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## Gamification or the Ludic Expectations of Literacy

**Abstract:** This article attempts to show how play, namely gamification, can fit the determined goal of achieving outstanding literacy instruction for Primary Education children. We first provide a brief overview of the recent history on the research of literacy and play. We also make reference to strong standards and gamification in Primary Education childhood classes. To do so, and after reviewing current research into the issue of gamification and literacy in education, we describe a practical experience in a state Primary Education school in Valencia (Spain) connecting gamification and literacy skills. By doing this we will try to fill a gap found after our search of the literature, which revealed that to date there are few studies that have investigated practical experiences of teachers using games. The main objective of the didactic proposal depicted here was to enhance the children's literacy skills through gamification in the field of Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL). Thus, the implementation of this experience has studied the way of integrating game dynamics in non-recreational environments to enhance their learning. The design of the teaching sequence shown here was contextualized by using the picture book *The Gruffalo*, and the students as the main protagonist to finally achieve a close relationship between learning, literacy and entertainment.

**Keywords:** Learning, literacy, play, gamification, English as a Second Language

### INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been an increasing amount of literature that has documented and examined the effects of play on the development of early literacy and the overlying zones of these two fields. Thus, in this article we attempt to show how play and gamification can promote the striving objective of accomplishing outstanding early literacy instruction for Primary Education children. We first provide a brief overview of the recent history on the issue. We also make reference to strong standards and gamification in Primary Education childhood classes. To do so, and after reviewing recent research into the issue of play, namely gamification, and literacy in education, we describe a practical experience con-

necting gamification and Primary Education literacy skills. By doing this we try to fill a gap found after our search of the literature. This showed, surprisingly, that to date there are few studies that have investigated practical experiences of teachers using games (Alexander&Losh 2010; Hodgson 2013; LaVaque-Manty 2013; Shultz Colby 2013; Bianchi&Bohunicky 2014; Colby 2014).

## PLAY AND LITERACY IN EDUCATION

This introductory section provides a brief overview of the recent history of play and literacy and their gradual convergence. It then goes on to deal with the linkage between play and literacy.

Literacy is more than a skill; it is a core learning that our students should use to construct, lead and transform their lives. Literacy, that is mainly reading and writing, has been studied by many researchers from the 1980s. In that time, some researches showed how many children started to read at a very early age, even before their school attendance, just by watching and interacting with other people in “literacy-focused routines such as storybook reading and in everyday life activities that involve reading (e.g., menus, signs) and writing (e.g., shopping lists, notes to family members).” (Christie&Roskos 2006: 64). In turn, play research in early childhood dates back the beginning of the 20th century when Karl Groos (1898) and G. Stanley Hall (1907) started to find linkages between play and development. It was in the late 1980s when, some research on the connections between literacy and play started to be carried out. Later, in the 1990s some support for early literacy-enriched play programs started (Christie&Rosko 2006; Yaden, Rowe&MacGillivray 2000). The educational possibilities of language play, as noted by Fernandez-Fein and Baker’s (1997), point to the fact that when children play with nursery rhymes, songs and storytelling-based activities, they are developing phonological skills (Adams, Foorman, Lundberg&Beeler 1998). This brief overview of the recent history of play and literacy suggests that play in childhood is linked to later literacy accomplishment.

## THE LINK BETWEEN PLAY AND LITERACY

When it comes to reading and writing, it has been thought by some means that it has to be taught mainly through direct instruction and be based on standards due to time constraints basically. We understand by standards “static expectations, outcome statements, or ‘amounts’ meant to satisfy established criteria (e.g., what children should know and be able to do at certain age levels)” (Christi&Roskos 2006: 58; Marzano&Kendall 1998). A case in point is the current Spanish educational system that sets its foundations on strict and rigorous

standards as observed upon our experience in-class. That leads to teachers to apparently be more focused on accomplishing the standards of the curriculum than on finding more motivational ways to make children learn. Hence, standards increase responsibility for emergent literacy instruction, “thus creating new pressures for play’s role as a medium for learning and a shift from unfocused free play to ‘educational’ play – play activities that are linked to educational goals, objectives and outcomes.” (Christie&Roskos 2006:59). At some Primary Education levels, this kind of teaching may constrain children’s opportunities to communicate, become literate and construct meaning in terms of the world surrounding them. All this said, play and standards can coexist, and play-based methods are necessary in the Primary Education curriculum.

