

## Gamification as an active methodology in English language classes

### ARTICLE

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### Abstract

This paper aims to study the practice of games and recreational activities in English language classes, focusing on the use of active gamification methodology. The research was carried out in a 9th grade class at a public school in the Alto Oeste Potiguar region. The general objective of this study was to analyze the use of games and recreational activities in English language classes as a stimulus for the development of student learning, also highlighting whether the teacher is applying gamification as an active methodology for teaching this curricular component. This is a mixed approach research, with theoretical studies based on authors such as Lima and Barbosa (2024), Nascimento, Silva and Morais (2019), Martins (2016) and guiding documents such as the PCNs (1998) and the BNCC (2018). The reflections indicate that games and recreational activities, if used appropriately, can stimulate English learning in the school researched.

**Keywords:** English Language. Gamification. Learning.

### A gamificação como metodologia ativa nas aulas de Língua Inglesa

### Resumo

Este trabalho tem por objeto de estudo a prática dos jogos e das brincadeiras em aulas de Língua Inglesa com foco na utilização da metodologia ativa gamificação. A pesquisa ocorreu em uma turma do 9º ano de uma escola pública da região do Alto Oeste Potiguar. O objetivo geral deste estudo foi analisar a utilização de jogos e brincadeiras pedagógicas nas aulas de Língua Inglesa como estímulo ao desenvolvimento da aprendizagem dos alunos, destacando, também, se o professor está aplicando a gamificação como metodologia ativa para o ensino nesse componente curricular. Trata-se de uma pesquisa de enfoque misto, com bases teóricas fundamentadas em autores como Lima e Barbosa (2024), Nascimento, Silva e Morais (2019), Martins (2016) e nos documentos norteadores, como os PCNs (1998) e a BNCC (2018). As reflexões apontam que os jogos e as brincadeiras, se utilizados de forma adequada, podem estimular o aprendizado de Língua Inglesa na escola pesquisada.

**Palavras-chave:** Língua Inglesa. Gamificação. Aprendizagem.

## 1 Introduction

With technological advances and the expansion of media that provide rapid information on a large scale, it is necessary to make the classroom an attractive and interesting space for students. When it comes to foreign language teaching, there is greater resistance and disinterest on the part of students in participating in classes in an engaged manner, hindering the development of essential skills for their basic education.

English is a compulsory subject from the 6th grade onwards (Brasil, 2017) and is relevant to students' multilingual education, as it is an international language spoken by people in many countries, from different cultures and with diverse linguistic repertoires. In this way, school can be an environment for interaction and learning for children and adolescents when methods and strategies are used that arouse interest in learning the content proposed for the students' life project.

For the teaching-learning process to be effective, it is necessary to adopt active methodologies, such as gamification, which promotes interactive participation in the classroom, where students become dynamic agents in the construction of their own knowledge, using game mechanisms. Thus, we decided to develop a study based on the following problematic question: how is the use of educational games and activities aimed at student learning in English?

From this perspective, we defined the general objective of this study as analyzing the use of educational games and activities in English language classes as a stimulus for student learning, also highlighting whether teachers are applying gamification as an active methodology for teaching this curricular component.

To this end, we conducted a mixed-method study (Sampieri; Collado; Lucio, 2013), using two questionnaires as instruments for collecting information, one applied to students in a 9th grade class at a state school in Rio Grande do Norte located in Alto Oeste Potiguar, and the other to the English teacher who teaches that class, as we will detail later.

This study is relevant because it investigates and analyzes the use of games and play for educational purposes as methodological teaching strategies that can stimulate and

enrich teaching practice, especially for teachers of English language courses, thereby expanding opportunities for student learning development.

## 2 Methodology

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This study has a mixed research approach. In this type of methodological procedure, there is a combination of quantitative and qualitative aspects. For Sampiere, Collado, and Lucio (2013, p. 550), mixed-method research is characterized by “[...] the systematic integration of quantitative and qualitative methods in a single study, the purpose of which is to obtain a more complete picture of the phenomenon.”

Two questionnaires were used as research tools for collecting and discussing information, and were administered in person. A questionnaire was administered to 30 students in a 9th grade class at a state school in Alto Oeste Potiguar. The questionnaire consisted of six questions, two of which were completely open-ended and four of which combined multiple-choice options and justifications (Table 1, a posteriori).

The questions focused on students’ perceptions of English language teaching and learning and the use of educational games and activities in classes for this subject. The questionnaire was administered during the month of December 2024. It is worth mentioning that the 9th grade class was chosen because it is the last year of middle school; therefore, these students can report more accurately on their learning at the end of this stage of education.

