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GAMIFICATION - A POSSIBLE INTERACTIVE LEARNING METHOD IN THE ROMANIAN LANGUAGE LESSONS

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Abstract

For many years, the propagation and multiplication of digital gaming in many areas of activity has been accompanied by the emergence of several theoretical concepts and notions in order to describe, analyze and even develop this phenomenon. What makes the gamification attractive is the fact that the heart of the gamming concept is the motivation and the commitment of a protagonist in several activities that rely on rewarding situations, positive encouragements and subtle feed-back loops coexisting with concrete elements such as levels, missions, trophies, points, scoreboard, prizes - in order to increase engagement and motivation. In education, a new trend is emerging in the world, the gamification captures everything from the university to the pre-school level. The explanation of the success of this method it is simple: the students are affected by the information avalanche, they are no longer patient and they are becoming more and more difficult to focus on. The motivation and their involvement diminish because of the many alternatives. They like to play and when they like something it is much easier to achieve it. The present paper aims to determine to what extent the teachers in the primary education are aware of the strength of this innovative method and how much it is used in Romanian Language and Literature classes. We also want to determine students' motivation to assimilate knowledge, learn rules, algorithms, through game-based learning, within these Romanian language and literature lessons.

1. Introduction

We all live in a society in which the access to video games became a normality in our everyday existence. The more chidren are attracted to this form of play the more it satisfies their need to recreation while creating new horizons ready to be discovered. Video games have been introduced sporadically at school in the instructive-educative activities. Lessons are transformed in missions, just as in video games, children can interact during the class and what is most important, they learn whereas they have fun. According to the numerous studies and to classroom experience, all specialists in the educational field claimed that after adding play elements in the learning process the result is spectacular. Roughly speaking, the provisions do not lie in obtaining a fast result but in the sustainability of the process itself.

By experience, we have even experienced boredom and a lack of motivation in some courses and it is often tempting to stop listening to the teacher and take his cell phone to go on social networks or even play games. games. On another level, from our personal experience, we realized that when we play video games, we learn things, facts, anecdotes but also skills such as team work. In addition, a video game player has a particular motivation when playing.

The propagation and multiplication of digital gaming in many areas of activity has been accompanied by the emergence of several theoretical concepts and notions in order to describe analyze and even develop this phenomenon. In the Anglophone academic research, in the field of marketing and professional practice of game design, the gamification concept has spread very quickly.

This concept was defined by Zichermann and Cunningham (2011) as a process of using a state of mind and a play mechanism to solve various problems and to determine users to use the basic components of the game in many contexts. What makes this interactive method attractive is the fact that the heart of the gamming concept is the motivation and the commitment of a protagonist in several activities that rely on rewarding situations, positive encouragements and subtle feed-back loops coexisting with concrete elements such as levels, missions, trophies, points, scoreboard, prizes - in order to increase engagement and motivation.

As a matter of fact, we can state that this type of play, introduced in the learning process, is not something new, but that children's level of expectation changed; this often happens because creativity of new generation children is much more productive as they use a huge amount of information . It is said that it is much easier to teach children how to learn than to tell them what to learn. This is highly desirable to be obtained regardless the type of lesson approached at the Romanian language, Mathematics or Science class. However, it would be more advisable if we taught children develop their own learning strategies, in accordance with a personal system of storage and assignation for their acquisitions, in order to obtain the desired results.

Thus, a student is motivated during any class from the moment he feels capable of succeeding the proposed activity, an activity that must not be too simple, that he can make choices in this activity (his behavior is not dictated by a third person) and that he knows that this activity can bring him new things. To bring interest to a person, there are levers, identified by several theories of motivation, learning techniques to perceive the value of an activity or its controllability or its competence to the individual. These levers can thus be used for gamification.

2. Problem Statement

Most parents and teachers don't know about or are not preoccupied to build pupils' emotional intelligence, which develop their resistance to competition stress and failures. One of the first domains where the concept of gamification had been used was marketing, which introduces through it the idea of motivation and personal engagement in different activities "which imply reward structures, positive reinforcement and subtle feedback loops alongside mechanics like points, badges, levels, challenges and leaderboards" (Zichermann & Cunningham, 2011).

This term which appeared around 2010, represents the use and transfer of video game mechanics in a non-ludic field ("Gamification is the use of game-design elements in non-game contexts") (Deterding, Dixon, Khaled, & Nacke, 2011, pp. 9-15),

Gamification is the concept of applying game mechanics and game design techniques in order to engage and motivate people to attain their goals. It is also a concept which applies in case of practical learning by means of **serious games**, such as online flight simulators or research laboratories. Gamification makes the connection betwen users' desires and basic needs and the impulses which gravitate round the idea of affiliation, rank and achievement. This includes a number of psychological concepts, concerning mainly motivation, behaviour and personality. A deep understanding of such concepts and the readiness of their application is one of the most important keys in the correct implementation of gamification, particularly in the educational field.

