

**ARTIGO** <https://doi.org/10.22481/praxisedu.v16i41.6474>**GAMIFICATION AS A TOOL FOR THE LEARNING OF THE ENGLISH  
LANGUAGE: THE EWB-UFS CASE****GAMIFICAÇÃO COMO UMA FERRAMENTA PARA O APRENDIZADO DE LÍNGUA  
INGLESA: O CASO DO ISF-UFS****GAMIFICACIÓN COMO HERRAMIENTA PARA EL APRENDIZAJE DEL IDIOMA  
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**Abstract:** The principles of the postmethod, defended by Kumaravadivelu (1994), lay the theoretical bases for the teacher to assume the protagonism of his/her classes, since he/she is seen as the only one capable of choosing the methodologies, techniques, and activities. In this context, after the discussions about the concepts of gamification in the EWB-UFS, teachers and coordinators planned a 16-hour course fully gamified. Thus, after a brief review of the literature on the subject, this paper describes the entire process of the Zombie-Apocalypse-course planning, highlighting the choices made based on the purposes of the script created and the principles of gamification theories. At the end, some considerations on the role of the script in the execution of the classes, the perceptions of teachers and coordinators on students' performance and the percentage of permanence of the pupils until the end of the course were pointed out.

**Keywords:** Gamification. English without Borders. English teaching.

**Resumo:** Os princípios do pós-método, defendidos por Kumaravadivelu (1994), lançam as bases teóricas para que o professor assumo o protagonismo de suas aulas, na medida em que é visto como o único capaz de escolher as metodologias, técnicas e atividades empregadas. Neste contexto, após as discussões sobre os conceitos de gamificação no Programa Inglês sem Fronteiras da UFS, professores e coordenadores planejaram um curso de 16 horas totalmente gamificado. Assim sendo, este trabalho tem como objetivo, após uma breve revisão de literatura sobre a temática, descrever todo o processo de preparação do curso Apocalipse Zumbi, apontando as escolhas feitas com base nos propósitos do roteiro criado e nos princípios das teorias da gamificação. Ao final, algumas considerações foram levantadas

sobre o papel do roteiro na execução das aulas, as percepções de professores e coordenadores sobre o desempenho dos alunos e o percentual de permanência dos alunos até o final do curso.

**Palavras-chave:** Gamificação. Inglês sem Fronteiras. Ensino de inglês.

**Resumen:** Los principios del post-método, defendidos por Kumaravadivelu (1994), sientan las bases teóricas para que el maestro asuma el papel de sus clases, ya que es visto como el único capaz de elegir las metodologías, técnicas y actividades empleadas. En este contexto, después de las discusiones sobre los conceptos de gamificación en el Programa UFS de Inglés sin Fronteras, los maestros y coordinadores planearon un curso de 16 horas totalmente gamificado. Por lo tanto, este trabajo tiene como objetivo, después de una breve revisión de la literatura sobre el tema, describir todo el proceso de preparación del curso Apocalipse Zumbi, señalando las elecciones realizadas en función de los propósitos del guión creado y los principios de las teorías de gamificación. Al final, se plantearon algunas consideraciones sobre el papel del guión en la ejecución de las clases, las percepciones de los profesores y coordinadores sobre el rendimiento de los alumnos y el porcentaje de permanencia de los alumnos hasta el final del curso.

**Palabras clave:** Gamificación. Inglés sin fronteras. Enseñando inglés.

## Introduction

The English without Borders (EWB) program was established in December 2012 through the Ordinance n. 1.466/2012. Its main goal was to provide students of Brazilian higher education institutions with the opportunity to take online and face-to-face courses, so they could be prepared for international certifications required by academic mobility programs (BRASIL, 2012). At first, the EWB program aimed to assist the Science without Borders (SWB) program in the academic mobility process, as it offered an English language course aimed at those who needed to achieve the TOEFL ITP Test score. Thus, the EWB program worked on the linguistic development of these students and proctored the TOEFL tests as part of the internationalization project that was in process in Brazilian universities. In 2014, with the Ordinance n. 973/2014 (BRASIL, 2014), EWB was amplified so as to include other languages, such as Spanish, Italian, Portuguese as a Foreign Language, German, and French. Consequently, it was entitled Languages without Borders (LWB); and it gradually became detached from the SWB. The new configuration of the program would also put emphasis on teachers' education, considering that undergraduate and graduate students could teach, write papers, and participate in online courses, conferences, and theoretical discussions (BRASIL, 2014). Thinking about the EWB as a teacher professional development program, we, at the Federal University of Sergipe, always sought to make possible new learning scenarios so that the teachers in training, given the vast

theoretical framework available, could make the most appropriate choices, considering teaching goals, the objectives of the program and students' context, when preparing their language classes.