Another questionnaire was administered to the English teacher of the aforementioned class. This instrument consisted of three questions, the first two with a combination of multiple-choice options and justifications, and the third completely open-ended (Table 2, a posteriori). The application took place simultaneously with that of the students. The questions addressed the pedagogical activities carried out by teachers with a focus on the use of games and play in English language classes.

It is important to note that all participants were informed of the purposes of this research and its educational goals, and freely and knowingly agreed to participate, as formalized by signing the Free and Informed Consent Form.

### 3 Results and discussion

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In today's world, society demands excellence in the global job market. So, people can prepare themselves for job competitiveness and an effective life in a globalized society. In this sense, knowledge of the English language can be an advantageous tool for getting a good job. Given this, many people who understand its importance and who have favorable financial conditions seek out private schools that teach languages in order to become qualified. Hence, providing quality English language instruction in public schools is an educational mission and a form of social inclusion.

It is worth noting that the National Curriculum Parameters (PCNs) determine as objectives for middle school that students be able to “question reality by formulating problems and trying to solve them, using logical thinking, creativity, intuition, critical analysis skills, selecting procedures, and verifying their adequacy” (Brasil, 1998, p. 8). Thus, teaching this curricular component provides students with a well-rounded education, with the aim of enabling them to understand and act in contemporary society in a critical and transformative manner for their own well-being and that of those with whom they interact.

In this perspective, offering English in the curriculum promotes a liberating force in education, as learning this language should not be the privilege of only the elite social classes. “Learning a foreign language sharpens perception and, by opening the door to the world, not only provides access to information, but also makes individuals, and consequently countries, better known to the world (Brasil, 1998, p. 39). Thereby, as it is a language that is socially valued around the world and spectacularized by the media, English disseminates literature, culture, art, economics, customs, among other aspects of countries, through a major global expansion.

The English language is used hegemonic ally in the global context in business, science, academia, music, literature, cinema, among others. Thus, quality English teaching in public schools is a way of preparing students to exercise citizenship, as they can become protagonists, acquiring critical skills to understand and actively participate in an increasingly competitive society.

In this context, the BNCC (2018) defines that:

the study of the English language can provide everyone with access to the linguistic knowledge necessary for engagement and participation, contributing to students' critical agency and the exercise of active citizenship, as well as expanding the possibilities for interaction and mobility, opening up new paths for knowledge building and continuity in studies. It is this formative character that places English language learning within a conscious and critical linguistic education perspective, in which pedagogical and political dimensions are intrinsically linked (Brasil, 2018, p. 241).

However, there are many difficulties in teaching and learning English in public schools, namely: overcrowded classrooms; lack of ongoing teacher training; few weekly classes; lack of language labs with teaching resources to enhance learning; and student demotivation. In light of these challenges, it is important for teachers to interact well with students, creating a classroom environment that values the activities carried out, so that students feel emotionally comfortable, including during the assessment process.

This means that teachers must advise, coordinate, direct, lead, encourage, motivate, stimulate, share, accept, listen, respect, and understand their students. You must put yourself in their shoes so that the other language does not seem "foreign" to them, that is, strange to them, but rather as the language of other people, which they gradually learn to appreciate and increasingly learn to make sense of (Brasil, 1998, p. 82).

Therefore, being a teacher requires continuous training, in which they are able to understand social changes and the new demands that arise as a result of these transformations. Therefore, educators must provide a welcoming environment for students, guiding them so that they can be active participants in the community with a critical and proactive mindset, defining their identity in a space where they can achieve personal and academic success in line with the demands of contemporary society.

To meet the demands of the contemporary world, English teachers cannot be merely language technicians. They need to be interculturally competent language educators. Teaching English involves not only linguistic and didactic aspects, but also aspects related to culture and society in general (Megale; Magalhães, 2021, p. 34).

English teachers can develop various activities in the classroom, such as projects involving cooking, traditional festivals, cultural gathering with music and literature, seminars on economics, geography, customs, traditions, population, history, politics, accounts of experiences abroad, among other aspects related to the language. “It is up to the teacher to make, within their means, every effort possible to maintain the motivation of students who already have it and to awaken it in those who are unmotivated” (Fernández; Callegari, 2009, p. 48). To this end, dynamic activities in the form of competitions and rewards can be prioritized to motivate them to build their learning in an enjoyable and autonomous way.

