

Language MOOCs and OERs: new trends and challenges

A cura di
Giampiero De Cristofaro
Fátima Silva, Borbála Samu



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diretta da
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Sommario

1. PREFACE

Borbála Samu, Fátima Silva, Giampiero De Cristofaro 13

PART I

LMOOC DESIGN AND ANALYSIS

1. **ACADEMIC LANGUAGE MOOCS: FROM NEEDS ANALYSIS TO IMPLEMENTATION**
Fátima Silva, Borbála Samu, Isabel Margarida Duarte, Natalia Czopek,
Iva Svobodová, Radica Nikodinovska, Ângela Carvalho, Branka Grivcevska 19

2. **COMO CRIAR UM LANGUAGE MOOC ACADÊMICO? IDEIAS DE DESENHO
NO CONTEXTO ESLAVO-ROMÂNICO**
Lasse Birger Bohn, Christian Koch 47

3. **DIETRO UN LMOOC: PROBLEMI DI PROGETTAZIONE E POSSIBILI SOLUZIONI**
Matteo La Grassa 63

4. **APPRENDIMENTO LINGUISTICO E FORME DI POTERE:
ANALISI DI UN LMOOC DI ITALIANO**
Alessandro Puglisi 79

5. **PATTERN DEVELOPMENT, SKILLS PRACTICE AND TECHNOLOGY: LMOOC
DESIGN AT FEDERICA WEB LEARNING, UNIVERSITY OF NAPLES FEDERICO II**
Ruth Kerr, Camilla Accetto, Federica Di Biase, Mary Longrigg,
Veronica Soloperto, Sofia Thomaidou, Jonathan Zerbib 97

PART II

DEVELOPING SKILLS AND COMPETENCES WITH MOOCS 117

6. **DESENVOLVIMENTO DE COMPETÊNCIAS COMUNICATIVAS E RELACIONAIS
EM PORTUGUÊS LÍNGUA NÃO MATERNA: PARA O DESENHO DE UM LMOOC**
João Morais, Fátima Outeirinho 119

7. **HOW TO IMPROVE ACADEMIC ORAL SKILLS IN A LANGUAGE MOOC:
FROM NEEDS ANALYSIS TO COURSE DESIGN**
Borbála Samu, Agnieszka Pakula 141

8. MONITORING AND ASSESSING L2 PROSODIC COMPETENCE	
Eduardo Möking, Simona Sbranna, Aviad Albert, Martine Grice	159
9. MOOC E VARIETÀ LINGUISTICHE: UN PERCORSO PER LO SVILUPPO DELLA COMPETENZA DIAFASICA	
Elena Tombesi, Veronica Bagaglini	185
10. IL BINOMIO CLIL E TECNOLOGIE: ESEMPI DI MOOC	
Letizia Cinganotto, Daniela Cuccurullo	205
11. MOOC FOR TEACHING LITERARY TRANSLATION TO ITALIAN LEARNING STUDENTS	
Svetlana Jakimovska	225
PART III	
DEVELOPING SKILLS AND COMPETENCES WITH EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGIES AND OERS	245
12. L'INSEGNAMENTO DELL'ITALIANO PER SCOPI SPECIFICI: PROGETTAZIONE DI UN'UNITÀ DIDATTICA	
Branka Grivcevska	247
13. VERSO PRATICHE EDUCATIVE APERTE (OEPS) PER L'ITALIANO L2 DI AREA MEDICA	
Marina Artese	271
14. INSEGNAMENTO DELLE ESPRESSIONI IDIOMATICHE AI PARLANTI MACEDONI: ANALISI CONTRASTIVA E PROPOSTE DIDATTICHE	
Radica Nikodinovska	291
15. INVESTIGATING PRAGMATIC AWARENESS OF ITALIAN AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNERS VIA COMPUTER-ASSISTED WEB INTERVIEWS	
Andrea Civile	309
16. GETTING OVER THE CULTURE SHOCK IN ITALY. DEVELOPING PRAGMATIC AWARENESS TO EASE SOCIOCULTURAL ADAPTATION FOR INCOMING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS	
Andrea Civile	331
17. LA LETTERATURA E I TESTI AUTENTICI IN RETE. CONNUBIO PER SVILUPPARE LE CAPACITÀ ARGOMENTATIVE IN CLASSE DI ITALIANO LS: UNA PROPOSTA DIDATTICA DEL CONTESTO UNIVERSITARIO MACEDONE	
Vesna Koceva, Jovana Karanikikj Josimovska	355