At the Federal University of Sergipe (UFS), face-to-face courses have been offered to the academic community since the end of 2013 in hourly loads (which are the same for all the universities involved with the program) that vary among 16, 32, 48, and 64 hours. Taking into consideration that the teacher training program, which helps EWB teachers in their planning sessions, is based on the postmethod condition, defended by many authors, such as Kumaravadivelu (1994, 2006), it is important to highlight the main aspects of the training which will better explain the pedagogical choices. For this reason, we briefly discuss this theory in this paper. Besides the postmethod condition, classes are planned, in the EWB of the UFS, based on the Communicative Approach (LARSEN-FREEMAN, 2003), that is, putting communication as the main goal, but bearing in mind that teachers, and not methods or authors, are those who know their students and educational backgrounds, and because of that, techniques of any other method or approach can be included. So, the postmethod condition (KUMARAVADIVELU, 2006) is part of lesson planning because the teachers are encouraged to test all kinds of activities (from any method or approach) and create new ones, based on the observation of what happens in class. By doing so, teachers analyze the results of these activities in class, therefore, theorizing from their own practice and practicing their theory. Thus, the teachers are educated to understand theory and practice as indissociable, as it has been defended in the scope of Applied Linguistics and of Education. In addition, EWB teachers consider students' needs and focus on engaging them in the class and on motivating their participation. For this purpose, gamification can be considered as an ally because it is able to increase motivation – both extrinsic and intrinsic (BUSARELLO; ULBRICHT; FADEL, 2014). It is important to mention that EWB courses are not pre-determined. Even knowing there is a national catalogue, from which teachers and coordinators have to choose the courses which will be offered to the academic community, all the classes have to be planned from scratch. Students enroll in the courses according to their interests, therefore a specific student may sign up for an oral skill course, due to the student's lack of fluency, for example, but not all students who are registered have the same level of proficiency. So, according to students' needs (vocabulary, themes, grammar, pronunciation) or interests, identified in the classes, the course planning will follow different directions.

Considering the need to engage students in EWB courses, once participation is optional and the levels of evasion are high, working with gamification is a choice that may solve these issues and contribute to students' motivation, which makes more studies that correlate gamification with motivation for learning a foreign language necessary. Besides, gamification, by making a class more playful, may cause participants to feel more open to use the target-language as a consequence of lowered affective filters. This research also justifies itself because games are a language that many people understand (especially kids, teenagers, and young adults), and this also needs to be investigated and analyzed in the context of the learning process. As Silva (2019) explains, teachers must discuss and analyze game logics before taking any action towards implementing gamification in classes, given that playing does not necessarily result in critically comprehending the issues surrounding its implementation; hence the need to work with this topic in teachers' formation.

Therefore, this paper aims to analyze an EWB course, *Zombie-Apocalypse*, in which gamification was implemented. Literature review underlying this study includes texts of authors like Caponetto, Earp and Ott (2014), Garland (2015), and Kapp (2012). Regarding the methodology, this paper is a qualitative (LAVILLE; DIONNE, 1999) and bibliographic research, based on action-research. The latter "involves a self-reflective, systematic and critical approach to enquiry by participants who are at the same time members of the research community." Its aim is to solve problems found in the research context and/or change practices, informed by critical decisions (BURNS, 2015, p. 188). The issues addressed in an action research vary according to the needs of the school, and they might be related to one class, to the whole school, etc.

Besides the introduction, this paper is organized in four topics: defining gamification, gamification and the concepts of language and teaching, gamification in an EWB course, and further considerations. In the first topic, we discuss the concept of gamification and its implementation in the educational field. In the second one, we focus on how gamification and concepts of language and teaching should be balanced and thought through in the process of designing a gamified course or class. In the third topic, we analyse EWB courses from the perspective of the above-mentioned theory. Finally, we draw some conclusions, considering the discussions presented in this paper.

## Defining gamification

Although the term “gamification” was coined for the first time in 2002, it was not until 2011 that it started to be used in titles of papers that addressed education. The studies show a rapid growth in 2013, when around 66% of papers on the topic were published, as a research reveals (CAPONETTO; EARP; OTT, 2014). These authors explain that the interest on gamification goes beyond its country of origin, the United States of America; the concept is also discussed in other places like Canada, Romania, UK, and Brazil.

In order to define gamification, we should consider the root of this concept: games. According to Koster (2005, p. 35), there are some common elements among the many attempts to define games, namely simulation, a formal system with defined rules that include choice-making and conflict, and the creation of a “world” which is not connected to reality. However, the author claims that games are real because they are related to the way through which our brain perceives things – including reality itself; the only difference between reality and games is, according to him, that “stakes are lower with games”. He also adds that games are puzzles that challenge the player who attempts to solve them; when they master abilities and/or accomplish the goal of a game, their brains release endorphins into their system and the feeling of fun is identified.