Even though play is an “intrinsic, evolutionary, and synergistic activity,” (Woods 2017) for children, teachers feel overwhelmed due to curricular overload and instead of having their pupils reading and writing in more ludic ways through games, they made the decision of basing their teaching on more conventional methods and activities. Nevertheless, these constraints in teaching regarding the use of games in Primary Education classes overshadow the fact that play is crucial to a best literacy learning of young students (Vygotsky 1978; Roskos&Christie 2001 and Stegelin 2005).

At this point, we should like to shed some light on the way that play could help to develop literacy. The first idea we would like to transmit in this article is that literacy does not compete with toys, computer games and other kinds of entertainment that do not demand fluent reading skills or the ability to interpret texts. On the contrary, literacy and play complement each other. The link between literacy and play is positive and constructive due to the fact that it “may create an entertainment orientation toward reading and writing, supplying important motivation for mastering written language (Sonnenschein, Baker, Sepell&Schmidt 2017: 124). In addition, according to Woods (2017: 2), “play supports the use and understanding of symbolic representation and oral language while providing opportunities for children to demonstrate and expand what they know“. For instance, role play is a meeting point for oral language development and play due to the fact that this kind of language embodies actions, objects and situations, while in games children also use things and actions, as well as language, to represent some other things. For instance, when children are role-playing in literacy-enriched play corners, they have theme-related reading and writing materials such as, when playing to hospitals, pencils, prescription-like papers, appointment books, patient folders and signs (*Please be quiet, Please wait to be called*) and easy-to-read children-adapted patient information leaflets. In the case of playing to restaurants, they have the menus, notepads to write down the orders, signs such as *Toilet* (or *Men, Women*), stickers in some bottles or cans that “increases in the amounts of emergent reading and writing activity during play”. (Neuman&Roskos 1992). In turn, taking part in play-related literacy activities

may foster the appropriation of literacy. Appropriating literacy means more than just learning to read and write through mastery of a symbol system and a set of rules: it also includes self-identification as a member of the literate community (Serpell 1997). Thus, appropriation involves cognitive, social, and motivational dimensions, consistent with a perspective on reading that emphasizes engagement (Baker, Afferbach&Reinking 1995).

(Sonnenschein, Baker, Serpell&Schmidt 2017: 107)

In addition, play is in itself one of the most important sources of learning (Vygotsky 1978) and thus, it contributes to create an atmosphere of literacy learning. Consequently, through the addition of literacy materials to children's play such as, flashcards, play dough, picture books, fancy dresses, videos, songs, digital games (for instance *Kahoot*<sup>1</sup> or *Plickers*<sup>2</sup>), board games (like Password); apps (like Story cubes) to mention but a few, within our classes, "children's uses and understanding of literacies increase significantly" (Comber 2000; Dyson 2003 and Woods 2017). Furthermore, play promotes language use, learning by doing, investigating, experimenting and socialization through oral language skills. Therefore, play is central to children's learning and needs to take a principal place in our pedagogy. So, as teachers, we should fill our classes with literacy-focused materials and tools and create literacy play corners (for instance the reading corner, the writing corner, the book creation corner, the dramatic play corner (Woods 2017), the creativity, the hospital, the shop corners and so on), to develop an environment inside our classrooms that respects, encourages and make time for literacy play (Stegelin 2005). Literacy play, as pointed out previously, can also be experienced through both video games and non-digital games such as card and board games. These materials are multimodal systems that provide a wide range of pedagogical chances for play literacy-based activities.

Overall, play, games in general, in the educational environment do not have to be seen as mere burn-out-extra-energy or time-wasting activities for children (Smith 2017: 4). On the contrary, "Literacy-enriched play environments encourage more play with print, support book reading, develop language skills, and motivate children to read and write." (Roskos 2017: xi). Thus, getting the classroom ready for literacy teaching and learning through play, teachers make a key contribution to children's development as a literacy learners (Woods 2017).

## GAMIFICATION

As seen before, there are several powerful motives to teach literacy with games. For instance, all games, but particularly commercial video games, "provide richly multimodal spaces that incorporate visual, aural, written, spatial, and

<sup>1</sup> <https://kahoot.com/what-is-kahoot/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.plickers.com/>

kinaesthetic modes that students can then analyse and explore.”(Shultz Colby 2017: 55). According to Payà (1936: 38), Gamification is considered a comprehensive educational process that includes playing activities and their large number of values in the educational field. In addition, this methodology could be applied to both, the physical part of the students and the intellectual and sentimental one, since if we use gamification framed in a didactic approach, it could be observed a global progress of the students (Ortega 1990: 21; Payà 1936: 49). Recent developments in the field of games have led to a renewed interest in looking at them as a natural method. The literacy-play based methodologies we are dealing with are called gamification and game-based learning.

