal or outcome in the classroom (Engin, 2009; Silalahi et al., 2022). As a result, they become less susceptible to distractions and can maintain focus for longer periods. Motivated students tend to display goal-oriented behaviors.

As digital learning environments become increasingly widespread, motivation in online and hybrid learning contexts has become a critical area of study. Researchers like Jeroen and Karel (2020) have focused on the role of digital tools and game-based learning in motivating students. Their research suggests that the use of gamified elements (points, badges, leaderboards) can increase engagement and intrinsic motivation when used in moderation. However, they also highlight the importance of balance, cautioning that extrinsic rewards in digital learning contexts must be carefully integrated to avoid undermining intrinsic motivation.

The amount of energy and enthusiasm students bring to language learning is closely linked to their motivation levels. Various aspects of teaching methods, strategies, procedures, and programs influence students' motivation to learn a language. When identified and reviewed, these factors shape the primary focus of analysis (Kalsoom et al., 2021) Some of them are:

- **Teaching Strategies and Learning Styles:** the methods used by instructors in the classroom have a direct impact on students' motivation to study a foreign language (Herman et al., 2020).
- **Feedback Especially** in second language instruction, student motivation has been shown to be influenced by teachers' feedback. This is related to the idea that students may depend more on instructors as partners since teachers have greater expertise.

Monitoring student progress and offering constructive criticism is a frequent method of facilitating learning in the classroom (Ananda et al., 2017).

- **Reward:** In foreign language learning, reward helps students to develop strong motivation. Students are frequently encouraged to improve their proficiency in a second language via the use of external incentives, such as rewards.
- **Group:** The findings of Johnson et al. (2014) meta-analysis, which examined over 168 studies involving undergraduate students, suggest that students who learned in a collaborative setting "had greater active learning, accumulation of content, and higher-order reasoning and problem-solving skills attributes than students" who worked alone.

These key concepts and theories allow the research to be structured in a particular way, as they support the research design, which aims to capture the depth and complexity of students' experiences, behaviors, and perspectives with gamified environments in their learning process. In addition, they provide a theoretical basis for analyzing motivational factors, engagement patterns, and cognitive impacts, ensuring that the study is grounded in established academic discourse while allowing for practical insight into student learning dynamics.

Research Design

In this research, qualitative research is especially valuable because it captures the depth and complexity of student's experiences, behaviors, and perspectives that quantitative research alone

cannot fully explain, allowing for insights into student experience and engagement, as well as the complexity of motivation and learning.

The design implemented in this research was action research. Action research can be defined as a research methodology aimed at educational change. Kemmis, et al., (2014) also describe it as a collective reflexive inquiry undertaken by participants in social situations to improve the rationality of their own social or educational practices. Moreover, the participatory process mentioned mainly aims to bring together action and reflection on processes, theory and applied practice, to provide practical solutions to problems. In general, Action Research allows developing a systematic approach to practices aimed at achieving positive changes (Holter & Frabutt, 2012). Considering that I wanted to enhance the communicative skills of English using gamification in first grade students, this research methodology is used to carry out the research idea, since as mentioned above, action research seeks to improve educational practices, so in this case, it will benefit the quality of the students' English classes.

For this research we seek to apply the action research model developed by (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988), a framework for systematic inquiry and improvement of educational practice. This consists of a cyclical process that includes several key stages:

First, plan: Here I identified the area of interest, in this case improving English skills through gamification as a pedagogical implementation. Likewise, I define the problems we found, and it is the lack of interest that students have when learning this second language in a traditional way, being a native-digital student. And finally, improvement strategies are developed, in which technologies are implemented in education, making use of daily technological tools that students use such as video games.

For the next stage, acting, the planned actions and interventions are put into practice. In this case, the pedagogical implementation the gamification as a tool and educational strategy to improve the acquisition of English as a second language in first graders of a private school. This strategy is implemented in English classes as a complementary activity within the class planning, where students must fulfill missions within the Monsterland video game for each language skill, Speaking, reading, writing and listening.

The observation is carried out in the pedagogical implementation of the video game Monsterland designed on the Genially platform. The data collection is done through three field diaries, one in each session. In each of the field diaries two important aspects were described, the first was the description of what was observed during each session, the interaction of students with the gamified environment, the development of communication skills, and the perception of the class with the use of a gamified environment. The second aspect was the interpretation of what was observed, the analysis that could be extracted from them. The objective of the three field diaries was to determine through them how the use of gamification as a pedagogical tool improves and increases the students' interest in the second language, to analyze the students' perceptions of the gamified learning environment, and to identify the contributions of a gamified learning environment in the mastery of the four communicative skills and vocabulary recognition.

Finally, in the last stage before starting the cycle again, the aim is to reflect: Analyze the data that have been collected about the implementation of this gamified learning environment, the impact it has had on the learning process of first grade students and reflect on the results and evaluate the effectiveness of the interventions, how this methodological strategy has raised or

improved the interest of students to learn, since they do it through something they enjoy doing, and acquire the second language in a natural way, improving their communicative skills.

According to the authors (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988) this cycle is iterative, meaning that after reflecting, we can return to the planning phase to refine our approach based on what we have learned. The goal is to foster continuous improvement and improve teaching practice through collaborative inquiry and reflection.