Koster (2005) points out some elements a successful game should have: preparation, the stage in which players get ready to face a new challenge; a sense of space; a solid core mechanic, defined as a rule that harbour content; a range of challenges that take place within the rules defined for the game; a range of abilities required to solve the encounter; and skills required in using the abilities. In order to transform the experience of playing a game into learning, the author adds some components, namely a variable feedback system, that is, the games’ response to players’ actions should be unpredictable and in constant change; the Mastery Problem must be dealt with in such a way that it prevents the game from being too easy; and failure must have a cost.

In summary games, according to Kapp (2012, p. 9, author’s highlights), consist of a system in which

[...] a **player** gets caught up in playing a game because the instant **feedback** and constant **interaction** are related to the **challenge** of the game, which is defined by the **rules**, which all work within the **system** to provoke an **emotional reaction** and, finally, result in a **quantifiable outcome** within an **abstract** version of a larger system.

The expressions in bold refer to what the author considers to be the key elements of a game, especially a learning game. The author explains that gamification is the application of the concept of games into other contexts and it has the power to foster engagement. There are some key elements in the definition of the term, as Kapp (2012) points out: game-based, which means applying game elements; mechanics, that is, levels, points, and rewards; aesthetics, in other words, the user interface with which the player interacts; game thinking, defined as transforming a daily activity into a gamified experience; engage, one important goal in gamification; people, the players; motivate action, the source of energy that encourages the player to complete the challenges; leaning promotion, since gamification is based on educational psychology, many of its elements are instructive and used in classrooms; and problem solving, which means going through challenges to accomplish the final objective. The author highlights that the most important of the above-mentioned elements is game thinking. In addition, he discusses what is not gamification; it should not be reduced to rewards because they are just one of the characteristics of the concept which is complex and, especially in education contexts, involves commitment to the learning process.

Garland (2015) utters that gamification does not have to include all elements; it may exclude one of them, like aesthetics, for instance, if we consider an offline experience. This is where it differs from another, quite similar, concept: serious games – in which game elements are used to create a course, not to change an existing one, like in gamification.

Another aspect related to gamification is the motivation – also important in the process of learning. Busarello, Ulbricht, and Fadel (2014) explain that there are two types of it: intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. The first one comes from the individual himself or herself; it is not caused by the outside world. The person, therefore, gets involved in the activity because the process is the aim itself, and by doing it positive feelings are awakened. Differently, the latter involves the external world's stimuli; the goal is the reward. When designing gamified experiences, the challenge is to balance the encouragement of both types of motivation, being careful not to focus only on extrinsic rewards because they can destroy intrinsic incentive.

Busarello, Ulbricht, and Fadel (2014, p. 20) also talk about the importance of the construction of a narrative:

The narrative experience is generated in the individual through the act of accompanying – reading, watching, listening, etc. – a story, as well as playing [a game]. This narrative experience leads to a cognitive experience which is

translated into an emotional and sensory construct of the individual when he gets involved in a structured and articulated life.<sup>1</sup>

When a person plays a game, he or she gets immersed in its narrative by changing the story, making choices that will reshape the game character's reality; ergo, the player is the active subject of reality. Differently from the experience of watching a movie, for example, in which the person can only see the actions taking place with no possibility of changing the outcomes, in a game, this person is able to live the narrative and be active in the process of making choices and changing the directions the story can follow. This contributes to engaging the player even more. The narrative should have clear rules included; they are important in shaping the players' behavior, so they can go through the challenges. Finally, engaging in a game must be a volunteer action; otherwise, motivation will not be increased, and the development of the experience will be compromised.

Even though discussions regarding gamification started to increase in 2013, its elements are not new, they have been used by the military and teachers themselves. It is also possible to find its implementation in other sectors, such as health and marketing. However, our focus here is on education. In this field, gamified activities take place mostly in higher education (CAPONETTO, EARP; OTT, 2014), but it can be used in other levels of instruction.

Considering the education field, Kapp (2012, p. 14) warns that teachers should not think of gamification as the solution to all of the problems that may be faced in a classroom, for it is not a neutral system applicable in every situation; we should "stay focused on using gamification for the right learning outcomes". The author emphasizes that designing a gamified experience is not an easy job; it involves a team that works extensively to achieve their objectives. It is crucial to build a script that includes:

- the overview of concept, that is, the goal and target-audience of the game, as well as its main theme and its type;
- an outcome, which is the result of the game;
- instructional objectives that ensure that the learning expectations are becoming reality within the gamified experience;
- description of the characters, if they are involved in the narrative;
- description of the game environment, in other words, where the story happens;

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<sup>1</sup> The quotes translated from Portuguese to English are the author's responsibility. Original version of the quote: "a experiência narrativa no indivíduo é gerada tanto pelo ato de acompanhar – ler, assistir, ouvir, etc. – uma história como o de jogar. Essa experiência narrativa leva a uma experiência cognitiva, que se traduz em um constructo emocional e sensorial do indivíduo quando este se envolve em uma vida estruturada e articulada" (BUSARELLO; ULBRICHT; FADEL, 2014, p. 20).