The gamification method appeared in the educational field as required by change and a more rapid connection to pupils, necessary conditions to Romanian educational setting. In education, we could define gamification as the usage of game specific elements and techniques in a digitally adapted learning environment with the view to increase pupils' motivation.

How is gamification applied actually? Pupils are rewarded with points, diplomas or badges according to activities and to the time span invested in project finalization as it happens in all video games. Consequently, it applies to an activity based on video game mechanics only to transform the teaching/learning activity into a ludic one. This technique derived from the access to the game and video game under the form of the serious game At school, it does not need a specific hardware and therefore it is easier to implement it than the use of the video game proper. On the other hand, gamification is not a game in the sense that it uses only certain components of the game. It is not a serious game which uses game merely to learn.

Claudiu Gedo, gamification expert: "Gamification functions well on 2 directions-it improves performances and changes negative behaviours. It can be applied either if we have good pupils and want them to become better or if we have problem pupils and want to show them the right path!" (Retrieved from: https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/actualitate/educatie/gamification-o-noua-metoda-de-invatare-aplicata-si-de-profesorii-romani-703972).

Gamification is therefore part of a pedagogy and specific learning. Pedagogy can be defined as the set of methods and practices a teacher implements to impart knowledge and skills to his or her students. It is specific to each teacher and can cover several forms. Associated with gamification, pedagogy takes here the form of pedagogy that offers work by autonomous group, an active pedagogy (the pupil is active in his learning, he does not wait to receive the knowledge by the teacher but acquires them by himself).

Apprenticeships thus appear as a set of mechanisms, specific to each individual that allows to acquire new knowledge and skills. This context is positive for prescribed skills training, but also in the personality development of the students: students feel valued, gain confidence in themselves, have the chance to learn authentically, to clarify their own values and attitudes toward knowledge. (Tudor, 2016)

The **gamification of learning** is an educational approach to motivate students to learn by using video game design and game elements in learning environments (Shatz & Itamar, 2015).The aim is to maximize the pleasure of learning and engage pupils through holding their interest, and to inspire them to keep learning. „Gamification, broadly defined, is the process of defining the elements which comprise games that make those games fun and motivate players to continue playing, and using those same elements in a non-game context to influence behaviour" (Deterding, Dixon, Khaled &, Nacke, 2011, pp. 9-15). However, in the educational context, what is important about the video games introduced in the didactic activity is the motivation created by them. The motivation to keep playing and to acquire information and skills they can use in another domain.

The elements of the game used to motivate pupils and to facilitate learning are: mechanics of progress (points, badges, classifications), descriptions and characters, player's control, rapid reaction, possibilites of collaboration in problem-solving, acquired knowledge and greater challenges, opportunities to optimize competences to pass to another level, socialization.

Within learning contexts, the single needs of every set of pupils, together with the specific learning objectives relevant for the context have to decide the combination of game elements which outline the gamification system endowed with the potential to motivate learners.

A system of game elements which operates in the classroom must be explicite and tested consciously by pupils. There cannot be a teacher's hidden agenda, or attempts to deceive pupils to do something. They must have the possibility to make their own choices in order to participate to the learning activities.

3.   Research Questions

Although the benefits of gamification are discussed extensively at the international level, in our country the intrepid teachers who adopted this system and who want to revolutionize education are very few. Incorporating elements from games into Romanian language classroom scenarios is a way "to provide students with opportunities to act autonomously, to display competence, and to learn in relationship to others" (Ryan, Richard ,& Edward, 2000, p. 68).

Analyzing the situation from Romania and knowing the didactic reality of the Romanian Language and Literature classes in the primary cycle, after having coordinated the students' pedagogical practice activities and other special activities, the present study can be built around the following main questions: Do the teachers of Romanian Language and Literature from the primary cycle know the concept of gamification? Is this concept used in the Romanian Language and Literature classes? The due answer targets if teachers know the concept, if they used it in their classroom activities and especially if they are going to use it in future as they learn about it.

Another dimension of the present study aims at finding answers to questions such as: Do you play video games? How often? What attracts you at a video game?

4.   Purpose of the Study

In the given circumstances from Romania, where there is a great dynamics as regards video games came onto the market, it is important to understand if the concept of gamification is known by Romanian language and literature teachers at the primary level and if these games are used in the classroom. Also, the study aims at detecting the factors which would determine the use of video games in teaching/learning Romanian Language and Literature notions in the classroom.