- 18. OERS AND LIFE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT AT THE UNIVERSITY**
Paola Polselli, Alice Fatone 365
- 19. ANALYSIS OF THE MOST FREQUENT ERRORS IN WRITTEN PRODUCTION
BY SERBOPHONE STUDENTS OF ITALIAN AS FL AS AN INSTRUMENT
FOR CREATING DIGITAL DIDACTIC MATERIALS**
Slađana Stanojević, Ana Petrović 393
- 20. PV GRAMMAR: EIGHT COMMUNICATION UNITS FOR ECONOMICAL AND COHERENT
GRAMMATICAL DESCRIPTION**
Roy Boardman 411

PART IV

TECHNOLOGIES IN LANGUAGE TEACHING: PROBLEMS AND NEW PROPOSALS

- 21. ASYNCHRONY: FROM CONSTRAINT TO RESOURCE IN DISTANCE TEACHING
AND LEARNING OF PORTUGUESE AS A NON-NATIVE LANGUAGE**
Cristina Martins 439
- 22. GAMIFICATION IN TECHNOLOGY-ENHANCED LANGUAGE LEARNING:
EXPERIMENTAL EVALUATION OF STUDENTS' ENGAGEMENT**
Agnieszka Pakula, Talia Sbardella 459
- 23. LEARN LANGUAGE AND DISCOVER CULTURE THROUGH SERIOUS GAMES**
Valerie McGrath, Kristin Brogan 477
- 24. UNLOCKING THE POTENTIAL OF CHATBOTS AND INTELLIGENT TUTOR
FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING IN ONLINE COURSES**
Giorgia Montanucci, Alice Peconi 497
- 25. EVALUATION AND VALIDATION OF INFORMAL LANGUAGE
ACTIVITIES WITH OPEN BADGES**
Benjamin Holt, Aleksander Wiater, Annick Rivens Mompean 519

22. Gamification in technology-enhanced language learning: experimental evaluation of students' engagement

Agnieszka Pakula, Talia Sbardella

Abstract: In recent years, the use of gamification in Technology-Enhanced Language Learning has become an innovative strategy to enhance students' engagement (Pujolà & Appel, 2020; Siemon & Eckardt, 2017). With the digital dimension, the game has assumed an increasing importance in contemporary society, as it allows students to experience their surroundings by implementing problem solving strategies not merely in informal learning contexts, but in all kinds of contexts (Jenkins, 2010). Through gamification it is in fact possible to pass from informal or unconscious forms of learning to formal or intentional learning. However, while more and more educators apply game elements to foreign language and second language teaching alongside the use of technology, there is still not much understanding of how to use gamification efficiently in the language classroom (Cahyani, 2016). This research aims to investigate the potential of gamified TELL to increase engagement in the process of Italian language learning while presenting the workshop conducted at the University for Foreigners of Perugia with students of different age, languages and cultural backgrounds. Two game-based learning platforms were used to create interactive activities and a questionnaire was administered so as to provide an experimental evaluation of students' engagement.

Keywords: Gamification; TELL; Learning Experience; Engagement.

1 Introduction

Engagement is a crucial factor that influences learners' interest and attention in second language (L2) learning. It can affect their willingness to participate, interact and communicate in the L2. One of the main sources of engagement is motivation, which can be divided into two dimensions: integrative and instrumental. The integrative dimension refers to the learners' desire to integrate with the social group that speaks the L2, and to learn about their culture and values. The instrumental dimension relates to the learners' personal and social benefits that can be gained from learning the L2, such as academic or career opportunities, or prestige. Both dimensions can play a significant role in enhancing learners' engagement in L2 learning. Gardner and Lambert's pioneering research (1972) highlighted the importance of cultural and ethnolinguistic attitudes and their impact on motivation

and learning outcomes. However, in the context of globalization and advancements in Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), Ushioda (2011) suggests that motivation to learn L2 should be rethought in terms of student's sense of identity as global citizens, capable of interacting with different cultures. Motivation research has evolved, encompassing various lines of inquiry, including social cognitive theory (Bandura, 2012), self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), and the study of learning strategies for achieving online and offline learning goals (Zimmermann & Schunks, 2001).