- description of the game play, basically, what occurs in the game;
- reward structure, which is deciding how to reward the player.

Kapp (2012) states that it is important to test the game in order to see if it complies with the script in practice. That is the only way we can analyze if the plan can be put into action. He draws attention to the fact that we have to play the game to see how it really works.

### **Gamification and the concepts of language and teaching**

It is important to understand the concepts which are behind a gamified class before we decide to prepare one, since every activity that is introduced has to be seen as a tool that may promote learning as a final result. Gamification may be responsible for the establishment of a fun environment, but the main objective of the class cannot be forgotten. Leffa (2016) emphasizes that what matters is how we use social media in the educational context, that they are not responsible for improving the learning process by themselves. It is our contention that this is also true for gamification.

The author explains that language is a means of interaction and we use it to talk about ourselves, the world around us, and to act upon the others. However, this concept of language is often not put into practice; instead, classes are focused on grammar – on the deductive explanation of structures. Leffa (2016) adds that frequently language is approached as a phenomenon to be explained, that is, teachers give explanations about it by using students mother tongue, not the target language. Therefore, students learn about English, not through its use, and that is why we decided to gamify some EWB classes. Our courses are not based on the sole teaching of grammar structures, since our objective is to prepare students to use the target language in academic contexts, reflecting on language usage and promoting some reflections, taking into consideration students' positioning when facing problems and new situations.

Interaction is a keyword in language teaching and should be promoted in class by providing students with the opportunity to talk with each other and to negotiate meanings. Grammar is not to be considered an end itself, but a means of developing communicative competence (KUMARAVADIVELU, 1994; MATTOS; VALÉRIO, 2010). When planning a class or a course, it is crucial to consider how and from which perspective language will be taught. This is not different with gamification.

When analyzing the app Duolingo, Leffa (2016) gets to the conclusion that although it is an up-to-date app, it works on language in a way that was done a long time ago: there is no



context, language is fragmented in sentences that very often make no sense. The app is gamified, it is easy to use, and it can be used anywhere. Hence, it is advanced when we consider technology; yet, its approach towards language is not. The author (LEFFA, 2016, p. 153) draws the following conclusions: “(1) technology needs to consider language teaching; (2) language teaching needs to consider technology; (3) what matters is not technology, but how it is used.”<sup>2</sup>

The use of gamification is not the goal, it is a possibility of motivating students and potentializing language learning. That is why the approach to language in the course we will analyze is based on principles which privilege inductive language teaching as it is identified in the Communicative Approach. The latter holds that language should be used to achieve communication goals, instead of being understood as a set of grammar rules to be learned (MATTOS; VALÉRIO, 2010), but it is not just the usage of an approach, since the teacher plays an essential role in this process and can mix methods and approaches according to their practices, and can even experiment new practices and techniques, based on their class observations and analysis. The postmethod condition (KUMARAVADIVELU, 2006) also emphasizes teachers’ autonomy and the study of the teaching context when (re)planning classes, and that is vital for this process, since their previous knowledge and beliefs, associated to the class observations, will help the educators in the decision-making process when planning their classes. They take the Communicative Approach principles as initial guidance; however, their choices are based not on this approach theory, but on their choices, the theories that have been reshaped during this process. This is in consonance with Kumaravadivelu’s (2001, p. 551) claims:

Teachers create and re-create personal meaning when they exploit and extend their intuitively held pedagogic beliefs based on their educational histories and personal biographies by conducting more structured and more goal-oriented teacher research based on the parameters of particularity, practicality, and possibility.

Inserted in this environment that favors autonomy, students have the opportunity to interact and to negotiate meanings as a group; grammar is not the goal, it is a means of discussing and making decisions. Take, for instance, the activity of the second class, which will be further explained in the following topic, in which students had to interview each other in order to get to know their classmates and adventure partners. The structure of a question was

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<sup>2</sup> Original version of the quote: “(1) a tecnologia precisa conversar com o ensino de línguas; (2) o ensino de línguas precisa conversar com o ensino de línguas; (3) o que interessa não é a tecnologia, mas o uso que se faz dela” (LEFFA, 2016, p. 153).

worked out later, based on what students already knew about it, on what they had used to do the interviews; therefore, grammar was approached inductively – having students observing and analyzing language in use to come to conclusions about its structure (LARSEN-FREEMAN, 2003). There was a purpose to learn grammar, a communicative end. In summary, gamification and language teaching must be balanced and thoroughly worked on.

### **Gamification in an EWB English Course**

The course under analysis in this paper has English as the target-language and is situated in the EWB context held at UFS. To analyze it, we are going to describe the process related to classes preparation and to the context in which these classes were designed, connecting this process to the theory that is behind the action research method. According to Burns (2015), the action research is processed in a cycle based on the following steps: plan, action, observation and reflection. Taking this model as a starting point, in the first phase, teachers and coordinators discussed some texts on English teaching methods, communicative approach, action research, the postmethod condition, and gamification.