It is worth noting that many students feel stifled in the classroom because the information provided by teachers fails to capture their attention within their socio-historical context, which consequently leads to disinterest, making the class monotonous. In this scenario, teachers need to rethink the teaching-learning process, seeking active methodologies that promote greater engagement among their students. Therefore, we argue that active methodologies can make it easier for students to learn English, as they “enhance the development of skills and abilities, encompassing not only content and concepts, but also the processes necessary for knowledge construction. Thus, they contribute to the comprehensive education of students” (Megale; Magalhães, 2021, p. 122).

Nowadays, in order to achieve professional success, it is necessary to obtain qualifications in order to compete in the labor market and outperform your competitors. In the school context, students are developing skills to achieve competencies that can be useful throughout their lives, whether personally, intellectually, and/or professionally. Given the challenges of social interaction, knowledge of foreign languages can be essential for active participation in society. In this sense, being a teacher requires knowledge, skills, and competencies that awaken in students the desire to learn. Therefore, incorporating



games and activities into the classroom for educational purposes can be a good strategy for motivating students to engage in English language activities.

In the context of this complex and dynamic society, where people compete for places at universities, in the production and dissemination of scientific knowledge, in the job market, among others, it is essential that schools keep up with certain developments in order to prepare their students to play a leading role on the local, national, and global stage. In foreign language teaching and learning, gamification can be an effective way to engage students. Duolingo is one example. Through this app, millions of people in different countries learn languages in an interactive and gamified way.

Thereby, “educational apps have focused on engaging students through lighthearted and fun learning, based on narratives, charismatic characters, reward systems, and short tasks” (Araujo, 2022, p. 6). Therefore, for students who are accustomed to screen games, Duolingo can be an effective learning tool, as it is easier for them to engage with this gamified universe.

In this sense, active methodologies – such as gamification – can be applied to English language teaching and learning. “Active methodologies are based on the idea that knowledge construction occurs collaboratively and assign students an active role in this process” (Megale; Magalhães, 2021, p. 122). Hence, teachers play a fundamental role in finding attractive methodologies to motivate students to learn a language. For example, “the fact that they do not practice speaking the foreign language and the distraction found in very crowded classrooms can compromise students’ motivation” (Fernández; Callegari, 2009, p. 43).

It is important that games and activities are used in English language classrooms to motivate students to learn the language in an enjoyable and fun way. In recent decades, the proposed method of teaching foreign languages is one that provides effective communication.

It is within the communicative approach that the proposed activities are clearly associated with motivation: the greater the interest in the content and procedures, and if there is some kind of challenge to be overcome, the greater the motivation

of the students. Along the same lines are recreational activities, also included in this approach and equally linked to the motivating factor (Fernández; Callegari; Rinaldi, 2012, p. 38).

The use of games and play is part of an active teaching methodology called gamification. According to Araujo (2022, p. 5), “gamification means adopting certain principles of game mechanics to promote engagement and even commitment from a specific group of people in a given situation.” In the educational context, specifically applied to English language teaching, mechanisms such as rewards, bonuses, prizes, and rankings, among others, can serve to stimulate students in a competitive environment in order to make them protagonists in the development of classroom activities and, consequently, apply the knowledge acquired in skills and competencies in society.

To meet the objectives of this study, we developed and administered a questionnaire to 9th grade students. See the following research instrument in Table 1:

**Table 1 – Questionnaire for 9th grade middle school students**

1 – Do you enjoy studying English? If so, mention your favorite activities in this subject. If not, explain why. ( ) Yes                      ( ) No
2 – In your opinion, how important is it for us to learn English? Explain.
3 – How do you rate your knowledge of the English language? Comment. ( ) Great                      ( ) Good                      ( ) Regular                      ( ) Bad
4 – Do you use any games in your extracurricular activities? If so, please mention which ones and why you play them. If not, please explain your answer. ( ) Yes                      ( ) No
5 – Name some games and/or activities you participated in during English classes from 6th to 9th grade.
6 – Do you think that participating in games and/or activities in English classes contributes to greater learning? Justify your answer. ( ) Yes                      ( ) No

Source: prepared by the authors.

All 30 students enrolled in the 9th grade responded to the questionnaire. Regarding the first question, it was found that 15 students like to study English (50%) and 15 do not like it (50%). Let's look at Graph 1:



**Graph 1 – Interest in studying the English language**



Source: prepared by the authors.