Even Deci and Ryan suggest that motivation can be classified into two types: intrinsic (autonomous) and extrinsic (controlled). Intrinsic motivation is driven by the pleasure of performing an action, while extrinsic motivation is based on external rewards. These two types of motivation are not necessarily opposed to each other and can exist on a continuum (Lombardi, 2013).

Technology is nowadays an integral part of students' daily lives, particularly for younger learners who expect a rich and stimulating learning environment that is conducive to autonomous and motivated learning. In this context, a gamified learning experience may help students to develop a stronger motivation, connecting concrete and hand-on experience, symbolic representations, and semantic concepts in increasingly engaging learning scenarios (deHaan, 2020).

Gamification is a methodological strategy that uses game design elements in non-game contexts to create engaging and effective learning experiences (Derding et al., 2011: 10). In this approach, elements present in the game such as levels, scoring, badges, feedback, and competition are generally used to stimulate learner motivation and emotional involvement and to increase collaboration skills, when scores are shared as a group. The students identify themselves in the role of player, driven by the desire to continue towards their goal. Each action of the user corresponds to feedback and, in the case of positive feedback, the gratification and reward stimulate the continuation of the game; in the case of negative feedback, it is possible to retry for a limited or unlimited number of times and the cycle repeats until the goal is reached. These mechanisms suit the contexts of physical and virtual presence: many platforms have features aimed at capturing users' attention or gratifying them with small prizes. Some tools to motivate and gratify users include congratulatory pop-ups appearing on a successful performance of an activity, Open Digital Badges released at the end of the learning path and small medals released upon completion of each stage with the aim of stimulating the user to collect as many as possible. Other elements are directly borrowed from the world of gaming and are present in various Learning Management Systems, such as the ability to view the progress bar, a real-time feedback, plug-ins to create "friendly" competitive activities between colleagues, etc. (Fischer et al., 2017).

Gamification has been widely applied in education for various purposes and benefits. According to Enders and Kapp (2013), gamification can help students feel as if they had power over their learning, create a more relaxed atmosphere in case of failure, have more fun in the classroom, make learning visible through progress indicators, and foster social interaction and peer collaboration. Gamification can also enhance students' cognitive skills, such as problem-solving, critical thinking and creativity (Zeybek & Saygı, 2023). Gamification can be used for different subject areas and levels of education, as well as for several types of activities and tasks, such as assessment, revision, practice, exploration, or discovery and can also be used for different modes of delivery, such as face-to-face, online, or blended learning.

Gamification can be implemented with or without technology. Nevertheless, the use of technology helps teachers keep records of the entire process in a gamified context and makes the teaching and learning processes more accessible (Alsawaier, 2018).

The gamified approach to language learning uses dynamics, mechanics, and components of the game to encourage the establishment of a behaviour. In psycholinguistic terms, it can also be defined as a motivational strategy: quoting Dörnyei (2001: 28): "Motivational strategies are techniques that promote the individual's goal-related behaviour [...]. Motivational strategies refer to those motivational influences that are consciously exerted to achieve some systematic and enduring positive effect." Dörnyei (2001) describes motivation in the language classroom as a dynamic process that can be divided into four phases. The first phase is the creation of a positive classroom environment and sense of purpose. The second phase is the generation of goals and objectives for the group and individuals and connecting materials to learners' needs and identity. The third phase is maintenance, which involves using stimulating techniques and promoting cooperative dynamics to maintain motivation. The final phase is closure, which involves reflecting on the work and providing motivational feedback and encouragement for personal progress and growth. Learning a language is a long and continuous process, so this model is understood as an iterative cycle.

On the other hand, Kapp (2012) identifies other four key components of effective gamification: goals, rules, feedback, and voluntary participation. As motivation plays a crucial role, in order to meet the student's needs, goals should be clearly defined, providing users with a sense of purpose and direction. The rules should be clear and transparent and should provide a framework for learning and exploration. Feedback should be timely and relevant and should provide students with insight into their progress and performance. Finally, voluntary participation is essential to create a sense of commitment and intrinsic motivation. Furthermore, the effectiveness of

gamification interventions needs to be carefully designed and evaluated to ensure targeted achievements and results. This requires a rigorous approach to assessment and evaluation and a willingness to adapt and iterate based on feedback and data.