Following the postmethod premises, principled pragmatism is defended rather than simple eclecticism. It is not about using different techniques from various methods and by doing so ensuring that the class was based on the postmethod condition. It is necessary to have a “sense of plausibility” developed, meaning that teachers have to understand what is done in class, instead of mechanically varying activities from a given list. In order to guide teachers into this classroom-oriented journey, Kumaravadivelu (1994) lists ten macrostrategies which have to be respected:

(a) maximize learning opportunities, (b) facilitate negotiated interaction, (c) minimize perceptual mismatches, (d) activate intuitive heuristics, (e) foster language awareness, (f) contextualized linguistic input, (g) integrate language skills, (h) promote learner autonomy, (i) raise cultural consciousness, and (j) ensure social relevance. (KUMARAVADIVELU, 1994, p 32).

Analyzing the macrostrategy “activate intuitive heuristics”, it is understood that Kumaravadivelu (1994) wants the teachers to enrich the linguistic environment so that the learning process may occur in such a way that students grasp grammar rules inductively, without being exposed to explicit grammar explanations, accompanied by a set of exceptions and special cases that make students’ lives difficult and may lead to demotivation. Given that, it is necessary

[...] to provide enough textual data so that the learner can infer certain underlying grammatical rules. A good deal of grammatical information can be conveyed not directly through rules but indirectly through examples. Learners should be encouraged to find the rule-governing pattern in the examples provided. (KUMARAVADIVELU, 1994, p 36).

By following the author's directions, it is evident that postmethod is not against grammar teaching, but invites teachers to reflect on the way grammar teaching has been taught before they choose the methods or approaches to be employed in their classes or even the new theories which will be developed or techniques that will be a result of what will be theorized.

After that, teachers planned the whole gamified course, as it will be described, under the supervision of coordinators. In the second stage, the gamified class was conducted, and the impressions were noted by the teachers who were in charge. Observation and reflection were then put in practice, when the class was analyzed in terms of participation, usage of language, interaction and students' opinions on the experience provided.

After discussing the concepts of gamification and theoretical studies about the potential of this practice in our pedagogical development sessions, three gamified courses were planned and put into execution; we are going to describe the planning process of one of them. Therefore, we will explore the way in which gamification can be used for teaching the English language in an academic context, focusing on the planning stages, involving coordinators and teachers, as well as the classes development.

In our pedagogical development sessions, it was emphasized that there was no need to involve all the elements of gamification in the courses which were about to be prepared, in consonance with Garland's contention (2015). Two teachers were willing to work with gamification, and gamified courses were offered in 2014, 2016 and 2017. Among the available elements which could be selected, it was decided that our courses would have a script (without a script it is impossible to think about gamification), collaboration, games and phases (or stages). The course was analyzed according to the following procedures: study of the objectives of the lesson, explanation of the lesson plan, description of the activities used, and analysis of the classes which were prepared and taught.

Initially, the Apocalypse Zombie course was offered with the objective of working on the necessary structures for locomotion and direction in unknown environments, which is a reality in the lives of students and teachers in academic mobility, since they need to interact with many new people, learn how to follow directions and start to establish a new routine. There is a communicative goal; grammar is a means to achieve it, as the Communicative Approach

defends. The objective was also established considering the teaching context, the purpose of the EWB program, and students' needs. When planning gamified classes, one must not forget the pedagogical goals which have to be defined before the gamification elements to be incorporated in the lesson; for, gamification is a tool to achieve the pedagogical objectives in a way that motivates students (KIM, 2015).

Because it was the first time one of the teachers got in contact with gamified classes, a 16-hour course was planned, level A2 of the European Common Framework, under the title of *English Language Cultures*. Considering the level is important in a gamified course because, as Koster (2005) puts it, participants have to feel challenged in order to want to continue playing, which means that the tasks cannot be too easy; on the other hand, they cannot be too difficult. In both cases, players are likely to give up on the game. The activities, therefore, had to be adequate to students' level (A2): challenging, but not impossible to do.

The course was divided into eight two-hour classes. The first one was called zero class and had the objective to promote interaction among the students and offer them opportunities to get to know each other, as well as the teacher. Students had heard about the course and its approach and had to decide if they wanted to be part of it, because participating in a gamified experience has to be a volunteer choice (BUSARELLO; ULBRICHT; FADEL, 2014). There were other non-gamified courses and students could have moved to them if they wanted to, but all of them decided to take part in this course. The course itself started in the following class. The purpose of the second class was to work on personal questions and directions. So, the teacher started the class saying that the group was chosen to be part of an academic mobility program in Los Angeles, where they could conduct their research in the University of their choice. In order to get prepared for the trip, everyone would have the opportunity to get to know a bit of Los Angeles, taking into consideration that they would do some research there and needed to know something about the city and about their colleagues. To get to know each other, they would go through a quick two-minute interview, so that the students would be seated in two queues, facing each other. Every two minutes, they would have to change partners and ask personal questions to almost all of them. The structure of the questions was worked out later. The narrative, an important element in gamification (BUSARELLO; ULBRICHT; FADEL, 2014), starts from the second class; hereupon, everything is part of the plot which was fictional, given that it included zombies, but kept its connection to the rules of reality, creating a world that "felt real", as Koster (2005) explains it.