On the one hand, students who enjoy studying English find it interesting because it is an attractive spoken language, with pleasant pronunciation and cultural curiosities that spark their interest. Soon, some of them said they participated in dynamic activities, such as memory games. Others read books, listen to music, write texts, and do written exercises requested by their classroom teacher. Therefore, “playfulness becomes an indispensable tool in teaching and learning English, based on the idea that these playful activities make the class an indispensable attraction and a magnet in which students absorb content and vocabulary more efficiently” (Nascimento; Silva; Moraes, 2019, p. 6).

On the other hand, students who do not like studying English reported that they have many difficulties understanding the language in its written form, especially in oral communication, and therefore feel unable to learn it. Furthermore, they believe that they will never participate in a real communicative situation using the English language and that this curricular component is irrelevant to their life plans. It was also pointed out that the classes lack interactivity and consist only of activities that must be answered by students and corrected by the teacher. This was evident in the responses, through statements such as: *“English is useless,” “I can’t understand anything in English,” “without the teacher’s help, I don’t even know what’s being asked on the tests,” “why study English if I never leave my city and will never leave Brazil,” “I don’t think English is important for my life.”* These

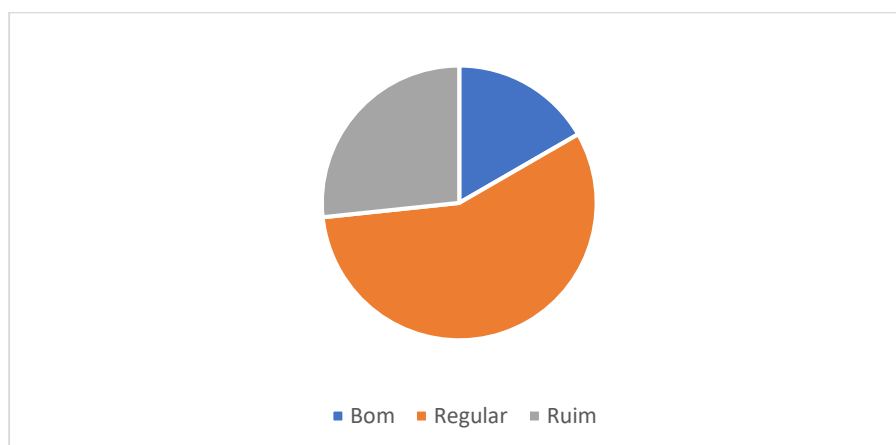
reports clearly show the low value placed on the English language in the students' perception.

On the second question, students expressed the opinion that English is relevant, given that it is the universal language of the contemporary world. Thus, knowledge of this language facilitates communication with people from other countries, expands job opportunities, promotes immersion in new cultures, contributes to international tourism, and enables deeper academic studies.

Thus, studying English enables students to broaden their horizons in terms of communication and cultural, scientific, and academic exchange, thereby opening up new paths to access, knowledge building, and social participation. It is this formative character that places English language learning within a conscious and critical linguistic education perspective, in which the pedagogical and political dimensions are intrinsically linked (Brasil, 2018, p. 199).

When asked in the third question to self-assess their English language learning, no one considered themselves excellent, 5 students believe they have a good knowledge of the language (16.6%), the majority (17) consider themselves average (56.7%), and 8 consider their learning to be poor (26.7%), as shown in Graph 2:

**Graph 2 – Knowledge of the English language**



Source: prepared by the authors.

Students who consider themselves to have GOOD English language skills report having a good vocabulary and say they can read and interpret short texts, as well as write a few sentences. However, they have difficulty understanding and producing oral texts.

Those who have REGULAR learning, on the other hand, mention understanding some words in songs, dialogues, and short texts. In addition, they know some grammar rules, identify cognate words, and other more accessible vocabulary for better translation. It is also mentioned that there is mastery of basic vocabulary, such as colors, objects, fruits, animals, numbers, among other topics.

Finally, students who consider their knowledge of English to be BAD reported that they are unable to understand or write simple words, sentences, and short texts in that language. However, it is worth noting that “in general terms, what learning a foreign language will do is: increase the knowledge about language that the student has built about their mother tongue, through comparisons with the foreign language at various levels” (Brasil, 1998, p. 28).

When asked in the fourth question about the use of any games in their routine, 22 students (73%) responded that they play at least one game, while 8 (27%) do not use any games in their daily routine. Let us look at Graph 3:

**Graph 3 – Use of games in everyday life**



Source: prepared by the authors.