Following the above-mentioned assumptions, an experimental workshop was designed to stimulate Italian language learning through gamification among students from different linguistic and socio-cultural backgrounds, thus allowing an intercultural confrontation. As the lesson topic, “speaking without words,” i.e. communication by means of gestures was proposed, non-verbal communication being integral part of the Italian culture. The experiment aimed to develop students’ strategic skills in the use and meaning of gestures in various linguistic registers, functions, and contexts, raising their intercultural awareness of non-verbal communication and facilitating comprehension of gestures in different cultural realities.

As Abercrombie (1968) famously remarked, “we speak with our vocal organs, but we converse with our entire bodies”. This statement illustrates the complexity of the ‘multidimensional’ effort needed to communicate effectively in a foreign language. Thus, the intercultural communicative perspective assumes that as we communicate with our entire bodies, it is necessary to develop simultaneously students’ linguistic, para- and extra-linguistic skills. Providing students with analytical tools useful for understanding the connotative aspect (specific of non-verbal communication) of the message as well as the denotative one (specific of verbal communication) results in a particularly relevant factor in developing communicative competence in the classroom (Caon, 2012). Therefore, the workshop aimed to provide students with such tools and to enhance their ability to interpret and produce gestures in a communicative situation.

2. Methodology

This section presents methodology applied in an experiment starting with the research questions (2.1), the research context and participants (2.2), experiment procedures (2.3), tools (2.4), and data collection and analysis (2.5).

2.1 Research Questions

The research goal of the experiment was to verify the potential of gamification to increase engagement in the process of Italian language learning en-

hanced by technology. Having defined the purpose of the study, the following research questions (RQs) were formulated:

RQ1: Does gamification in TELL increase student enjoyment?

RQ2: Does gamification in TELL increase student engagement?

RQ3: Does gamification in TELL increase student knowledge?

RQ4: Does gamification in TELL increase student satisfaction with the online language games?

RQ5: How does gamification in TELL affect students' performance and interaction in the classroom?

Thus, the five dimensions of analysis constitute students' enjoyment, engagement, knowledge, satisfaction with the online language games, and the students' performance and interaction in the classroom so as to provide an empirical study of the relationship between these factors in the gamified learning context.

2.2 Research Context and Participants

The workshop "I can speak without words. What's your superpower?" was performed among Italian and foreign students at the University for Foreigners of Perugia on the following days: 30th September 2022 and 4th October 2022. The participants are students from different socio-cultural, linguistic, and educational backgrounds that can be grouped into the following two research subjects:

1. SHARPER *European Researchers' Night* participants: 18 participants of Italian level: A1-C2/mother tongue, aged 9-31+, representing 5 different nationalities: Italian (8), Belarusian (7), both Italian and Belarusian (1), Russian (3), Senegalese (2), Yemeni (1).
2. Italian Language and Culture course students: 15 participants of Italian level: B1, aged 14-31+, representing 12 different nationalities: French (2), Japanese (2), Mexican (2), Afghan (1), Argentinian (1), Belgian (1), Chinese (1), Colombian (1), Ecuadorian (1), Swedish (1), Swiss (1), US (1).

The reason for choosing this particular research context and the group of participants was to analyse the data on the basis of the participants' different linguistic levels (A1-C2/mother tongue), age and nationality, and in particular to compare the results obtained from research group 1, composed of Italian native speakers and non-native speakers of Italian, and research group 2,

composed of non-native speakers of Italian. A total of 33 students completed the questionnaire, the survey results being presented in section 3.

2.3 Experiment Procedures

The experimental workshop was conducted according to the figure (Fig. 1). First, the lesson topic was introduced by teachers' presenting a dialogue with gestures and asking students to comment on that. Then the lesson on Italian gestures was taught using interactive online activities created on two game-based learning platforms, namely Wooclap and Kahoot!. During the lesson, the participants were observed by the teaching team from the perspective of general performance and interaction in the classroom. At the end of the workshop, students were asked to fill in an online questionnaire using Google Forms.



Fig. 1 Experiment procedures

The lesson on Italian gestures was structured in five phases, in which students were encouraged to interpret the meanings of gestures by challenging each other in the gamified environment. The first phase had two main objectives: to introduce the topic of gestures as a form of non-verbal communication and to make students aware of the different messages that gestures can convey in different cultures and contexts. The activity started with a brainstorming session, where students were asked to share their previous knowledge and experiences with gestures. Then, a video sequence on the Wooclap platform was presented, showing various gestures from different countries and regions. Subsequently, the participants were invited to make hypotheses, based on their observations and intuitions, on the possible meaning of the gestures presented in the video. The video was played again with subtitles that explained the meaning of each gesture so that the students could test their hypotheses and compare them with the actual meanings. Students were then asked to remember the most significant gestures and to answer some questions related to them (e.g. *Are some of these gestures also used in your*

country? Do they have the same or a different meaning? Are there different gestures to express the same meaning?). These questions were followed by a plenary debate which stimulated intercultural reflection and discussion among the students, raising students' awareness of the importance of gestures in intercultural communication.