After this initial phase, the teacher interrupted the class saying that a radio news had just been broadcasted, and everyone would have to listen to it. It was an audio recorded by the teacher himself in which it is narrated that the country had been invaded by zombies and that they would have to flee quickly. The only requirement was that everyone should do it together. Since not all cities were safe, only groups that deciphered a few riddles could go to this new city. The students, therefore, had to collaboratively decipher the messages that led them to New York City (NYC). In groups, they would have to answer a quiz, to know a little more about the city. Faced with the points they had known, they would have to split up to get to know the city, so that everyone could stay together by the end of the class, in a safe place.

In trios, they discussed about important places they could go to in NYC, making a list of important objects they could take along to help them during the zombie outbreak. Many of them may have seen something about NYC on the news, magazines or TV shows, but in order to help those who know almost nothing about it, the teacher stuck some pictures on the walls with some brief information about the main touristic sites. After that, the entire class would have chosen the touristic places they wanted to visit since they were in a safe place and as the zombies would not be there, they could try to enjoy the city peacefully. They would have to look at the NYC map and find the places they had chosen. After finding them, they were supposed to guide the others towards this place by giving them the correct direction. That was the moment for them to study directions by using the real map of NYC. As a final activity, they would have to decide, together, where to go to buy a new phone, since the ones they had were not working anymore. The phone could be useful, considering that it would be easier for them to communicate among themselves and to check the news to see if the city would continue free of zombies. The class finished when the teacher told them that NYC was about to be invaded, and that they would have to move to a new place. They had to wait for a phone call to get new instructions, but, meanwhile, they would have to decide, collaboratively, which objects they could leave behind. Students, both in the previous and in the following activities, had to interact in order to win the challenge, that is, interaction is related to the rules of the game – another element of gamification that Koster (2005) explains. This happened through the English language which was a way to achieve a goal, working as a communication instrument.

In class 3, students received a phone call from someone who managed to escape the zombie attack, telling them that the city of Boston was safe. Everyone then decided to go to Boston, taking only the objects that had been previously selected. To avoid cultural shock, students had to list all the adjectives which could be used to describe Boston, according to them,

and to share the information they had about this city. By doing so, the access to the city could be granted, if they had included in their list at least five adjectives announced by the person who made the call, since that was the required password. While they were waiting for the password confirmation, the teacher worked on the use of adjectives, focusing on adjective order. The confirmation came and all of them were finally in Boston. Famous landscapes and places were presented by the teacher, and students were supposed to choose the perfect hiding place so that they could be protected from the zombies. In order to convince the others to go to a specific place, students had to use the adjectives they had been exposed to. Two places were top voted: Trinity Church and Boston New England Aquarium, but students decided to go to the Church. They were put as active players, responsible for making decisions that would change the direction of the narrative. This is another aspect that can be included in gamified experiences, according to Busarello, Ulbricht, and Fadel (2014).

Then students were divided into three teams, each group was responsible for one of the following: safekeep supplies (check water, get food, get medical supplies), lookout (watch, be on alert) and check the radio (listen, avoid static). In order for them to be able to complete the new assignments, they should list the words they would need to carry out the task, taking into consideration the appropriate survival English. Online dictionaries could be used. Taking advantage of the acquired vocabulary, students would have to answer some vocabulary questions, and for each correct response, they would have the opportunity to get some supplies, such as a bottle of water, a can of beans and rice, a slice of bread, and so on. At that moment, the teacher announced that another message had been intercepted, asking everyone to head off as quickly as possible to Boston Harbor because many zombies had been spotted close to where they were. While the teacher investigated the veracity of the message, students found a history book and took advantage of their spare time to study a little about the history of the city and the Boston Tea Party in the 1770s<sup>3</sup>, and how that event impacted Boston's history and its struggle against tyranny from England. At that time, the simple past was worked out, always in association with the story presented and students' opinions about the events that had occurred.

At the end of class 3, the students had to decide whether or not to follow the recommendation found in the intercepted message, since, according to the teacher's findings, it was sent by a captain of the port, whose mental record was not very favorable. He was in the U.S. Navy, had fought in the Gulf War and lost his family in L.A. in an earthquake 5 years

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<sup>3</sup> It was a protest against the act that allowed Britain to sell tea in America without paying taxes apart from the ones in the Townshend Act. The sons of liberty threw the chests of tea that were transported in ships into the Boston harbor.

before the outbreak. After losing his family in this earthquake, he was diagnosed as having some kind of mental illness. Even fearing for the possible proximity of the zombies, the students found it very dangerous to go to Boston Harbor, and as they were afraid it could be a trap, they decided to go to the airport and get the first available international flight.