In recent years, there has been an increasing interest in the differences between Gamification and Game-Based Learning (GBL). Both concepts have been confused for each other at times. Isaacs (2015) shows how, on the one hand, Gamification is the idea of combining game components to a circumstance where game is not included. In contrast, Game-Based Learning, is related to the use of games to improve the learning process. In other words, gamification is, to some extent, a more adaptable and multi-purpose concept. The reason for this is that it shares the objective of increasing student commitment with Game-Based Learning, albeit without creating bonds to a particular game.

Turning now to the experimental evidence on Gamification, Isaacs (2015) states that it does not consist on textbook activities but lessons are built through the use of game mechanics such as leader boards, points and similar means to achieve their own goals at their own pace. Furthermore, with educational games you should take into account how elements comfort the learning process. According to Hilton (2017), there are 12 items that should be borne in mind when gamifying any content: conflict, collaboration, competition, strategy, chance, aesthetics, theme, story, resources, time, rewards and levels. In addition, when comparing the two methodologies, Gamification and Game-Based Learning, it can be seen that in game-based learning, commercial games are a dynamic and effective learning tool because they really hold the attention of the students (Isaacs 2015). In turn, Hilton (2017) explains that unlike Gamification, Game-Based Learning draws into a real game that motivates people learning. The result of the implementation of these methodologies is that students, while playing, will either be familiar with something as for example, instead of using solely texts books, being able to achieve a goal as a result of playing a game.

## GAMIFICATION IN THE EDUCATIONAL FIELD

To put in context Gamification in the field of education, it is crucial to mention previously the marketing and business world, since the term Gamification arises as a result of the use of some mechanisms belonging to games to the aforementioned fields. This entails the use of tools such as

quests, levels, badges, points, leaderboards, virtual goods, avatars, narratives, and progress bars, used in isolation or in various combinations. Other forms of gamification draw on design principles inspired by digital games, such as giving students the freedom to fail and retry a task without penalty, and freedom to choose activities and learning pathways that best suit their interests.

(Hung 2017: 57)

*Frequent Travelers* is an example of gamification in an airline marketing campaign. On this occasion, regular customers were rewarded with the option to redeem miles driven by points for their next trip. Nevertheless, the origins of this method goes back approximately to the origin of the human species. As Kockenberger (2003: 109) argues, “not only toys but also materials belonging to Nature and everyday life have to be investigated, tested and moved. They invite new motor experiences and support the development of the child.” In this way, we can find games such as *mancala* or *manqala*, of African or Asian origin, that was expanded by Roman soldiers during the Roman Empire time (Arnold 2014: 35), with some mechanisms in common such as materials consisting of a board seeds. That is, we can see how new technologies have been changing the concept of the game over the years.

Regarding the impact of gamification on education, the first thing we would like to point out is that this method can develop instructional practice when it is designed in a reliable way, focusing on a user-centred approach (Hung 2017). Applying Gamification within the educational field could be carried out by following a five-step process (Huang and Soman 2013: 7): (i) understanding the public and its context; (ii) definition of learning objectives; (iii) structuring the experience; (iv) identification of resources and application of the Gamification elements. The mechanisms of the game can be catalogued as self-elements or socio-elements. The first of these mechanisms are the points, award symbols, levels or simply, time constraints. These components enable students to focus their attention on self-improvement and enjoy their success at a personal level. The second mechanism refers to group competition, such as classification tables. These kinds of challenges help relationships between students by stating their progress in public results (Huang and Soman 2013: 13). It is also recommended that both, in the educational and the familial fields, boys and girls have to play in a natural way. For this reason, students must play, no matter their age or circumstance. Any positive aspect of Gamification could be transmitted to the educational field and thus to literacy development, as it could be the case of toy libraries, that would act as intermediaries between the game and the school. Fortunately, currently, no teacher or student is surprised when some more playful activity is introduced in the classrooms since these dynamics are totally accepted today (Garcia and Ruiz 2001: 11).