The second lesson phase aimed to stimulate game-based learning and promote the development of strategic skills in the use and meaning of gestures in various registers, functions, and contexts. With this learning objective a Kahoot! quiz on Italian gestures was proposed to the participants. The quiz consisted of ten multiple-choice questions with several digital images in .gif format showing different Italian gestures, accompanied by four possible interpretations. Participants were invited to answer multiple-choice questions on their smartphones or computers in a limited time and additionally to interpret the meaning of the gesture, its function (personal, interpersonal, regulative, referential), context and typology (formal, informal / familiar, vulgar). For example, they had to decide whether a gesture meant "I'm hungry", "I'm bored", "I don't care" or "I don't know", and whether it was used to express an emotion, to regulate a conversation, to refer to something or someone, or to perform another function. The quiz was designed to challenge the participants' knowledge and understanding of Italian gestures, as well as to provide them with feedback and explanation after each question. The quiz also aimed to foster a playful and interactive atmosphere among the participants, as well as to stimulate reflection on the similarities and differences between gestures in mother culture and in Italian culture. Finally, the quiz served as a preparatory activity for the next lesson phase, which consisted in students' creating and performing their own dialogues using gestures.

The third lesson phase had three main objectives. The first one was to encourage the reprocessing of information through collaborative learning, which means that students had to share and discuss their knowledge and opinions with their peers. The second one was to implement interdependent strategies, which means that students had to rely on each other and coordinate their actions to achieve a common goal. The third one was to encourage learning autonomy, teamwork and creative thinking during different steps of the task, which means that students had to take responsibility for their own learning, cooperate with their team members and use their imagination and originality to solve problems. The collaborative task-based activity "Can you speak without words?" designed for this phase consisted in inviting students to work in small groups of three, four or five and to prepare a short conversation without words, that is with the only use of the gestures previously learnt. The conversation had to have a clear context and a coherent plot, such as a meeting between friends, a job interview, a family dinner, etc.

Once finished, each group presented the dialogue to their classmates, using only gestures and body language. All the participants were asked to pay attention and to provide feedback and comments on the performance, such as guessing the context and meaning of the gestures used, evaluating the clarity and coherence of the dialogue, suggesting improvements or alternatives, etc. The task was meant to enhance the students' ability to use and understand Italian gestures in a communicative situation, as well as to stimulate their creativity and collaboration skills.

The fourth phase aimed to stimulate the development of critical thinking and metacognitive processes among the participants. In this phase, students were invited to take part in a Wooclap Poll and to vote for the team that had achieved the best quality performance according to the criteria previously specified by teachers. The criteria included aspects such as the clarity and accuracy of the gestures, the coherence and originality of the plot, the interaction and collaboration among the group members, and the ability to elicit feedback and comments from the audience. The online tool Wooclap Poll allowed the participants to express their opinions and preferences in a quick and anonymous way and to see the voting results in real time on the screen. The activity was followed by a plenary discussion, in which the teachers provided their feedback and evaluation of each groups' performance, highlighting the strengths and weaknesses, and suggesting ways for improvement. The discussion also aimed to foster self-reflection and self-evaluation among the participants, as well as to raise their awareness of the criteria and standards for quality performance. It gave students the opportunity to compare and contrast different gestures and their meanings across cultures, and to reflect on the role and importance of gestures in communication.

The final lesson phase was designed to stimulate students' interest and curiosity about non-verbal communication and intercultural reflection in various situational contexts, both in class and after class. Each student received a small surprise gift at the end of the session: a piece of paper rolled up and tied with a wooden pencil and with a message inside: "Can you speak without words? Give your pencil as a gift with your message or exchange it with other students!". The students' task consisted in drawing their favorite gesture on the paper and writing a brief description of its meaning, function and context in different cultures. For example, the thumbs-up sign can mean approval, encouragement or hitchhiking in some cultures, but it can also be considered as offensive or rude in others. Finally, the participants had the opportunity to share their paper as a gift with other students in or after class. This conclusive task invited students to further exploration of gestures in different cultures, creating at the same time a positive and friendly atmosphere that promoted intercultural dialogue and exchange among students. Additionally,

the task stimulated students to use creative thinking to express themselves without words and to reflect on non-verbal communication as a source of diversity and wealth.