The students mentioned the following games played in their routine: Brawl Stars, My Singing Monsters, Rent Please, Valorant, Roblox, FIFA Soccer, Free Fire, Cooking Rage, Skullgirls, Cookie Run Kingdom, Cooking Fever, Minecraft, Genshin Impact, board games, dominoes, UNO, pool, and cards. They also stated that when they play, their stress levels decrease, they relax, and it is a great form of entertainment, in addition to providing interaction with other people, increasing their friendships. As we can see, 73% of students are familiar with some kind of game.

In this context, games gain ground as an ideal tool for foreign language learning, insofar as they stimulate students' interest, who see games as a factor in the development of different levels of their personal and social experience. The game helps you make new discoveries, develops and enriches your personality, and symbolizes a pedagogical tool that elevates the teacher to the status of guide, motivator, and evaluator of learning (Martins, 2015, p. 11).

In this perspective, the inclusion of educational games can be a fundamental strategy for improving learning in English language teaching. Students who do not play games claim that they do not like the activity and consider it unnecessary. In Brazil, foreign language teaching has been oriented toward a communicative approach, which aims to develop the skills necessary for effective communication, enabling students to play a leading role in contemporary society. From there, students can experience a variety of social activities in their routine, such as games and play, as it is conceivable that classroom practice should approximate this reality in order to produce knowledge that makes sense for the student's life.

To this end, classroom practice should be based on authentic materials typical of the student's social life, on contextualized language excerpts beyond the sentence, and focusing on the four language skills, since knowledge of a language, according to the communicative approach, requires that its user be able to use the language to read, write, speak, and listen – skills present in everyday social life (Tílio, 2015, p. 54).

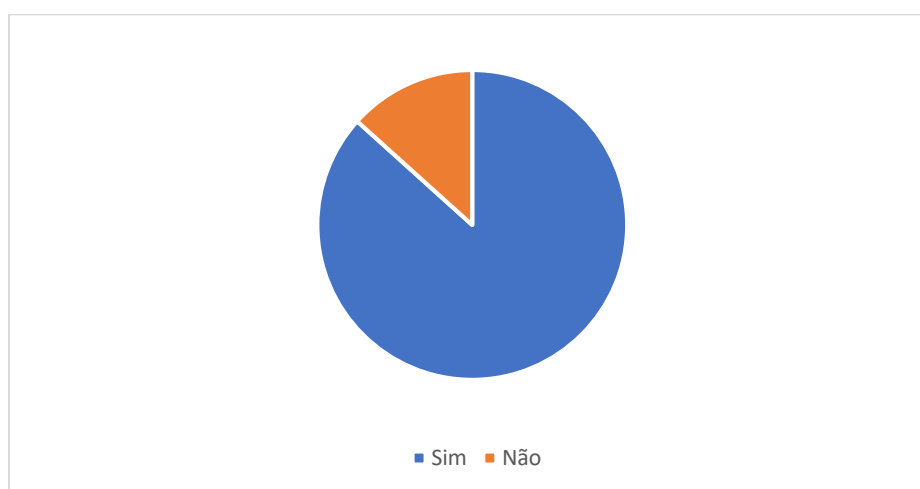
Regarding question 5, 26 students reported that they did not participate in any games or activities in classes of this curricular component in middle school (6th to 9th grade). However, four students mentioned playing word searches and other games that associate

words with pictures. Based on the aforementioned, it is evident that gamification is not yet fully utilized in teachers' pedagogical practices. This active methodology consists of using game principles for educational purposes.

We suggest that language teachers use playful activities through games that challenge students' intellect in their pursuit of knowledge of the target language. Planning and researching innovative activities can contribute to the meaningful absorption of the content taught, internalizing it through diverse and enjoyable exercises and activities. With the use of recreational games, teachers can also choose to divide students into groups, promoting interaction and information sharing among them (Nascimento; Silva; Moraes, 2019, p. 4).

Finally, in the sixth question, 26 students surveyed (87%) believe that participating in games and/or activities in English classes contributes to greater learning. Four (13%) believe that it does not contribute at all. See Graph 4.

**Graph 4 – Contribution of games to English language learning**



Source: prepared by the authors.

The students who answered affirmatively justified that playing games can make classes interactive, dynamic, attractive, and interesting, as it contributes to greater concentration and increases creativity, making it easier for them to learn in a fun and enjoyable way.

In this sense, activities involving the language of games, scripted according to age group, can be integrated into everyday school life, promoting collaboration and socialization, awakening logical thinking, stimulating creativity, and leading to the use of strategies. In addition, these activities teach how to deal with competition, contribute to respect for diversity, and encourage the exchange of ideas, stimulating the desire to achieve goals. They can also help in overcoming defeat (Lima; Barbosa, 2024, p. 19).