Data Collection Instruments

According to qualitative research, it has been established that data collection in this research is fundamental, through interviews and observations captured through a field diary, these are carried out to answer the why and how in educational research.

Interview.

Interviews are a basic world of human interaction, it means, human beings talk to each other, interact, ask questions and answer them. Through interviews, investigators meet other people, they find out about their experience, feelings and they have news of the world in which they live (Kvale,2012).

For this reason, an interview was conducted at the end of each class for each pedagogical intervention, that is, three interviews in total. The purpose of these interviews was to learn about the experiences, opinions and perceptions of the students in the English classes with gamification or how they would like the next class to be. These interviews were recorded with the permission of their parents or relatives.

To apply this technique, it is necessary to request the consent of the students' parents or relatives, to request a permit to record students in English classes for research purposes. The audio-recordings made will be described in detail to identify the possible factors that produce demotivation in English classes.

Field diary.

According to Nandi (2015), a field diary is a method of capturing lived experiences, blending factual observations with subjective interpretations to enhance research depth and validity. The researcher performs an immersion in the classroom in the same way as the subjects to be analyzed, after which to undertake a socialization process that allows, as far as possible, a better study on the situation under investigation (Oun, & Bach, 2014). That is why the classes were carried out by the researcher, but not before planning them using the different materials and resources available in the classrooms of the educational institution.

This participation was recorded through [3 field diaries](#) as a recording tool, one for each class or pedagogical intervention. Each field diary documented two key aspects. The first consisted of detailed observations of each session, including student interactions within the gamified environment, the development of communication skills, and perceptions of the class using gamification. The second aspect focused on interpreting these observations and analyzing the insights gained. The purpose of the three field diaries was to assess how gamification improves students' engagement in second language learning, explore students' perceptions of the

gamified environment, and identify its impact on communicative skill development and vocabulary recognition.

Participants

The participants in this research project were 25 first grade students, 11 girls and 14 boys, aged between 6 and 7 years, belonging to the private bilingual Newport School, located in Floridablanca, Santander. These students are part of an institution with a bilingual educational model, in which learning English is a fundamental part of their academic formation. In addition, the school emphasizes the development of digital skills and the use of technological tools in the classroom.

The selected boys and girls are characterized by being active, participative and with great cognitive and attitudinal skills. It is important to highlight that within this group there are neuro-divergent students with various diagnoses such as ADHD and autism, who were personally accompanied. The group belongs to a high socio-demographic environment, where most of the students live in strata between 4, 5 and 6, with financially present parents, most of them single children, who have a variety of technological tools at home and at school.

Ethics

The implementation of this project required the participation in an audio-only interview, which was notified through an informed consent form to the parents of the students, which they authorized through a signature. Participation in this interview was completely voluntary and was carried out in 3 sessions, or three pedagogical implementations, where each class developed a different mission in the game, thus seeking the development of different communication skills. this interview was completely voluntary and was carried out in 3 sessions. It is important to

mention that participation in this research had no monetary compensation, likewise, all the information collected was confidential and was used only for research and academic purposes.

Pedagogical Implementation

This pedagogical intervention was based on gamification, which allows us to determine how the incorporation of this gamified environment enhances and improves students' engagement in the L2 learning process.

Initially, the [lesson plans](#) was designed, considering the elements of gamification and the learning objectives to be achieved through the game. Then, it was investigated through which platform the gamified environment could be developed, based on the students' interest on games. In this case, several platforms were considered, such as roblox, kahoot, among others. However, due to the ease of use of the operating system and the design of the gamified environment, the Genially ([Genially.com/juegosMonsterland](https://genially.com/juegosMonsterland), 2024) platform was selected.

Next, the game was materialized and created, considering the gamification elements such as the name, the story, the characters, the missions or challenges to be developed, the rules, and the rewards such as points or prizes to be won. At this point I considered the themes or contents that are being worked on in the school project of the grade, which was related to healthy lifestyle habits.

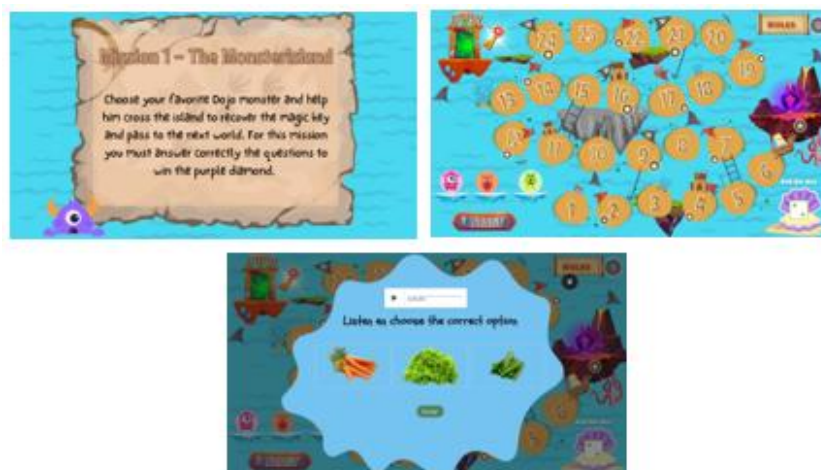
The pedagogical intervention was organized in 3 general missions, 1 mission for each class, in which students had to complete different challenges to move to the next mission. The first, called Monsterisland, focused on vocabulary; it was designed in the form of a mysterious

island, referring to the game of the maze and the stairs, where the protagonists, small monsters guided by the students, had to overcome a series of mini-islands to recover the key to the next kingdom.