Together these studies provide important insights into the potential for developing literacy through gamification. Overall, there seems to be some evidence to indicate that Gamification enhance writing pedagogy and reading

comprehension (Shultz Colby 2017); that using information technologies and gamification elements, assists learners to deal with the school curriculum with less difficulties and extend their knowledge (Đjordžević&Brkić 2016); that gamification through video game pedagogy could provide flexible learning for students using methods that go beyond the predictable tool-based approach (Garneli, Giannakos&Chorianopoulos 2016). That is, “the complex tasks, recurrent failures and final success of board game play in preschool enables the children to create an open mind for enhancing literacy (Markey et al. 2008), logical thinking (Kapp 2012; Wilson et al. 2009), cognition skills (Goldstein 2012), play therapy and aesthetics (Pearce 2006)” (Chou 2017: 2405). Hence, finding the way to intertwine gamification, literacy and new-technologies-based pedagogical methods related to playing must be imperative if we wish our children meet 21<sup>st</sup> skills and competences.

#### METHODOLOGY

A case-study approach was adopted here to obtain further in-depth information on the use of linkages between gamification and Primary Education literacy skills. The main goal of the teaching proposal described here was to develop children’s literacy skills through gamification (either using traditional or new technologies mechanisms) in the field of Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL).

Forty-two students studying their third year in Primary Education in a State school in Valencia, Spain were recruited for this study. They were divided into group A (20 students) and Group B (22 students). Both third-year groups were selected on the basis of a degree of homogeneity and equity of their level of foreign language (English).

After an in-depth observation period of the classes routines, the first step in this process was to bear in mind the main objectives of this teaching sequence so they could be useful for the present study and thus, being able to design the proper activities that foster the student’s interest on the subject English as a Foreign Language. This was a not popular subject due to the traditional methodology, more based on instruction and memorization, used until that moment. While this interest was arousing through gamifying the activities they had to carry out to fit the syllabus proposed for third year of Primary school, we would develop the children’s literacy skills in English language. In other words, literacy would be developed through more ludic activities that would let them develop their reading and writing while having fun. We made the decision of choosing a reading whose main topic would fit the textbook the students were dealing with and thus, do not ruin the teacher’s planning of the month.

Prior to the developing of gamified activities, we made the decision of using a picture book in order to provide relevance and context for significant learning

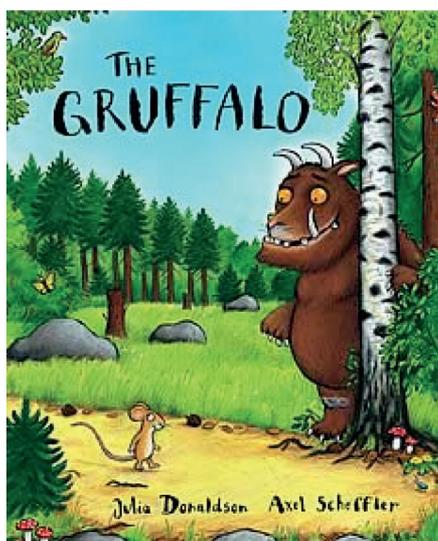


Fig. 1. J. Donaldson, *The Gruffalo*,  
il. A. Scheffler

and develop both, visual and text literacy (Cleveland 2015; Oliveira&Cruz 2017). Nevertheless, one of the greatest challenges was to make a choice regarding a proper reading that could be used as common thread for the activities proposed. Finally, we took *The Gruffalo*<sup>3</sup> (2006) by Julia Donaldson and illustrated by Axel Scheffler. The reason for this choice was that the topics ‘animals’ was present all through the story, a topic the students were dealing with in class. *The Gruffalo* tells the story of a mouse, the main protagonist of the book, walking through a European forest where it meets many dangerous animals (a fox, an owl, and a snake). This picture book was the winner of many awards<sup>4</sup> for children’s literature, and has been developed into plays on both the West End and Broadway. The Gruffalo front page can be seen in figure 1. Apart from this reading, some flashcards made by the teacher were designed and used to help in the development of the activities.

Once the reading was chosen, the activities chronogram was divided into six sessions as can be seen in table 1 below.