2.4 Tools

Two game-based learning platforms, Wooclap and Kahoot!, were used in the workshop to create interactive activities. Both represent a new generation of student-response systems that enhance student motivation and engagement through gamification. This section presents some of the main characteristics of these two tools (gamification elements, typology of questions) and their application for the research experiment.

Wooclap is an Audience Response System accessible from different devices such as laptop, tablet, personal computer, smartphone, designed to engage the audience and measure their understanding during presentations, lectures, or training sessions. The tool provides students with the possibility to carry out interactive activities and supports gamification features like points, badges, and leaderboards to make the activity more engaging and inspiring. It provides a tool for collecting answers in real-time and presenting them visually, thus allowing teachers to analyse event results and track participants' progress. It also reinforces learning through neuroeducation, based on the four pillars of learning: attention, active engagement, error feedback, and consolidation (Oulaich, 2019).

Wooclap can be easily integrated with tools such as PowerPoint, Google Slides, Keynote, Moodle, Microsoft Teams. The platform offers more than 19 types of questions for engaging students in learning and brainstorming their ideas (Brainstorming, Word Cloud, Open question), assessing participants' level of understanding (Multiple Choice, Poll, Find a number), supporting visually teacher's explanations (Audio/Video), soliciting visual recognition (Label an image, Find on image), collecting and comparing expert and student responses (Script Concordance Test and Judgement Concordance Test). The Wooclap event "I can speak without words. What's your superpower?" created for the workshop used the following four types of questions: Brainstorming, Word Cloud, Video, and Poll.

The second tool used in the experiment, Kahoot! is a game-based student response system (GSRS) learning platform that aims to make learning engaging combining enjoyment, interactivity, sociality, and accessibility. Thanks to the ease of use and the high possibility of customization, the tool is suitable for people of all ages and backgrounds. The concept of the platform is based on the Lecture Quiz research project at the Norwegian University of Science

and Technology, carried out in 2006, which developed and tested several prototypes over the years, founding that they enhanced student motivation, engagement, and learning through fun and social activities (Wang, Øfsdal & Mørch-Storstein, 2007; Wang, Øfsdal & Mørch-Storstein, 2008; Wu, Wang, Børresen & Tidemann, 2011).

Kahoot! was founded in 2012 with the aim of making it easy for teachers to create, play, and assess quizzes, and for students to join without registration, play, have fun, be competitive, and learn (Wang, 2015). The platform is accessible on any device with an internet connection and allows users to create, play, and share interactive quizzes, surveys, polls, and puzzles on any topic and subject. Players can join the activities by entering an in-game PIN or by scanning a QR code on their smartphones, tablets, or computers. The platform uses gamification elements such as points, leader boards, timers, music, and animations to create a lively and competitive atmosphere, and supports different game modes, such as team vs. team, player vs. player or challenge assignment, to suit different goals and preferences of learning. Additionally, it allows educators to monitor learners' progress and performance through reports and analytics. The quiz "Italian gestures" created for the activity consists of ten multiple-choice questions with pictures to verify the meaning of the gesture presented visually in each question.

2.5 Data collection and analysis

To evaluate the effectiveness and impact of the activity, different methods of data collection and analysis were used. As for qualitative data collection tools, a questionnaire "Gamification in Technology-Enhanced Language Learning" was created in Google Forms to measure the participants' perceived enjoyment, engagement, knowledge, and satisfaction with the online language games. The questionnaire used a five-point Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree and multiple-choice questions, as well as some open-ended questions to give students more space and liberty for expressing positive/negative aspects of the workshop. The collected data was analysed so as to investigate the differences between the responses from the two research groups. Additionally, students were observed during the workshop by the teaching team from the perspective of general performance and interaction in the classroom. The teaching team consisted of two teachers, who monitored the students' participation, engagement, motivation, collaboration and learning outcomes. The teaching team took also notes and recorded some of the students' performances for further analysis.

3. Results

The experiment results present differences in students' enjoyment, engagement, knowledge, and satisfaction with the online language games in regard to the research questions previously defined. The descriptive statistics are presented in the five categories of the five-point Likert scale: (1) Strongly Disagree, (2) Disagree, (3) Neutral, (4) Agree, (5) Strongly Agree.