The students chose their favorite monster, rolled a die and, depending on the number, moved the indicated number of squares, taking the monster to a square that contained a challenge related to the recognition of the vocabulary of the healthy food project, where with the help of images the students chose between healthy and unhealthy, in order for them to practice the meaning of these words, as well as listening comprehension exercises, where through an audio the students selected the correct option, according to the word heard. Finally, we recovered the magic key on the last island, which indicated the entrance to the next world or mission.

In the following link is the gamified environment available. Genially, (2024) juegos/Monsterland, <https://view.genially.com/671cf0ae1d34e6a174480a7f/interactive-content-food-race>

Figure 1
Mission 1 – The Monsterisland.

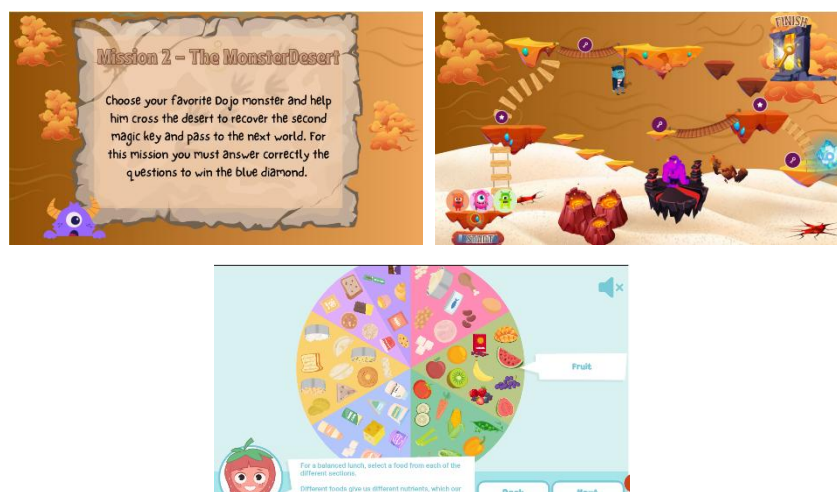


Note: The image represents the first mission of the gamified environment, and the activities

related to it.

In the next class we continued with mission 2, called El MonstruoDesierto, where in a new world they had to face the dreaded zombies, which had the function of restarting the game if they reached them. In this mission, students had to take their monster through different challenges, or platforms, avoiding the dreaded zombies and solving a series of activities on other educational pages related to reading short words, such as fruits, good, eat, helps, apple, yum, etc. In addition, the conformation of food groups, through puzzles and word scrambles. On the other hand, in this second level the students would become super heroes with the creation of a healthy lunch box, focused not only on reinforcing English communication skills, but also on the development of life skills, such as healthy habits in relation to the grade level project.

Figure 2
Mission 2 – The Monsterdesert.



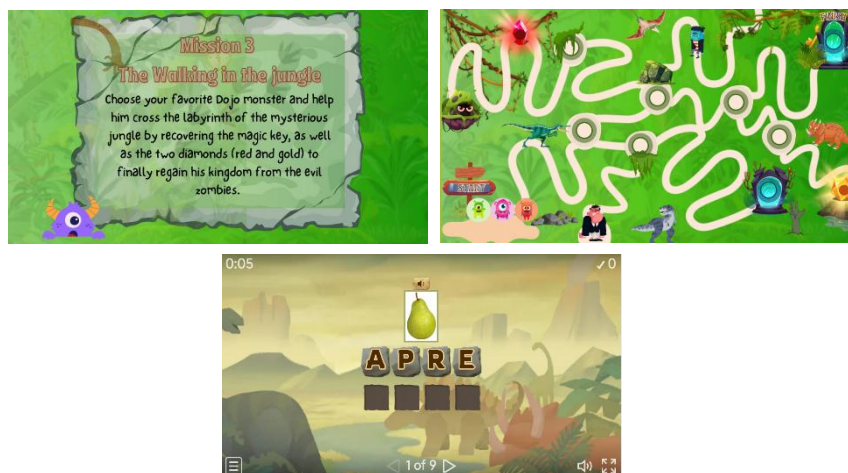
Note: The image represents the second mission of the gamified environment, and the activities related to it

For the last mission, the world to go through was a jungle, with dinosaurs, and zombies, taking into account the comments in the students' previous interviews, where they requested more

characters for this mission, answering question 4.2 Here the mission was to help the monsters to cross a labyrinth, leading to the last key and the magic diamonds. This mission focused on developing writing activities, and spelling simple and familiar words, since having to rearrange letters to form correct words, students pay attention to the sounds and structures that make up

words. Students are exposed to new words and reinforce those they already know, facilitating a natural expansion of vocabulary (Nation, 2001).

Figure 3
Mission 3 – Walking in the jungle.



Note: The image represents the third mission of the gamified environment, and the activities related to it.

The following table shows a summary of the missions designed in the lesson plans, and the objectives they were intended to achieve through the gamified environment, highlighting the number of missions, the theme worked on, the activities that each mission contained.