Table 1. Chronogram

1st session	Introductory video, Running dictation & Find and choose
2nd session	Which one is missing? Jump and point & Hide and find
3rd session	Mime, Song, Who is who? & Painting my zoo
4th session	Mouse and cat & Find and choose
5th session	Game on vocabulary (interactive whiteboard (IWB) ) Chair’s game
6th session	Final assessment

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.gruffalo.com/>

<sup>4</sup> The Gruffalo won the gold award (in the 0–5 category) of the 1999 Nestlé Smarties Book Prize. It also won the 2000 Nottingham/Experian Children’s Book award, and the Blue Peter Best Book to Read Aloud award. The audio version won the Best Children’s Audio award in the Spoken Book Awards. In November 2009 the book was voted “best bedtime story” by listeners of BBC Radio 2.

For the purpose of the study, we briefly describe the sessions that were implemented with the purpose of drawing conclusions regarding the development of literacy through gamification.

The first session in this process was aimed at introducing the reading by means of an introductory video about it. Thanks to this video students could get introduced to the Reading process gradually. In this way, those pupils who were more reluctant to reading would get motivated since they do not start reading directly. Then, we implemented a *Running dictation*. This activity also helped to fulfil the reading process introduction due to the fact that students were reading but in a very different and unconscious way. Thus, when we started to read the story, all the children were able to understand some of its details because they had revised them previously. So, to carry out the game, we chose a short passage of *The Gruffalo*, before reading it and made several copies. We put the copies up around the walls of the classroom and organized the students in small groups. The aim was for one of the students in each group to run to read the passage on the wall. They had to remember a sentence of the passage and run back to their group. Then, they quietly dictated what they remembered to their partners, who wrote it down. Another member of the group swapped roles. Over several turns they built the whole passage. The winning team was the one that finished first. We checked for mistakes and if there were any, they had to run once more to check. We used this activity also to learn some punctuation and some difficult words spelling and pronunciation. We finished this session with the game *Find and choose* to work literacy more in depth in this first session. The reason for this is that this game looks to work the vocabulary included in the Reading in a more ludic way. In this way, if students matched play and reading, or learning to read, they would change their point of view with regard to this skill. They would be more and more motivated to understand Reading as a different and enjoyable learning process. This game was focused on explaining the vocabulary related to the reading. To that aim, some flashcards with the target vocabulary (nouns, verbs and pictures related) were created and stuck around the class. The children had to stand up one by one, take one flashcard, either a picture or a noun and look for their appropriate couple. In this way, the learners were able to read the keywords of *The Gruffalo* in a ludic way.

The second session started with the game *Which one is missing?* Which served the purpose of revising the vocabulary previously introduced in the first session. In this activity, the pupils had all the flashcards representing pictures stuck on the blackboard. Then, the students had to close their eyes while we took one of the flashcard off. When they opened their eyes, they had to tell which one was missing. With this activity we reinforced the vocabulary comprehension. This game was focused on learning the vocabulary through a memory game which helped little by little to set the animals in their corresponding scene of the story. Thus, the learners were unconsciously reminding

the story once and again each time they wanted to discover which animal was missing. On finishing this game, we moved to the next one: *Jump and point*. This game was basically centered on the fact that children did not see reading as a static process which they must always work sitting in their chairs and stuck to a desk. They realized that vocabulary of a reading could also be worked by jumping and playing with their peers. We started by distributing all the flashcards to the students so each and every child had at least one flashcard (either noun or picture). Then, we started to tell the vocabulary aloud and they had to run to look for their corresponding partner. After that, when all of them were with their couples, they had to go to one particular place within the classroom. To finish, each time we said aloud the name of an animal or action, those students who had the corresponding flashcard had to jump. Once this activity was over we ended the session by playing *Hide and find* as a follow-up phase of the reading vocabulary session. This is an easy-to-play game where all the flashcards were hidden around the class while the students remained with their eyes closed. When we finished, the kids had to open their eyes and start looking for the pictures in groups of four people. The goal of this game was making the students working the story unconsciously once more, since when they lacked only one or two flashcards to finish, they needed to remember the reading to notice which ones they need to complete the story. Hence, they were all the session working literacy without spending the whole class reading and writing. To finish this session, *The Gruffalo* was read in a storytelling activity. Now the children were able to understand the story and were really willing to know the development of the story, after two days of working on it.