3.1 RQ1: Does gamification in TELL increase student enjoyment?

Table 2 presents the questionnaire results for the two research groups for statements related to students' engagement. The results show that in general students perceive language online games as fun (statement 1), challenging (statement 2) and timepass (statement 3) although there is a statistically significant difference between the research groups with a total of 94.5% of the SHARPER participants (research group 1) expressing agreement and a strong agreement with the first statement compared to 80% of Italian Language and Culture course students (research group 2).

<i>Statement</i>	<i>Research group</i>	<i>Strongly disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly agree</i>
1. During this online language game session I had a lot of fun!	1	0%	0%	5.6%	5.6%	88.9%
	2	0%	0%	20%	53.3%	26.7%
2. While playing the online language games, I felt challenged.	1	0%	5.6%	16.7%	5.6%	72.2%
	2	6.7%	0%	33.3%	20%	40%
3. With the online language games, time has passed very quickly.	1	0%	0%	11.1%	5.6%	83.3%
	2	0%	6.7%	13.3%	26.7%	53.3%

Tab. 1 Student enjoyment

3.2 RQ2: Does gamification in TELL increase student engagement?

Table 3 presents the questionnaire results for the two research groups for statements related to students' engagement. The results show that language

games have provoked participants' curiosity (statement 4), that they felt motivated to complete the game (statement 5) and involved in the activities during the game (statement 6). As in the previous research question, there is a statistically significant difference between the research groups with 77.8% of the SHARPER participants (research group 1) strongly disagreeing with the sixth statement compared to 53.3% of Italian Language and Culture course students (research group 2). Not only did the SHARPER participants feel more involved in the activities but they also perceived themselves as more curious and more motivated to complete the game when compared to the second group.

<i>Statement</i>	<i>Research group</i>	<i>Strongly disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly agree</i>
4. The online language games have provoked my curiosity.	1	0%	0%	11.1%	0%	88.9%
	2	0%	6.7%	6.7%	46.7%	40%
5. While I was playing, I wanted to complete the game.	1	0%	0%	11.1%	11.1%	77.8%
	2	0%	6.7%	13.3%	60%	20%
6. I wasn't involved in the activities at all.	1	77.8%	16.6%	5.6%	0%	0%
	2	53.3%	40%	6.7%	0%	0%

Tab. 2 Student engagement

3.3 RQ3: Does gamification in TELL increase student knowledge?

Table 4 presents the questionnaire results for the two research groups for statements related to students' acquired knowledge. Again, there is a statistically significant discrepancy between the research groups with the majority of SHARPER participants (66.7% and 77.8% respectively) strongly agreeing that they have learnt a lot while playing the online language games (statement 7) and that they can apply the knowledge acquired to non-class related activities (statement 8). In comparison, 46.7% of Italian Language and Culture course students (research group 2) strongly agree with statement 7 and only 40% of them strongly agree with statement 8.

<i>Statement</i>	<i>Research group</i>	<i>Strongly disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly agree</i>
7. I have learnt a lot today while playing the online language games.	1	0%	5.6%	5.6%	22.2%	66.7%
	2	0%	6.7%	13.3%	33.3%	46.7%
8. I can apply the knowledge acquired with the online language games to non-class related activities.	1	0%	0%	5.6%	16.7%	77.8%
	2	0%	0%	13.3%	46.7%	40%

Tab. 3 Student knowledge

3.4 RQ4: Does gamification in TELL increase student satisfaction with the online language games?

Table 5 presents the questionnaire results for the two research groups for statements related to students' satisfaction with online learning games. The findings show that both research groups feel generally satisfied with their learning experience through gamification, the SHARPER participants resulting to be the more satisfied group. The majority of the first research group would like to repeat this experience (statement 9), will recommend it to other students (statement 10), and find it useful while learning a language (statement 11), with a total of 88.9% of the SHARPER participants expressing agreement and a strong agreement with statements 9, 10 and 11.