Table 1*Summary of designed missions*

Lesson / Mission	Topic	Activity	Developed skill	Reward
Mission 1 - Monsterland	Healthy and unhealthy food	Cross the island through the game 'Skulls and Ladders' making an adaptation to the classic game of snakes and ladders, students must answer a series of questions.	Listening comprehension Vocabulary Speaking	By answering the questions, you will advance and win the purple diamond and the magic key to the next world, before the zombies steal it.
Mission 2 - Monsterdesert	Food groups	Cross the arid and dreaded desert of zombies, sliding on the platforms, you will have to answer the questions and perform all the activities related to the food groups.	Reading short words, vocabulary recognition, and image-word relationship.	If you manage to escape from the terrifying zombies, you will win the powerful blue diamond and the secret key to the third world.
Mission 3 – Walking in the jungle	Good habits	Find the right path through the dreaded maze, sliding through each one by organizing and spelling correctly each of the words related to good habits.	Reading and writing/ spelling	Rescue the red and golden diamonds that will protect you and lead you to recover the last magic key.

Note: The table shows the summary of the missions designed in the lesson plan of the gamified environment.

Data Analysis and Discussion

This section describes the analysis conducted on the data collected through the research instruments. It will describe how the data were organized, analyzed and interpreted to draw meaningful conclusions in relation to the research objective. The analysis of the data started with

the organization of it into manageable formats, (first word and then excel) ensuring that all responses or measurements were accurately recorded through transcription and classified according to the thematic analysis, that, according to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing and interpreting patterns within qualitative data.

First, the information collected was organized. Once the audio-interviews were obtained from the students, they were transcribed through Word and the Office Dictation tool. This function converts the voice into a text transcript with each speaker separately when loading the audio file and with time stamp.

Three field diaries were also written using a format designed to document in detail not only the events observed, but also the thoughts, reflections and interpretations of the students as they interacted with the gamified environment in their English class, and in general throughout the research process, during the three pedagogical missions or interventions. Then, each transcript was saved as a Word file with each student's name, inside a folder in the drive or cloud.

Once the data was stored, they were copied in [Word and Excel files](#) to facilitate the analysis of the information. For this initial analysis, a thematic analysis was performed to identify significant or recurring patterns that emerge in the data set, which are interpreted in a reflexive and flexible manner (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

The first preliminary exploratory thematic analysis was conducted on the Word transcripts of the students' audio interviews. Here the analysis began by highlighting those themes or patterns that were repeated and emerged from the data (inductive codes). Each category found was assigned a color, fuchsia (Perceptions), aquamarine (Listening) yellow

(Speaking/ Vocabulary), and as more categories were analyzed, they were differentiated with other colors, such as orange (Use of ICT tools) and green (Language Skills)

Figure 4
Thematic analysis classified by colors

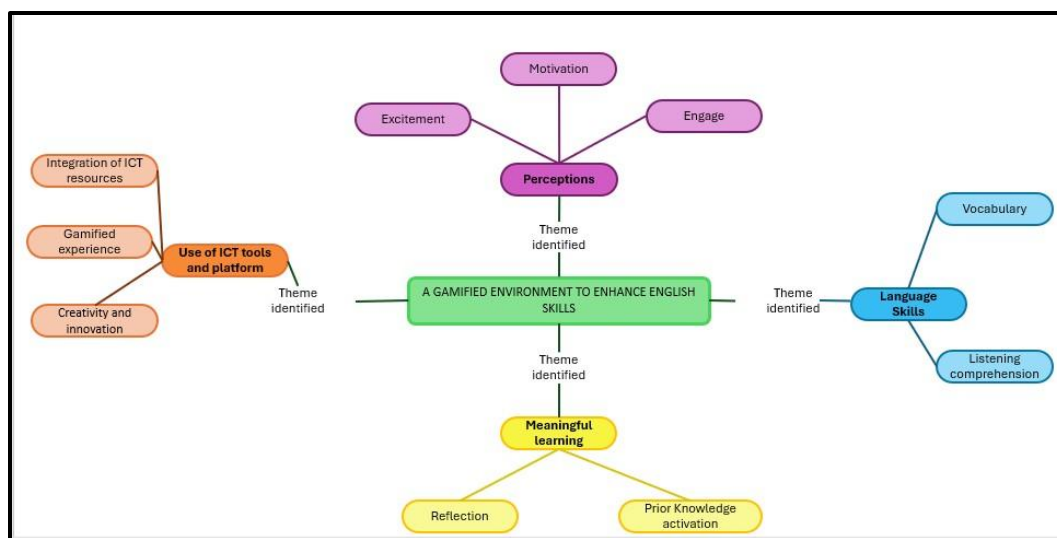
Instrument	Expect	Specific aspect
Interview	Misa: ¿Qué imágenes o elementos te gustaron o viste ahí en el juego?	Vocabulary
Interview	Valeria: Apples y french fries.	Vocabulary
Interview	Misa: ¿Qué palabras del vocabulario de healthy food escuchaste?	Vocabulary
Interview	Valeria: cookies y nuggets	Vocabulary
Interview	Misa: ¿Qué imagen de la comida? ¿Qué comidas viste?	Vocabulary
Interview	Valeria: Fish, fruits y vegetables	Vocabulary
Diario de campo 1	where they repeated many of the vocabulary words previously seen and asked for others.	Vocabulary
Diario de campo 2	asking before starting the class 'Misa, today we will play with the monsters'?	Vocabulary
Diario de campo 2	During the development of the game, the students had questions about some vocabulary words such as 'unhealthy' or 'Diary'	Vocabulary
Interview	Misa: ¿qué palabras ves ahí que son del vocabulario de healthy food? ¿What is this first, for example?	Vocabulary
Interview	Eva Luna: Hamburguer, salad, water	Vocabulary
Interview	Misa: ¿Qué palabras de vocabulario de healthy food escuchaste en el juego?	Vocabulary
Interview	Mateo Salamanca: Apple, water y carrots	Vocabulary