At the beginning of the following class (the fourth one), the teacher announced he had bought them airline tickets to Ireland since the US had proved to be dangerous. The departure was immediate and while they were in the airplane, they began to study on the folklore of Ireland, taking advantage of some activities and quizzes that focused on the history of the fairies, the dances, and songs. From then on, music and dances were compared between what had been presented on Ireland and the songs and dances of Brazil, using, for that, the comparative of equality, superiority and inferiority (grammatical topic of the lesson). As soon as the plane landed, they realized that the zombies were also in Dublin, but the zombies there were mesmerized by music, and that could be used in their fights against the zombies. Everyone tried to kill the maximum number of zombies as possible to the sound of *Thriller*, of Michael Jackson, and in order to do so, students would have to answer some questions about comparatives in pairs. For each correct answer a zombie would be killed, but for each wrong answer the zombie infection would grow. Before the final correction, students could check the answers with the other groups, and if 70% of the class answers were correct, they would neutralize the zombies that were at the airport. In this activity, another aspect of gamification was incorporated: failure must have a cost (KOSTER, 2005). If students could complete the task they would be rewarded – they would be able to eliminate the threat, the zombies. However, if they failed, the enemy would win, and they would not be able to survive in the game. As the activity was supposed to be completed collectively, everybody could help each other in the search for correct sentences, as long as they finished the exercises before the song ended.

With almost all correct answers, students were relieved, but realized they could not stay in Ireland any longer. They decided to take another flight to a different country. Thus, in the following class they would discover the new route, since they had to continue their search for the cure of the zombie infestation which was the ultimate goal of the gamified course.

At the beginning of the fifth class, the teacher asked students to listen to a message recorded by an American scientist saying they had found the cure for the zombie infestation and the survivors were supposed to meet him in Africa for the shot. That would be their last trip, considering that the zombie apocalypse would soon be interrupted. During the flight, they watched the *Lion King* cartoon trailer and had to write a summary, containing the following

structures: In the beginning there was ...; What really happened was ...; People may not like ... But I do, because ... With this activity, pupils would work a little more on the past, and would have a new opportunity to practice this grammatical structure and to work on vocabulary related to family trees, based on the story of Simba. So, before they could talk about their families, students completed the Simba Family tree. It is important to highlight that the plot that is created when gamification is taken place may be used in order to make classes more dynamic and interesting, not just in terms of fluency but also related to the way grammar is taught and exercises are conducted. Having a more involving and interactive class is part of the goal pursuit by a teacher who decides to work on gamified activities or classes, dealing with grammar more inductively and collaboratively.

When landing, students needed to familiarize themselves with the names of the animals in Africa, from a competition in which, divided in groups, they would have two minutes to write the names of all the animals presented. After the two minutes, the winning group would be responsible for collecting the names of the animals that the other groups had remembered and present these names to the teacher, who would use the result obtained as the password required to leave the airport. By doing so, they would have to choose a place to go (by looking at some pictures brought by the teacher), collaboratively, planning what they would do in the chosen place. After working on the future, each group planned a day of fun in a different place, since they all came up to the same conclusion: they deserved a fun day off, after struggling against a zombie infestation. The plans were presented, and everyone voted on the best itinerary (the groups could not vote for theirs).

Upon arriving in South Africa, students were notified that the scientist who had discovered the cure was there, and if they got the vaccine they would be saved. The professor suggested that they made an announcement trying to call the scientist's attention, and they had to choose one of the following genres: newspaper, radio, or TV ad. They chose to make a newspaper ad. The teacher worked with the students on the characteristics of a newspaper ad, talking about the vocabulary and structures which were expected from the headline to the body of the ad. Each group made its announcement and the best one was elected. They then sent the ad by email and while they were waiting for some contact from the scientist, they were answering some exercises about the future. The supposed response to the announcement came in the form of an audio that had already been recorded by the teacher, in which the scientist responded by saying that he had received the message and that everyone would be vaccinated. This was the final moment of the course, which was celebrated by all, as they had all



incorporated the roles of fugitives from the zombie outbreak and healing meant salvation. Class 6 was no longer in the gamification format, and it was all about a review. In classes 7 and 8 students were evaluated by following an oral presentation format. They all had to talk about one of the countries visited, seeking more information about them and talking about their discoveries. At the end of the presentations, a feedback session was held, in which students received feedback on their progresses and evaluated the course. The group was composed by 10 students, who remained from beginning to end of the course and indicated that the motivation for the classes was greater than the one verified in other courses that they had done in the EWB, since the created story made them feel part of something special and the non-attendance would mean the lack of a component in search of healing and consequent salvation of the whole group.