We started the third session by playing *Mime* as a warm up activity. This game was very familiar to the children, they had to think of an animal, it did not matter if the animal did not appear in the reading. Then, they had to go one by one in front of their peers and mime his or her animal until someone guessed which animal it was. Literacy was also worked here since most of the animals they mimed were contextualized in the story so their peers could

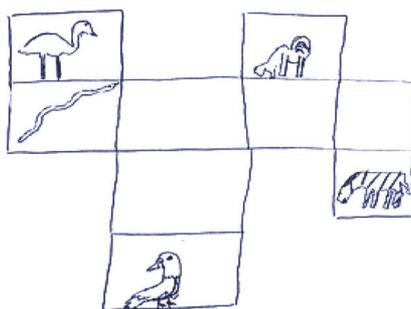


Fig. 2. Painting my Zoo template

understand them. We then moved to focus on *The Gruffalo* song<sup>5</sup> which in the first place they heard once without stopping it. In subsequent listenings, we stopped the song focusing on the parts of the body and colours vocabulary to finish by singing and miming it. This was an activity based on the methodology Total Physical Response (TPR). For the next game, *Who is who?* We prepared another

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CcCkEpKCLAs>

group of flashcard on the vocabulary related to the parts of the body and added them to the whole bunch. We then hid one flashcard behind a paper and we started to show the card slowly until someone guessed it. This time, to finish, we let some of the children to read, in a collaborative activity, the story to the rest of the class. After guessing the animal, the children had to tell us which scene of the Reading the animal appeared in and what it was doing. This was the link with literacy in this game.

The fourth session started with the activity *Painting my zoo*. In pairs, each participant had two equal templates with some animals drawn (see figure 2). In one template, they had to draw their own zoo with the same animals that appeared in *The Gruffalo*, but in the places that they wanted. Then, they covered the paper with a book or with another paper. After that, they had to ask each other some questions because, in the second template, they had to draw their partner's zoo. For example, one question could be: "Where are the monkeys?" His or her partner had to answer: "The monkeys are next to the gorillas". In this way, the couple could draw the monkeys next to the gorillas. And so, successively to complete both zoos. This activity made our students realise that working literacy could also entail drawing and painting, activities that they like profoundly.



Fig. 3. Mouse and cats (answer)



Fig. 4. Mouse and cats (question)

We got to our fourth session and we devoted it to an online game *Mouse and cat*. We started to incorporate interactive games which provided the opportunity of making them working vocabulary and everyday expressions while reading. It is an online game where the students, helped by the keyboard arrows, had to lead a mouse by creating the necessary questions and answers. But they had to stay away from the cats' squares in order to complete those questions (see figures 3 and 4 below).

As a cool down activity to finish the session, we played *Musical Chairs*. A similar game to the well-known game of elimination involving players, chairs, and music in which there is one fewer chair than players. Whoever player fails to sit on a chair is eliminated when the music stops. Then a chair is removed and the process repeated. This time, when the students sat down, they had to say the name of the flashcard that was on the chair they had chosen. They were eliminated unless they find out the name of the thing (object, action, etc.) on the flashcard.

The last session was devoted to a final evaluation aimed at drawing results from this experience. Thus, this didactic sequence was evaluated through three different mechanisms:

- by means of a direct observation procedure by keeping record of everything that happened or was heard during the sessions worth it to be mentioned. This assessment was carried out by means of a logbook,
- through a written assessment that the students had to carry out in order to assess the didactic sequence from their point of view,
- through a self-evaluation in which we assessed the experience from our point of view

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results obtained from the preliminary analysis taken by means of direct observation recorded in our logbook showed very interesting findings regarding the linkage of play and literacy in Second Language Learning. These are some of the positive and negative points that we would like to highlight:

Regarding the development of literacy, it was noticeable to observe how children that were used to a more traditional and direct instruction type of classes got quite surprised when something different and more playful was proposed, as is the case of games. These children were used to make use of textbooks and a digital whiteboard (with the activities of the textbook). They had to be quiet and sat and it was difficult for them to understand that they were allowed to leave the book aside, stand up and even run all around the classroom. For those children reading and writing was only on textbooks and picture books, the only learning mechanisms they knew. The fact that they could read and write while playing got them motivated to improve their literacy.

Nevertheless, a number of issues were identified. The short time that normal classes take, 45-minutes, is reduced to half an hour or 35 minutes. This is so since teachers of English have to pick the pupils up from the current classroom and take them to the English one. The consequence of this is that very short time is devoted to teach. For this reason, when gamifying the activities, it is difficult to carry them out completely. For instance, in one of the sessions, we had prepared four games and we were able to carry out just two of them.