Note: The figure shows the first categories highlighted in the word tool, and the new categories found and organized in the excel tool.

Once these themes or patterns were identified and highlighted, I proceeded to take this data to an excel file, where these themes were organized, labeled and coded by sheets. Each sheet contained the name of the theme and within it the instrument from which the theme had emerged, a fragment, or an excerpt and a specific aspect in which the central theme was summarized. Then, a new analysis was carried out in which some codes that had similarities in their specific aspect were reduced or synthesized, and other new ones emerged, to finally capture them in a thematic analysis map.

After grouping and debugging, the following categories were established to answer the research question.

Figure 5
Map thematic analysis



Note: The graph summarizes the categories analyzed and the aspects found in them.

Findings

In analyzing the categories found in the thematic analysis, some sub-categories were also identified within the observation and the transcribed interviews. These describe in detail the findings regarding the students' perception of the gamified environment, the communicative skills they developed, the significant learning acquired and the use of ICT tools.

Perceptions about gamification

The perceptions about gamification are interpreted through students' gestures, words, comments and behavior, the emotions and sensations that the students had when interacting with the gamified environment, during the 3 classes developed.

Three types of perceptions were identified: motivation, excitement, and engagement. They will be described in the next lines.

Motivation

It is an orientation toward learning; it is the impulse to learn and the positive attitude towards the learning process. During the lessons, it was observed that most of the students showed more willingness, attention, and interest in the English class when they interacted with the gamified environment. Moreover, as highlighted by Anjomshoa and Sadighi (2015), learners show great effort and enthusiasm in acquiring new knowledge, especially in language learning, learners were motivated, they treated learning as a game, turning it around to see it from a new angle.

As mentioned in the [field diary 1](#), it was identified that with the food sorting activity ‘‘When we started with the food classification activity, all the students wanted to participate’’, all students wanted to actively participate and were motivated by the game. ‘‘They constantly asked if it was time to use the tablets and play the review game’’. This drive was also apparent in the [interviews](#). Miss: Ahora cuéntame, ¿te gustó el juego?

Student 1: "Me encantó el juego Miss, porque puede hacer cosas divertidas y también pude hacer muchas cosas que me gustaron y no había hecho en las clases". these findings suggest that the students were very engaged in the food sorting activity. It highlights their eagerness to participate, especially in the gamified environment which they found motivating.

In the interview, the student's response further underscores the enjoyment and novelty she found in the activity. She liked the game because it allowed her to do fun things and engage in different activities than she had previously experienced in class. This reflects the positive impact of the game on her learning experience.

Excitement.

Excitement comes from “knowing” or “doing” something new and being able to do something they could not before, it refers to that enthusiasm, energy and positive emotional engagement that students experience during a more engaging and interactive learning process. During the classes, students expressed their surprise and excitement at engaging with game elements integrated into the English learning context. They found this approach to be a refreshing and highly interactive way of learning, which captured their interest and enjoyment. Their enthusiasm translated into increased motivation and engagement in the learning process.

As noted in Field Diary 1, "At the beginning of this second session, the students were much more excited and eager to start mission number two." Similarly, during the interview, when asked what had surprised them about the first mission, students shared their impressions and experiences. Student 1, one of the students answered "Me sorprendió de que el juego era muy chévere, yo nunca había jugado ese juego aquí en el cole y es divertido", This was also evident in Student 2's response about her perception of the gamified environment. “Sí, porque tenía cosas divertidas como los diamantes y los monstruos, Miss: ¿cuál fue tu misión favorita? Student 2: ‘La de hoy, la dos porque aparecieron los zombies y las actividades estaban chéveres.’” According to the responses, these illustrate how the students' enthusiasm and engagement grew after their first experience with the gamified activity, this enthusiasm reflects the positive emotional response that the gamified environment triggered in the students, creating a dynamic learning experience, awakening their curiosity and enthusiasm for future missions.

Engagement.

Refers to the active involvement, interest and effort that students had in their own learning process, it goes beyond mere attendance or participation; engaged students were mentally, emotionally and behaviorally involved in the pedagogical implementation carried out through the missions.