5.   Research Methods

Our study is based on a questionnaire which aims at analyzing teachers' perceptions and motivations as concerns the use of video games in The Romanian Language and Literature class at the primary cycle. They are unacquainted with them and consequently they do not use them? They choose to use them because they are useful or because they are a "must", or trendy? What are their other reasons to use them/not to use them? In what types of lessons they use /would like to use video games : teaching/learning lessons, assignation or systematization lessons?

The sample of the study was made up of 100 primary school teachers of different ages who teach Romanian Language and Literature in the urban and rural environment. The study has not been conceived to include pupils; they have been excluded as they have in general a positive attitude towards the dynamics of the video games and towards the ludic component, regardless of the difficulty of the tasks.

The data collected aimed at intercepting the attitude of Romanian Language and Literature primary school teachers towards the use of gamificaton in the classroom, as well as the usefulness of this concept for the performance of the educational act. Thus, we have built a questionnaire to be applied to the target group. This method allowed us to collect a large number of data in a relatively short period of time; also, the sample has been large enough to let us draw certain conclusions related to the subject under debate.

6.   Findings

We can affirm from the very beginning that significant differences have been registered between the answers of the teachers working in the rural environment as compared to those working in the urban environment. Thus, the former complained as early as the   preliminary discussion to the applied questionnaire that they do not possess the logistic means to exploit games within the Romanian Language and Literature classes. The proper equipment of all schools is still a challenge hardly attained in the rural areas.

For the first question (*Do you play video games?*), 45% of respondents affirmed that they play this kind of games during their free time; among them, all male respondents (representing only 26% of the target group) said that they all play such games. Also, differences have been recorded according to the age, namely of all respondents aged between 20-30 years, 89% affirmed that they play, the rest abstained. At the age level, 30-40 years, 76% of players have been registered whereas at the age level 40-60, only 43% play video games.

As regards the issue *how often they play*, those who practice more these games play weekly; while others sporadically, according to the context(with other colleagues, with their own children) and to necessities.

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At the questiom if *they used video games within Romanian Language and Literature activities*, 87% of the primary school teachers admitted they did not introduce this type of materials in the class. They have been asked why they did not use them. Most of them answered they are unacquainted with the concept. Other reasons referred to the impossibility to access them (they are expensive, there is no equipment, the possible players do not have the necessary training).

The other segment of 23% used video games, alone or helped by the informatics teacher in the school, mainly during assignation and revision lessons. Under the circumstances, activities have been structured on teamwork and lasted two hours.

At the question: *What kind of results did you you obtain?*, teachers recognized unanimously that in point of dynamism and motivation the effect created in the classroom was amazing. Not only the teams were extremely efficient in winning the contests but also the knowledge, language or literary theory has been enhanced easier. Moreover, rewards offered to winners determined a maximal concentration level.

The last question addressed to the target group referred to *the familiarity with the concept of gamification.* 35% of participants admitted that they read about the concept and found information online. The other 65% did not meet the concept but they manifested the wish to know more details about it and agreed that it promotes ideas which meet the interest of the present day generation of pupils.

A final observation of those who are acquainted with the concept of gamification and who used at least once the video game within the Romanian Language and Literature class is that, unfortunately, there are not too many such games which could correlate to each discipline or even to the interdisciplinary area.

Other teachers who play video games less or at all, they would be eager to participate in training courses to acquire the skills and competences necessary to use this type of games in the instructive-educative activities.

7. Conclusion

This example, where gamification is directly related to social networks, is not unique and shows us how much this play strategy can have the effect of changing behavior (including going to certain places because we will accumulate points with our friends). Gamification can then imbue social relationships with playful dimensions, in line with the "soft" persuasion tendency identified by Lipovetsky (1983).

Faced with the retreat of great political, moral or disciplinary ideologies, this tendency consists of focusing on gratification and playfulness instead of other types of explicit power relations. As a result, new relationships to power are introduced not only within games, but also in the conduct and representation of social bonds.

This form of activity would develop efficiently the wish for teamwork. Moreover, it would allow a better learning as „a pupil retains the lesson easier if he participates and performs actions in the learning process" (Dale, 1959, p. 534). Certainly, gamification could be used in learning interdisciplinary practical elements in order to favour the creation of connections among different disciplines.

However, even though gamification seems to increase students' motivation, there are limitations to its practice. The first limit identified is a limit common to all new pedagogies: gamification should not be used continually but punctually at the risk of boring the students. Once the phenomenon of novelty has passed, if gamification is used too often, it could lose its motivational potential.

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