<i>Statement</i>	<i>Research group</i>	<i>Strongly disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly agree</i>
9. This is an experience that I would like to repeat.	1	0%	0%	11.1%	16.7%	72.2%
	2	6.7%	0%	26.7%	40%	26.7%
10. This is an experience that I will recommend to other students.	1	5.6%	0%	5.6%	5.6%	83.3%
	2	6.7%	0%	20%	53.3%	20%
11. This is an experience that I find useful while learning a language.	1	5.6%	0%	5.6%	5.6%	83.3%
	2	6.7%	0%	20%	40%	33.3%

Tab. 4 Student satisfaction with the online language games

3.5 RQ5: How does gamification in TELL affect students' performance and interaction in the classroom?

The results reported here are based on the teaching team's observation of how students performed their tasks and interacted in the classroom. Three types of interaction were observed: student-student interaction, student-teacher interaction, and student-content interaction. The following observations have been made for the two research subjects:

1. SHARPER *European Researchers' Night* participants: high student-student interaction: in the form of intercultural confrontation between Italian native speakers and non-native speakers of Italian, highly interactive peer collaboration and peer feedback; high student-teacher interaction: some open questions to the teacher during and at the end of the workshop expressing students' interest in the topic; high student-content interaction: all the participants got access to the learning platform, students' highly positive response to the system positive feedback (loud cheering on getting the correct answer). General performance: the class was involved in all the activities and highly responsive; the dialogues performed were all well-prepared and involved all the participants.
2. Italian Language and Culture course students: student-student interaction: in the form of intercultural confrontation between non-native speakers of Italian, scarcely interactive peer collaboration and peer feedback; high student-teacher interaction: open questions to the teacher during the workshop, students mostly asking for clarification; student-content interaction: all the participants got access to the learning platform, students' positive response to the system positive feedback (quiet cheering on getting the correct answer). General performance: most of the class was involved in all the activities and highly responsive; some students reported some technical or communication problems; most dialogues performed were well-prepared and involved all the participants.

The results based on observations of students' performance and interaction in the classroom confirm the questionnaire results, indicating the first research subjects, i.e., the SHARPER participants, as more collaborative and more involved in the activities when compared to the second research subjects. As far as general performance, student-student and student-content interaction is concerned, the findings show slightly more satisfying results among participants from research group 1, the intercultural confrontation between Italian and non-Italian participants influencing positively classroom dynamics in this gamified learning context.

4. Conclusions

This contribution has presented an experimental workshop with gamification applied to increase engagement in the process of Italian language learning enhanced by technology. Two research groups participated in the experiment working on two game-based learning platforms: Wooclap and Kahoot. Having defined the participants' profile in terms of a linguistic level, age, nationality, and game preferences, the research goal was to verify the effectiveness of gamification for learning Italian language and culture in terms of students' perceived enjoyment, engagement, knowledge, satisfaction with the online language games, and the students' performance and interaction in the classroom, thus providing an empirical exploration of the relationship between these factors in the gamified learning context.

The questionnaire results revealed students' elevated level of participation, engagement, motivation, and creativity during the workshop activities though with some differences in students' perception of their learning experience between the two research groups. The SHARPER European Researchers' Night participants reported higher levels of satisfaction, enjoyment, and interest than the other group, which may be related to the fact that the participants were mostly university students interested in academic research and motivated by curiosity and challenge. The findings from observations of students' performance and interaction in the classroom revealed similar results for both groups. Thus, peer collaboration between Italian and non-Italian participants contributed positively to the classroom dynamics and facilitated learning.

As for the future lines of research, further experimenting and collecting data has been planned with the aim of extending the group of research subjects and focusing on peer feedback and collaboration as the crucial element in language learning. The collected data will be then analysed based on the participants' different linguistic levels (A1-C2/mother tongue), age and nationality so as to verify the effectiveness of peer collaboration between Italian native speakers and non-native speakers of Italian when compared to that of non-native speakers of Italian.

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The year 2020 has recently been referred to as “the second year of MOOCs” (Shah, 2020). MOOCs are one of the most widespread means of development of education and a wide range of higher education institutions offer some kind of distance education through MOOCs. Open learning has progressively gained place in higher education, introducing new models of flexible tools linked to long-distance education. This volume presents Language MOOCs from a wide array of perspectives, framing them with respect to OERs and new available technologies. The authors of the chapters are higher education professionals, applied linguists, and language technologists working on issues related to language learning and teaching, namely: MOOCs, OERs, new approaches in language teaching and learning, academic mobility, linguistic description of languages, linguistic diversity, language for specific purposes, digital transformation in education and new educational technologies. The volume includes a selection of contributions presented at two international conferences organized within the project “Romance languages for Slavic-speaking university students” (LMOOC4SLAV), funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union.

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