During the pedagogical interventions, students were mostly connected when doing the activities through gamification, as they had fun learning, and were also rewarded with diamonds or magic keys. As mentioned in the field diaries 'Here we tell the story of the game, the dynamics and the first mission to accomplish, when the students saw this story, they were much more interested ' because for them the game represented a challenge or game to win. In addition, 'the students were captivated by the characters in the game, the monsters they had to help and the excitement of winning the diamonds, as several of the students excitedly shouted "I won the diamond." One of the elements that demonstrated this engagement of the students with the gamified environment were the answers in the interviews, questions such as: ¿Que te sorprendió el juego? the students expressed: Me sorprendieron cuando vi a los zombies, "Me sorprendi cuando tenía que pasar las mini islas para ganar la llave magica" The story and dynamics of the game made the students feel more engaged because they saw it as a challenge or a game they could win. The idea of completing missions and earning rewards, such as diamonds, piqued their interest, which generated enthusiasm. The students' reactions demonstrate how involved they were in the game.

Developed language skills.

During the pedagogical interventions, the main objective was to develop and encourage through a gamified environment L2 language skills such as speaking, listening, reading and writing related to vocabulary. During the development of these missions, the students practiced and strengthened their communicative competence by engaging in interactive tasks that required them to use the target language in meaningful contexts. Additionally, the incorporation of digital rewards and progression-based incentives motivated students to actively participate and persist in their learning process. Two subcategories were evidenced in the analysis.

Vocabulary Acquisition And Recognition.

Vocabulary acquisition is not an end, but a way to enrich the learner's listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills, which ultimately leads to greater fluency in L2 learning. In the gamified environment, the exposure to words represented in images and audios contributed to acquiring vocabulary and thus to improving their communication skills. As it was seen in the interviews, students used the vocabulary learned and strengthening their speaking and listening comprehension:

Interviews:

Miss: ¿Qué imágenes o elementos te gustaron o viste ahí en el juego?

Student 3: Apples y french fries.

Miss: ¿Qué palabras del vocabulario de healthy food escuchaste?

Student 2: cookies y nuggets

Miss: ¿Qué imagen de la comida? ¿Qué comidas viste?

Student 2: Fish, fruits y vegetables

Miss: ¿qué palabras ves ahí que son del vocabulario de healthy food? ¿What is this first, for example?

Student 4: Hamburger, salad, water

Miss: ¿Qué palabras de vocabulario de healthy food escuchaste en el juego?

Student 3: Apple, water y carrots

From the above it is evident that the students acquired communicative skills, such as vocabulary recognition through images and listening comprehension, and produced speaking related to the topic of healthy food.

Listening comprehension.

Listening comprehension refers to the ability to retain and understand spoken information. In this case, the gamified environment encouraged the students' capacity to understand spoken information evidenced in the interviews: for example, when it was asked about some of the words they listened in the gamified environment Student 4 said: "Apple, water y carrots", while Student 2 answered "cookies y nuggets". It shows students could understand and memorize words that appeared in the missions of the gamified environment.

It is also important to clarify that most of the students needed to listen to the audios two or three times to understand, but after repeating the audios they were able to answer the questions thanks to the recognition of the vocabulary, connecting the known words with the new ones. As mentioned in field diary 2, "During the development of the game, the students

repeated more than 2 times the activities related to listening, however, after 3 attempts they manage to identify the word or vocabulary they are listening to.” This indicates the relationship of listening comprehension to vocabulary recognition and how learners relate their prior knowledge to unfamiliar words. As mentioned by Coyne, McCoach and Kapp (2007) who conclude in their study how vocabulary intervention strategies help learners connect familiar words with new words, thus improving their listening comprehension ability.

Meaningful learning

Learning becomes meaningful when learners relate new information to prior knowledge, can use the information in other contexts, allowing for a deeper understanding in which learners reflect on and provide input into their own learning process. This occurs when students relate what they learn in the gamified environment to their real life, for example knowing which of the foods they eat are healthy and which are not, as one of the students mentioned in the interview. Student 4: "Sí, yo pensaba que la hamburguesa era saludable y ahora sé que no es tan saludable."

Reflection.

It is the process by which learners actively think about and critically analyze their experiences, thoughts, and the knowledge they've gained. This process involves examining what they learned, how they learned it, and how it connects to their existing knowledge and real-world experiences. It was here that students reflected on their learning, analyzing and looking back on what has been learned, how it was learned, and how it can be improved.

This is evidenced in most responses where students mention in the interview. For example Student 4 said : "Sí, yo pensaba que la hamburguesa era saludable y ahora sé que no es tan saludable.". In the same line, Student 3: "Sí, aprendí que las gaseosas son malas, pero el cuerpo y las vegetales son buenos.", Likewise, another student replied: "Cosas nuevas sobre la comida, porque yo ya sabía que el dulce no era saludable." This demonstrates that learners actively reflect on and critically evaluate their learning experiences, the knowledge they have acquired, and how it relates to what they already know or to real-world contexts. In this process, learners not only recalled what they have learned, but also reflected on how they acquired this knowledge.

These examples illustrate that students reflected by analyzing what they had learned, demonstrating a deeper level of critical thinking about their learning.

Prior Knowledge activation.

Working with the food project and reinforcing it through the gamified environment helped students see connections between prior learning and new knowledge, providing a framework for students to better understand the new information and bring it into their real-world context. This is reflected in one of the field diaries, where it is mentioned that " Then, we remind the students of our project "Yummy, Yummy Let's Eat" in which we are working on healthy lifestyle habits, including healthy eating" Likewise it is described that " One of the novelties observed during the activity is that most of the students finished the 'ladder' quickly, so they were instructed to do the same exercise not only with 1 but with 3 monsters". On the other hand, in the interview the students answered the question about what they would like to continue learning in the next missions, Student 2: "Nuevas cosas sobre la comida". "This shows

that most of the learning was already related to them, but that remembering these topics helped them to consolidate them significantly.

