



UTILIZING LUDIC FOREIGN LANGUAGE PEDAGOGY AT THE TERTIARY LEVEL

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Abstract:

This paper aims to draw attention to the utilization of ludic activities and their effectiveness in foreign language teaching, learning, and assessment at the tertiary level. It focuses on the description of the ludic language pedagogy and its characteristics. Representing valuable formative assessment instruments, game-based educational tools can be used in both traditional and blended teaching and learning contexts. This paper also explores how game-based assessment tools can be incorporated in the language classroom as beneficial instruments for more effective teaching practices, particularly in the online environment. The evaluation of the use of game-based assessment tools in different language classes shows how these tools can contribute to the achievement of learning goals and outcomes. The examples analyzed in this paper led to the conclusion that those students who actively participated in ludic assessment activities developed their language competence and content knowledge and also reinforced self-assessment skills. Moreover, the interplay of knowledge construction and the ludic design of learning activities and competitive elements made the whole learning process more motivating, engaging, and effective.

Keywords:

Ludic Language Pedagogy, Tertiary Level, Foreign Language Teaching, Game-Based Activities and Assessment.

INTRODUCTION

Various social, cultural, and industrial influences have caused changes permeating all levels of education, and foreign language teaching is no exception. The existing teaching methods and approaches are being reevaluated, adapted to the newly created circumstances, and supported by new models. The learner-centered approach has been emphasized for several decades, and teachers have been encouraged to utilize methods to organize the teaching process and, thus, support students' full engagement.

New approaches and models such as gamification, serious games, or game-based learning and the use of various assessment tools have become a popular topic of studies both in industry and in educational contexts since its popularization in early 2010 [1], [2], [3]. The role of plays and games has always been considered important in various

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aspects of human society. The COVID-19 pandemic has encouraged educators to reexamine the existing teaching practices and approaches and incorporate the adapted ones into various learning management systems.

Although primarily used with children, plays can be beneficial for adult learners as well. The topic of the use of ludic activities with adults has gained in popularity, and the significance plays can exhibit has provoked researchers to investigate educational aspects of ludic activities at the tertiary level. The increasing number of studies from higher education shows that students can benefit from the use of play and game-based activities incorporated into the curriculum.

This paper aims to draw attention to the increasing popularity of using ludic activities and creative approaches to foreign language teaching at the tertiary level. On the one hand, it explores the ludic language pedagogy and its characteristics; on the other, it focuses on one aspect - the use of game-based assessment tools and how they can contribute to more effective teaching practices, particularly in the online environment. The analysis of their application provided in this study illustrates how game-based assessment tools, as one example of the organization of ludic activities, can be used in teaching and how they can contribute to the learning outcomes.

2. THE STATUS OF LUDIC PEDAGOGY AT THE TERTIARY LEVEL

In the field of early stages of education, a game as a symbolic activity is considered to be a fundamental tool for the cognitive and language development of children [4], [5]. In that context, a game as a common activity for all cultures has been recognized by Huizinga [6] as a serious activity with clear rules and a potential tool to be used in different fields, such as language, philosophy, law, and art. Sicart [7] has introduced the concept of playability and defined it as the ability to use the game beyond the game, which means to adopt coherent actions for certain purposes, with a psychological, physical, and emotional perspective that is adopted towards people, things, and situations. Perceived from this point of view, game design and playful techniques can be applied as effective instruments not only in social activities but also in education.

In education, the gamification of learning has a long history and the principles of gamification had already existed in the pre-digital world [8], [7]. On the other hand, Prensky [9] points out the potential of games and game-based learning to enhance learning, motivate

and engage students, but only if they are designed and planned with pedagogical background and for educational purposes.

Krashen [10] argues in his hypotheses of affective filters that variables such as motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety can significantly affect learning and L2 acquisition. Currently, in the digital era, characterized by the dynamic progress of technology integration in education and the popularity of digital games, the ludic activities, supported with ICT tools and game designs, have become revalued in various contexts aiming to produce game-like experiences to support different activities and behaviors [1].