The Apocalypse Zombie course followed a script that contained, according to the elements pointed out by Kapp (2012), the overview of concept, that is, target-audience (students and workers of UFS), the main theme (a zombie attack), and the goal of working on the English language to solve problems and survive the attack. There was, therefore, an outcome: getting the vaccine that meant the salvation of the whole world. The instructional objectives were checked in the oral evaluation, the moment in which the teacher could evaluate if the lesson's objectives were accomplished. The story took place in an apocalyptic reality in which the characters had to travel to different places in the world, such as Boston, Dublin, and South Africa, in order to survive. The rewards of the game were means of outlasting, like food, water, and health supplies, and the final one was the vaccine.

It is also important to highlight that the gamified course had a narrative well-constructed with phases, in which a whole parallel reality was built. Narratives, as we discussed before in this paper, are an important element in gamification, according to Busarello, Ulbricht, and Fadel (2014); they contribute to students' engagement because they can participate in the story by really changing its course and making choices actively. In this context, students had to become characters, people trying to survive a zombie attack.

### **Further considerations**

It is important to emphasize that every time we decide to prepare a gamified class or course that focuses on language learning, we must remember that our planning has to promote interaction between the participants, so they have the opportunity to use the language and construct knowledge together. The main objective in adopting gamified practices should be to

promote learning, taking as a starting point the productions which are observed when students are in contact with each other and not to offer a sequence of dynamic games to make the class enjoyable.

In view of this understanding, it is necessary to highlight that the decision to offer an English language course fully gamified in the EWB program at UFS was only possible due to the theoretical discussion that was carried out, since teachers had to understand the main concepts of gamification and to get in touch with some examples of gamified classes.

For Zichermann and Cunningham (2011), 12 mechanics can be used in the planning of classes, so that the script can evolve, and the students can interact in the best possible way. Of the twelve listed mechanics, the activity of the Zombie Apocalypse contemplated six of them: pattern recognition - students should identify the patterns to be followed so that the zombie threat could be neutralized; collecting - students worked together to collect objects and pieces of information that would be important for the outcome of activities; surprise and unexpected delight - throughout the class students were surprised with new announcements about the proximity of the zombies, which happened at different moments of the classes, always thinking about the element of surprise as a motivating one; recognition for achievement - as the students needed to recognize the new environments, and get familiarized with new routines and practices, they were able to continue in the game, searching the cure; leading others – it was also an important element in this class, since cooperative challenges were always inserted and students were only able to overcome the challenges imposed by working in groups on the leadership of some students; and the last one of them, nurturing, growing - students needed to preserve the conquered environments, since they had to protect themselves until they could finally defeat the zombies.

By analyzing the progress of the course and its results, it can be said that the ultimate goal was achieved as the students felt motivated and assumed the roles of survivors to a zombie attack. In all classes, the feeling was that of seeking salvation, which was achieved in the end. The steps were all fulfilled in a collaborative way, always moving from one level to another to each class, from the problem solving in a collaborative way, and always in search of a prize, which, in this case, was the possibility of escaping the zombie attack. In each class, and from each plot drawn, the students worked on the English language, and activities of grammar and oral practices were conducted. By accomplishing certain activities some prizes were collected and the feeling that the final objective would be accomplished by the whole group was growing after each class. Students did not just have fun, but interacted in the target language, developed

fluency and worked on accuracy, since the grammar points which were selected were well explored in class.

Working with gamification is to get out of a person's comfort zone and accept that class planning is a continuous rebuilding process. Student responses should guide new decision making, which helps the teacher to experience concepts such as flexibility and resilience. To throw ourselves into the unknown is actually an act of courage if we take into consideration that comfort zone warms us, but at the same time, it limits us too. At first, no EWB-UFS teacher was interested in working with gamification, signaling the fear of the unknown as the main deterrent. But the idea of gamifying a class began to flourish among teachers, who, each day, seemed to be more interested in experiencing gamification and placing it among their methodological options and not as something impossible to be understood and worked on.

With gamification, it is possible to work with new possibilities of building knowledge from the insertion of contextualized and meaningful game mechanics, which can help the teacher to put the students in the mood of the class, by having a dynamic script. Grammar is not trivializing, but rather allows the creation of a parallel or virtual environment in which the student is inserted and is motivated to follow the steps and guidelines, with the objective of completing the requested tasks and, at the same time, working on students' own linguistic development.

Considering that about 30% of the students enrolled in the English without Borders classes end up dropping out of the course throughout Brazil, it is relevant to verify that all the students enrolled in this gamified class have remained until the end. When asked about the main motivation for the completion of the course, it was common the claim that the non-attendance would imply a collective loss, and the possibility of failure of the team as a whole. Thus, it can be verified that the gamified classes can be capable of encouraging motivation among foreign language learners.

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