Use of ICT tools and platform

The integration of the use of technological tools in language classes played an important role in the improvement and transformation of the learning process, facilitating the acquisition, sharing and management of knowledge. The integration of ICT in the pedagogical implementation captured the students' attention, attracting their interest and increasing their motivation. During the thematic analysis carried out, 3 subcategories were found, the integration of ICT resources, the Gamified Experience, and Creativity and innovation.

Integration of ICT resources.

During the development of the missions the students were confronted with handling tablets, a technological tool that most of them know. However, many of the students asked for help as they did not know how the application worked and had several commands, since it was the first time they interacted with it.

This behaviour was reflected in the field diary 1, “Likewise, it was evident that since it was a new platform, the students constantly required the adult's help to continue with the next steps.” And in the interviews where the students even reported discomfort at not being able to complete the command to continue the game. Question 3.3, Miss: ¿qué fue lo que menos te gustó? Student 1: “Lo que menos me gustó fue cuando algunas veces no lo podía oprimir y entonces le tenía que pedir ayuda a la Miss.” This means that the use of gamified environments poses a challenge for students, facing a virtual learning environment where they must face

several challenges and commands for some unknown, however it also shows that students adapt after practice and can finally solve the activities autonomously.

Gamified Experience.

Gamification is the integration of game elements and principles into the learning process, in this case L2, to improve engagement, motivation and learning outcomes. Gamification during the pedagogical interventions occurred with the use of common aspects of games -such as points, levels, rewards, challenges and competition- in a teaching-learning context, where the students, motivated by meeting these challenges, were more engaged in the activities and in participating in the class. A significant aspect for the students, who, through the interviews, highlighted their pleasure and enjoyment with the use of this learning strategy, Miss: ¿Te gustó el juego? Student 1: “Sí, porque tenía cosas divertidas como los diamantes mágicos”, also answered the question: Miss: ¿cuál fue tu misión favorita? Student 1: “La de hoy, la dos, porque teníamos que ayudar a salvar el reino de los monsters y ayudarlos de los zombies”, Another student answered what he liked most about the game: Student 2: Me gustó cuando pinchamos el botón del dado para poder seguir a la otra isla”, And one of them also expressed what he enjoyed most. Student 3: Como que teníamos diamantes, teníamos que rescatarlos y teníamos que rescatar unas llaves.

The [field diaries](#) also revealed that; “ they were constantly asking if it was time to use the Tablets and play the review game”, “ Likewise, it is observed that they take more time during the development of the game, completing each of the obstacles to win the diamonds and the magic key.” This reveals the engagement and interest generated by using this type of gamified environment in the teaching and learning process, which attracts and captures the attention of students, improving and strengthening their commitment and motivation.

Creativity and innovation.

Through the different missions the students developed the ability to think in a new, original and imaginative way, using their imagination to create ideas and solutions related to the gamified environment, this was reflected during the interviews where the creativity of the students was evidenced by asking them " If you could create a game with a new level, a new mission, what would it be like? What would you like it to be?" Student 5: "En una luna, haría muchas cosas como. Jugar." Student No. 1 answered the same question "En una playa" Student 4. also said "crearía muchas islas" Other questions such as, "What would you like it to have to make it more fun?" Student 5 answered: "que mis amigos pudieran tener muchos muñequitos y que cada uno creara su propio personaje como ellos quieren", Student 2 expressed: "A mí me gustaría un nivel con dinosaurios." It can, therefore, be concluded that the gamified environment also helps to develop other competencies, such as those related to ICTs, where students, facing a more digital world, can develop critical and creative thinking.

Conclusions

The objective of this research was to determine how the use of gamification as a pedagogical tool improves student engagement in a private school in Floridablanca. Through a combination of qualitative methods, such as field diary and interview, this study explored the impact of various gamified learning activities on students' engagement, motivation, and acquisition of general communicative skills. The research revealed that the incorporation of game elements such as characters, rewards, challenges, and competitive activities significantly improved student engagement, fostering a more dynamic and interactive learning environment. The connection between gamification, motivation and engagement has been widely explored across different learning settings, disciplines, and educational levels. Most of the studies

reviewed indicate that gamification has a positive impact on learner motivation, enhancing intrinsic motivation and improving learners' attitudes toward the content in gamified environments (Buckley et al., 2018; Dicheva et al., 2018; Featherstone, 2018; Monterrat et al., 2014; Stoyanova et al., 2017).

Thus, the results suggest that the use of gamified environments not only increased students' interest in the L2, but also fostered a sense of achievement and engagement in learning. By incorporating game mechanics in the classroom, students participated more actively in classes, which improved concentration, participation, communicative skills such as listening, vocabulary acquisition, reading, writing and speaking. In addition, the use of the digital platform to track progress and provide immediate feedback contributed to increased motivation, as students could visually see their improvement and achievements along the way as the game progressed.