Although the integration of games in the teaching and learning process is usually perceived to be more appropriate for young learners, there is a growing number of higher education institutions considering the implementation of ludic pedagogy into the curriculum. In order to respond to the reforms at the tertiary level stirred by the Bologna Process, universities started reconsidering the methodologies, techniques, tools used in teaching, and researchers reported on the benefits of such shifts [11], [12], [13]. What is emphasized as the important aspect of ludic pedagogy is its reliance on a positive learning environment and the use of games, but, at the same time, on academic standards supporting the intellectual and cognitive students' development.

3. THE USE OF LUDIC ACTIVITIES IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING

The application of a ludic pedagogy in language teaching became more recognized in the last quarter of the 20th century, and it was in a close connection with the integration of the communicative approach into the language teaching process. As mentioned earlier, according to Krashen [10], second language acquisition is affected by elements known as affective filters that can significantly impact the learning process. By creating an engaging atmosphere through the use of various teaching strategies, language teachers can help students with motivation, help them build a positive attitude towards their skills and abilities, and reduce learning anxiety. In that context, playful activities and ludic strategies have always played an important role in achieving a pleasant learning environment, regardless of the learners' age. Their use can result in various pedagogical benefits, such as motivation, pleasant working conditions, and a relaxed atmosphere in the classroom [14].



Nowadays, many authors devote their research to the topic of game strategy, game-based learning, and the application of ludic activities in the foreign or second language teaching and learning [15], [16], [17], [18], [19], [20], [21], [22].

As regards a formal recognition of the implementation of ludic activities in language teaching, The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages has devoted a section within Chapter 4 to the relevance of ludic uses of language for effective learning and language development. According to the CEFR, several categories of ludic activities have been recognized; these include social language games, individual activities, and verbal joking [23, pp. 55-56]. These types of activities can be adapted to the level, language skills, and linguistic-communicative objectives that language teachers intend to achieve with the learners. The linguistic games should also be considered as an instrument of language learning and pedagogical tools, in such a way that they should be incorporated into the curriculum and the common language classroom activities [24]. According to Sandoval [24, p. 98], the use of linguistic games can be beneficial in the classroom, and they can enhance motivation, contribute to the creation of an active and interesting learning process for the learner, and boost both productive and receptive language skills. Furthermore, their proper use can also help teachers to create a pleasant atmosphere and become closer to the students. Overall, these tools have the potential to facilitate a more relaxing but, at the same time, more effective teaching and learning process.

Although the ICT-mediated instruction and the use of various learning platforms and tools had been present in teaching foreign languages, the sudden and unprecedented changes in the organization of teaching practices around the world, caused by the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak in 2020, made language teachers reexamine the existing habits, approaches, methods and tools [25]. The online learning environment posed challenges not only in terms of content delivery and lesson organization, but, more importantly, it affected students' motivation, active involvement, cooperation, and assessment. Within such an educational context, thoroughly planned and organized pedagogical utilization of ludic activities can provide a good framework for a motivating and engaging atmosphere that promotes not only the development of all language skills and language competence but also creativity, critical thinking, and cooperation among students [26], [27].

4. THE USE OF GAME-BASED ASSESSMENT TOOLS

The use of ludic activities should have clear pedagogical aims. When choosing the applications and tools for the realization of such activities, a foreign language teacher estimates their purposefulness and what learning outcomes can be achieved. Among the wide scope of such activities and tools, various game-based tools possess characteristics that can ensure the realization of the aimed outcomes. The examples below illustrate good practices in different classes and subjects.

During the spring term of the academic year 2020/2021, a group of 65 students attended the English Semantics course at the Anglistics study program at a private university in the Republic of Serbia. The course lasted for 15 weeks, and before the final exam, the students took two midterm tests - after the fifth and eleventh week of lectures. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the course was conducted exclusively online. The game-based tool Quizizz was used every week with the purpose to collect information related to the students' learning progress. The study included the analysis of a corpus of tests taken by a group of 65 students. The continuous assessment process was conducted with the aim to improve students' learning outcomes and to create a teaching process according to the formative assessment results. The tasks were graded and provided careful scaffolding - they included multiple-choice questions, cloze-ended, and open-ended questions. When the course was over, all the results were collected, analyzed and the outcomes compared. The purpose of the analysis was to investigate how digital tools can be utilized for continuous assessment of students' learning progress in an exclusively online teaching and learning environment.