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That said, we reaffirm the need to incorporate teaching practices based on the use of games and play in schools, specifically in English classes, as this is a methodological strategy that can increase students' interest in learning essential content for developing the language skills and competencies that are fundamental to their educational development.

When assessing students' perceptions of the use of games and play in the classroom, we felt the need to also understand what teachers think about this and whether they use gamification as an active methodology for teaching and learning English. Thus, we developed and applied the following questionnaire, shown in Table 2:

**Table 2 – Questionnaire for 9th grade English teachers in middle school**

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|--|
| <p>1 – Do you enjoy teaching English? If so, please mention your favorite activities in this subject area. If not, please explain your answer.<br/>( ) Yes                      ( ) No</p> <p>2 – Do you use games and activities in your teaching practice in English classes? If so, please mention what these activities are and why you use them. You can mention games and activities that you have used in English classes from 6th to 9th grade. If not, justify your answer, pointing out the difficulties in using games and activities.<br/>( ) Yes                      ( ) No</p> <p>3 – In your opinion, how relevant is gamification in middle school English classes? Are there any difficulties in using it? Please explain.</p> |
|--|

Source: prepared by the authors.

Regarding the first question, the teacher states that he enjoys teaching English and believes that reading is essential for his students' learning. According to him, "*reading activities lead us to reflect on a wide variety of topics and, consequently, help students build knowledge for life.*"



Regarding the second question, the teacher replied that he does not use games and play as teaching resources in English classes because “*the lack of collective planning and the absence of practical tools make it difficult to engage in these new teaching methodologies for this curricular component.*” We can infer from the teacher’s response that his situation is similar to that of many others throughout Brazil, because he works double shifts and is responsible for many bureaucratic tasks, which consequently leave him overloaded with work and with no time to seek continuing education in refresher courses that cover new teaching methodologies. So, complacency and a lack of initiative on the part of teachers to make their classes more appealing can make English language teaching monotonous.

As an alternative to make classes dynamic and attractive, teachers can use analog games, as well as digital games for educational purposes, in their teaching practice to facilitate learning in English. Therefore, we suggest playing games and activities such as: Quiz, WordBrain, Scrabble, Stop!, Pictionary, Snakes and Ladders, The Game of Life, Clue, Red Light Green Light, Duck Duck Goose, Memory Game, Scramble Words, Running Dictation, Draw Something, Bingo, Hangman, Guess the Song, Guess the Singer, among others.

In question 3, the teacher acknowledges that gamification can aid student learning because of the entertainment and socialization it provides. However, the teacher cites a lack of time and teaching resources as obstacles to applying this active methodology in the classroom.

Games and activities in the classroom can promote cooperation and interaction among students. They can be used to facilitate learning and not as a distraction for the class, as these playful activities should be designed and carried out with educational purposes in mind to make learning effective and meaningful. It is worth noting that teachers should not overuse games and play, as not all students enjoy recreational activities. Furthermore, the use of these teaching tools should involve the content being covered in class as a strategy to consolidate learning.

In this sense, games can help reduce student shyness, increase concentration and creativity, and challenge them to learn. It is therefore up to the teacher to make good use of this teaching resource so that these playful activities do not become trivialized and achieve their educational purpose, which is to facilitate student learning. Therefore, if the active methodology of gamification is used in the classroom, the teacher can focus on the student's progress in a personalized way, considering their progress in overcoming difficulties through the challenges proposed, using the logistics and mechanisms of games for educational purposes.

## 4 Conclusions

It was found that half of the students surveyed enjoy studying English and that most consider their level of knowledge of the language to be REGULAR. Students feel motivated by participating in games and activities, enabling greater learning in English in a dynamic, interactive, and enjoyable way.

We can say that it is possible for students to be motivated in the classroom to learn English through playful activities, such as games and play. This may be because 26 of the students surveyed (87%) believe that participating in games and activities in English classes can contribute to greater learning. In addition, most already use games in their daily lives for a variety of purposes, and they also recognize the importance of studying this language.

It is worth emphasizing the need for effective public policies that offer continuing education for teachers in the area of foreign languages so that they are familiar with active methodologies and can apply them in the classroom in order to provide their students with dynamic and engaging lessons.

Outside of school, students experience language practices such as analog and virtual games involving the English language. Thus, teachers could better accommodate their students' affinity for games and play and incorporate it into the teaching-learning process in the school context in a dynamic way.

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