The contributions of this study to my professional development as a teacher and researcher were significant from every point of view. Starting with the teaching exercise, the research provided valuable information on the effectiveness of the use of gamified environments as a pedagogical tool to improve engagement, motivation and the development of students' communication skills, taking into account the needs of digital native students, their habits, knowledge, personality traits, skills and interests, which requires us teachers to update our methods and ways of carrying out our work, knowledge, personality traits, skills and interests, which requires us teachers to update our methods and ways of teaching, to have students who play an active role in teaching and learning activities and participate more willingly and willingly, obtaining better learning and teaching results.

The relevance of selecting a qualitative and action research design on the use of gamified environments in the acquisition of L2 communicative competencies is highly relevant and advantageous, as both methodologies provided unique insights into the processes, outcomes, and dynamics of gamification use in first grade students. On the one hand, qualitative research was particularly appropriate, as it allows for in-depth exploration of learners' experiences, perceptions and emotions. In the case of gamification, qualitative methods such as interviews, and field diaries through observations, allowed to uncover nuances about how students perceive the elements of the gamified environment and engage with them, as well as the underlying motivations that drive their engagement in L2 learning. And on the other hand, action research which is a participatory and iterative approach that directly involves the researcher and the participants in the change process, in this case teacher-students. This research methodology allowed me to continuously improve the strategies for the use of ICTs and turn them into a gamified environment, adjusting them according to the opinions and perceptions of the students and the continuous evaluation of their impact on the learning process.

The action research allowed not only to study the implications, but also to act as a facilitator, actively participating as a teacher with the students in the design, implementation and modification of the gamified environment, in search of continuous improvement in each of the missions.

This research project focused its object of study on understanding how the use of gamified environments as a pedagogical implementation in first grade native-digital learners influences students' motivation and engagement in learning English as a second language. This study specifically explored how the use of game-based elements such as points, rewards,

challenges, and competition, in the learning process can influence students' interest, enthusiasm, and active participation in improving their English language skills. The study contributed to understanding how students may be more motivated to learn English because they enjoy the structure and rewards in the classroom like a video game, an element of entertainment that students use most of the time today, and how this interest and enjoyment can be linked or connected to the learning process, making the acquisition of a second language, in this case English, more enjoyable and meaningful for them.

By using gamification elements, the study helps demonstrate how students become more engaged in their learning process. Contrary to traditional teaching methods that are not concerned with keeping students' interest active, gamified environments offer a way to capture attention and encourage sustained engagement.

Throughout the research project, different difficulties arose that, beyond being 'problems', became areas of opportunity for improvement. One of these first difficulties was to link the students' taste for video games with their learning process, and how to connect these two important elements. Taking this point into account, the initial idea was to create a video game, using the Roblox platform, which was constantly mentioned by the students, so this platform was taken as a reference to create the gamified environment.

During the design of the gamified environment, the Roblox platform was consulted on the possibility of creating educational content, which is an option offered by the platform under the name of Roblox for education, which seeks through this video game platform to create pedagogical experiences that facilitate the acquisition of learning. However, when starting with the creation and design of the gamified environment for first grade students, we

found the difficulty that this platform works through advanced programming and scripts, which are plain text files that allow adding personalized and dynamic behavior to the experiences. Even taking on the challenge of creating a game through programming and coding without knowledge also made it difficult to have the time to develop the game, since creating each instruction or behavior in the game meant taking the time to create the script, as it was having basic tutorials to do so, so ultimately it was desisted from using the Roblox platform as a tool for creating the gamified environment.

Taking this difficulty as a reference, I looked for other educational platforms that would allow me to create gamified environments, containing elements typical of video games such as characters, missions, rewards, etc., and so I came to the Genially platform, which facilitated in different aspects the creation of the gamified environment for the improvement of communicative competences in L2.

Another difficulty that was found within the project was the lack of broad answers in the interview resource, since students at this age do not expand their answers to a greater extent, so it had to be stimulated in different ways with reinforcements such as "tell me more" or "tell me why" or "explain to me a little more what you want to say", etc. And thus, better capture the answers to the interview questions to analyze them and classify them in the corresponding categories.

Further research

Nowadays the digital world is part of our daily life, we find it in our way of communicating, in our jobs, in entertainment, in our way of learning, etc. The use of technological strategies, linked to the tastes and interests of students is essential in this

digitalized era of learning. So, considering issues related to, for example, the impact of gamified learning environments on English proficiency not only in the short term, but in the long term, as most research in this field focuses on motivation and engagement in the short term. Future studies could explore how gamification affects long-term retention and language proficiency. Furthermore, explore in depth the customization of gamified learning environments for different learner profiles in English language acquisition, taking into account that within the school context there are students with different special educational needs and diagnoses that need to be taken into account, exploring how gamified English learning platforms can be designed to be more inclusive and allow participation of all learners. Another future research to consider could be to explore how the use of these games in an educational setting influences students' spoken language skills, especially their ability to communicate and collaborate in English, as video games often require players to collaborate and communicate with each other.

These topics represent just a few of the many possibilities for future research on the use of gamified environments and video games in English as a second language acquisition. Each of these areas can provide valuable insights into how technology and game-based learning can enhance language learning, address challenges such as motivation and engagement. Keeping in mind that as these technologies evolve, so will the opportunities for new research to better understand their potential and limitations in educational settings.

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