The results showed that those students who regularly took these tests scored higher in the midterm and final exams. They also show that those students who actively participated in these game-based assessments improved their language competence, and some even considerably improved the learning outcomes. The use of a game-based assessment tool did not only show effectiveness in terms of assessment but also helped students with self-assessment because they received immediate feedback on their progress. The continuous self-assessment process helped students identify which aspects should be improved. The elements of games, competition, and animations used in the classes made the whole learning process more motivating and engaging, and, thus, the elements of fun were effectively supported by academic



and intellectual rigor. The results obtained in every class also served as a solidified diagnostic tool that directed lesson planning and reaching the aimed course outcomes.

Similar results were obtained with another group of students who attended another course subject. During the winter term of the academic year 2021/2022, a group of 20 fourth-year students regularly attended the ICT and language learning course. The course lasted for 15 weeks, and before the final exam, the students took two midterm tests. This course was conducted according to a hybrid or blended learning model: face-to-face and on-line. The gamification tool Kahoot was used in every lesson with the aim to practice the presented learning content and continuously assess students' learning progress, both in a virtual and face-to-face classroom context. The tasks and exercises were created with multiple-choice and true-false questions. Each question was designed with visual and auditive elements (image, animation, short video, music) and playful components, such as collecting points, rewards, competition feeling, leaderboard with tracking progress, time scale.

The results showed that those students who regularly participated in these playful activities obtained higher results in the midterm and final exams than those who did not take these tests. At the same time, those students who regularly played Kahoot improved their content knowledge significantly and developed self-assessment skills by receiving instant feedback on their progress. The most remarkable characteristics that students showed during these activities were their enthusiasm, team spirit, and cooperation with peers, which made the whole course interactive, conducted in an engaging and motivating environment for all participants in the teaching and learning process.

The last example illustrating similar teaching strategies shows that game-based assessment tools could be successfully applied in other courses, such as general foreign language courses. Both the above-described game-based tools - Quizizz and Kahoot - were used in the classes of Spanish as a foreign language course with students of other study programs, such as Tourism and Hospitality Management, Business Economy, and Information Technology. These tools were used with the same purposes - to motivate students and create an engaging and interactive teaching and learning environment on the one hand, and on the other, to provide continuous formative assessment [28]. The results proved the effectiveness of the regular use of these tools in Spanish language classes - those students who regularly participated in language games, based on language aspects covered

in every lesson, showed better development of language skills (especially grammar and vocabulary) and content knowledge (topics). Additionally, the analysis of their replies showed a higher percentage of correct answers and better results in summative assessments.

5. CONCLUSION

Continuous and unpredictable changes in all areas of modern living have resulted in the need to adapt teaching contexts and practices at all levels of education. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated these changes and stirred educators and foreign language teachers to adapt their teaching methods and techniques so as to respond to the newly created teaching context. This paper emphasizes the importance of incorporating ludic activities and game-based tools which are motivating and engaging for students, and, at the same time, driven by sound and solid pedagogical rationale. This paper also shows the importance of introducing/reinforcing outcome-oriented teaching practices at the tertiary level as an inevitable part of the higher education reforms.

The common conclusion is that games (digital or traditional) can transform the pedagogy of second language teaching at the tertiary level. This paper draws attention to the importance of applying the interactive approach to foreign language teaching and creating effective second language learning games and tools, relying on the expertise and collaboration between language teachers and game designers. The use of game-based tools can create a rather positive learning environment, motivate students and encourage them to actively participate in knowledge creation. These tools can be used in both online and blended educational environments and they can serve as a valuable instrument for formative assessment. The examples provided in this paper illustrate how the utilization of one aspect of ludic activities can keep students engaged and motivated during online and hybrid lessons. Their use also contributed to the creation of an enjoyable environment where students wanted to participate. Furthermore, what made these tools invaluable in the online environment relates to their use for continuous assessment, as a diagnostic tool and helpful feedback students received on their progress which helped them improve and score better at the exam.



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