Although it is true that gamification involves more work on the part of the teacher and more attention on the part of the students, the reward is greater when you hear them asking: „Have we already finished?“, while in a normal class they just want to leave as early as possible. By observing their gestures we were able to realize how much fun they had had. The satisfaction is even greater when you know that apart from implementing a funny class, the goal set for that class, in this case learning to identify, read and write the vocabulary about animals, their parts of the body and their actions, had been fulfilled. In addition, the motivation of our students

took them to tell Prof. Márquez: “– I want you to be my teacher forever!” or to their tutor: „– Andrea teaches very good English, she is a very good teacher”.

Interestingly, we observed that with games, no child got distracted as easily as they did with a direct instruction class, we thought that the surprise factor always helps. Moreover, the children wanted to participate constantly and, therefore, either directly or indirectly, to practice more their literacy. They were always curious to know what game or activity they were to play after and so, they listened very carefully to the explanation, since they wanted to understand it perfectly so that they could develop the game without any problem. Due to this, we can affirm that working literacy through games raises students’ motivation when, for instance, taking part in a storytelling activity since they know that it implies they are going to play some games after that and they learn by doing and do by playing.

With regard to the written task carried out by the students in order to assess the experience on developing literacy through gamification, they had to answer which games they had liked the most, whether the change of the role of the teacher had pleased them and whether they preferred the activities of foreign language (English) through the discipline of gamification. All these questions and any other ideas that came to their minds were written in the shape of an essay activity.

A number of issues were identified from their analysis. In most cases, the students reported that one of the activities that they had liked the least was the *running dictation*. The main reasons they claimed were related to the fact that they had to learn by heart some sentences which they did not understand as a play since it was a too similar method to the daily routine they used to have.

Additionally, there was a sense of disappointment amongst students with the game *Jump and point*, which they had already played previously many times, so they considered it a routine task. Nevertheless, *Musical chairs* and *Hide and find*, were two of their favourite games because, in their opinion, they had had a lot of fun and had learned a lot.

Turning now to the change of the role of the teacher, the overall response to this question was very clarifying since none of the students wanted Prof. Márquez-Gómez to leave due to the fact that it would entail going back to their routine focused on a more direct instruction. It was clear that they were more willing to learn within a more dynamic framework. The most important and striking result to emerge from the writings regarding the development of literacy is that learners did not relate gamified classes solely with play, but most of them wrote that these lessons had been a different and funnier way to learn for them.

With regard to the final part of the assessment, the self-evaluation focused on the development of the didactic sequence, there was a significant positive response on the part of the students towards this method. Thus, our initial expectations had been fulfilled satisfactorily. Nevertheless, there were some aspects which needed some improvement, namely, to study more in depth the way we had to attend those children with special educational needs. Also, since gamifi-

cation entails a more dynamic class, conflict solving needed to be enhanced, due to the fact that conflicts aroused more often than usual. Taken together, these results suggest that the association between literacy and gamification is worth it to be implemented more often within the Primary Education curricula.

## CONCLUSION

Closing the article, we encourage a more dynamic support and backing of educational play in Primary Education programs. It is within our understanding that educating in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century is the considering of a better prepared generation of children.

Gamification is a not very well know teaching method in Primary Education, even though many teachers put it into practice without even being conscious about it.

Within our project, our first achieved aim has been to fill the gap due to the few studies that have investigated practical experiences of teachers connecting gamification and Primary Education literacy skills. The following findings have been observed: (i) children's literacy skills through gamification in the field of Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) has been enhanced through gamification according to the direct observation data gathered during the experience. (ii) Thus, the implementation of this teaching sequence has studied the way of integrating game dynamics in non-recreational environments to enhance their learning. (iii) The design of the teaching based on *The Gruffalo* by making it an interactive and gamified storytelling activity has allowed for a better comprehension of the story and its elements on the part of the students, to finally achieve a closer relationship between learning, literacy and entertainment in a foreign language; (iv) for teachers, unlike students, gamification entails too much work according to their claims. It was easier to base the English classes on the text book. Even though, they admit that ludic activities within the classroom classes help students to socialize more and to have a break in their daily routine.

Regarding the limitations of the present study, we have not found much information in terms of the linkages between literacy and gamification, neither in first nor second languages learning, in Primary Education.

To finish, we want to leave this idea: gamified activities may work as a launch pad for the development of children' critical thinking skills, let's help them.

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