Game Sense To Improve Students' Knowledge And Skills In English Language Learning And Teaching Practices.

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Medellín

2022

GAME SENSE TO IMPROVE STUDENTS' KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS IN

ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING AND TEACHING PRACTICES.

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Trabajo de grado para obtener el título de licenciado en inglés y español

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2022

Abstract

In this thesis I intend to show the importance of game sense, an element of video games. In order to understand the use of this concept in educational environments, I analyzed some video games in which I am actively involved, in other words, how they helped me to improve my experience and my game sense, and how the latter helped me to improve my skills. In addition to that, I looked for some experts on the subject who helped me to realize the value that Game Sense could have in second language learning environments. Therefore, this work focuses on how gamer as teachers use their background gaming experience and adapt it to ESL classes, especially talking about game sense.

The method used to collect the information regarding game sense is associated with digital autoethnography, which allows us to see the understanding of our experiences in the different game contexts to analyze them and apply them as a resource to improve skills in a second language in the school context.

Keywords: Gamer, skills, game sense, context.

Resumen

En esta tesis pretendo mostrar la importancia del game sense, un elemento de los videojuegos. Con el fin de entender el uso de este concepto en ambientes de educación, analicé algunos videojuegos de los cuales soy activamente participe, es decir como estos me ayudaron a mejorar mi experiencia y mi Game Sense, y como este último me ayudó a mejorar mis habilidades. Adicional a eso, busqué algunos expertos en el tema los cuales me ayudaron a darme cuenta del valor que podría llegar a tener el Game Sense en ambientes donde se aprenda una segunda lengua. Por lo tanto, el propósito de este trabajo se centra en cómo los gamer como profesores utilizan su experiencia de juego de fondo y la adaptan a las clases de ESL, especialmente hablando del sentido del juego.

El método que se usó para recolectar la información referente al sentido del juego está asociado con la autoetnografía digital, la cual permite ver la comprensión de nuestras experiencias en los diferentes contextos de los juegos para analizarlas y aplicarlas como recurso para mejorar las habilidades en un segundo idioma en el contexto escolar.

Palabras clave: Gamer, habilidades, sentido de juego, contexto.

Statement Of The Problem

Education is constantly changing, and its methods and strategies are the main targets of these changes. Recent conversations have also questioned the role of gaming experiences in education. For instance, some studies (e.g, Hamari et al., 2014) see the concept of game inside the gamification core as an academic topic relatively young. Others (e.g. Zirawaga et al., 2017) see it as a distraction to learning, but at the same time its role is used to increase, engage and motivate students to develop and improve certain skills. . As educators and researchers explore the culture of video games, there is a better understanding that playing them is not just about spending a certain amount of time and leaving them. The gaming experience entails commitment in terms of time trying to learn more about a game. (Sánchez-Rodas & Sanmartín-Arango, 2020). This experience gives us a sense of what we can find if we explore the gaming environment more deeply, allowing gamers to interact with several elements that will improve our skills and knowledge inside the game.

We already know video games play an essential role in our life, Granic et al. (2014) say "Video games are a ubiquitous part of almost all children's and adolescents' lives… playing for at least one hour per day" (p. 66). We learn some specific aspects that we can later use in our daily life, using our video games' knowledge to create strategies to solve a problem. According to research about gamification, "it seems evident that typical video game features such as playability, advanced graphs, attractive rewards, level of the challenges adapted to the players' skills and amusement contribute to increasing motivation and implication in the learning process" (Ozma et al., 2015, p. 2268). These aspects are related to game sense, or the way to introduce students to a new learning process because it will allow them to acquire educational content and skills while playing.

As a result, the gamer starts interacting with game elements to improve in-game. That would be the primary goal. This interaction, according to Figueroa (2015),

Has as the main objective increasing the participation of a person, which most of the time is called or mentioned as an "user", and motivates them by incorporating game elements and techniques, like leaderboards and immediate feedback. This creates in the users a sense of empowerment and engagement in the way they work through processes and achieve tasks (p. 38).

Game elements include points, leaderboards, progress bars, levels, avatars, rewards, etc. All these elements have a different purpose inside the class, and the teacher could adapt them to any educational environment. Through game elements, students in every class have a distinct objective that focuses on winning by defeating obstacles to achieve a specific task to receive their rewards and occupy the top of the leaderboards. The works mentioned above strongly motivate students to improve their skills in every class and become the best in the classroom.

In this sense, the purpose is that students enjoy the process, but at the same time, they need to be creative and focused on the main topic on which they are working now. To do this, some game components or elements are involved in the gaming process. In this case, I will focus on game sense as part of those game elements and as a boost to improve our gaming skills and knowledge. Additionally, game sense is a great tool to increase our gamer experience with new information we can use when playing a game and later apply it in the classroom.

Purpose and Question

This work analyzes how teachers can increase students' input and output when acquiring a second language through game sense. Therefore, I will show it with some application of the game sense in a gaming context and how gamers use it to improve their gaming background knowledge and skills. The following research question will set the

purpose: *What makes game sense a key factor to improve the skill and understanding of the context in ESL environments?*

Conceptual Framework

Game Sense

Learning through a Game Sense approach is situated within modified games that involve competition and decision-making (Light, 2013). In other words, players are encouraged to develop skills to be tactically aware and make better decisions in a fun and engaging activity. Video games give a sense of positioning, including map knowledge, roles, collaborative work, and communication with one's team and enemies. This concept provides gamers with the perception and understanding of the game and how different events will influence gamers to use it and take advantage of what is happening now.

There are two crucial aspects to be aware of regarding Game Sense in gaming environments. On the one hand, mistakes are okay because we ask questions about what we did wrong. We learn and improve our skills from them, which is why practice makes a master. On the other hand, teamwork is critical because working collaboratively with our teammates to take advantage of the game is quite powerful. We start to play a role when we realize that our situational awareness is built not only from our knowledge but the knowledge shared by our team. Only then do we understand the "why" of it and the "how" to do it, and the "when" it happens.

Connecting the previous gaming knowledge we have and the new knowledge we are getting will allow us to apply it immediately in-game. In other words, hours of practice will be the key to increasing the value of our knowledge when we use it in-game so we avoid making the same mistakes and improve in the game.

NewKnowledge and Game Sense.

It is essential to consider that gamers obtain new understanding while playing a video game through game sense, and as Pill (2018) said "practice starts with game-play, and training continues to feature a focus on skill practice within game contexts". (p. 43) If the gamer spends an amount of time, that information will be new knowledge about every characteristic of the game. According to Garcia (2020), playing is how nature leads us to learn. (Learning while playing, para. 1). When learners do something with passion and motivation, they memorize every piece of information to improve in that game.

So in video games, the role of game sense is the overall mental picture of the game: knowing who is alive and who is dead, the positioning of all players, including the enemies even if they are approximate, the strengths and weaknesses of the two teams, as well as the state of the skills, and anticipating future actions, as well as recognizing when to attack and retreat.

Skills

In video games, the skills will be how one interacts with one's environment, including objects and enemies. If one has good skills, that will affect one's play, communication, and problem-solving skills. Otherwise, one does not know how to act when the situation requires it. Based on my experience, we must consider the following elements:

- Roles

- Play

- Time

- Performance

- Result

García et al. (2014) mentioned that "the player must have a goal in order for this game setting to inspire reflection and skills development". (p. 504). That is why in every video

game, gamers will play a role according to their experience, the amount of time playing a character (it could be called "your main"), and the position in their team. Therefore, when they know their role, they will start thinking about what play will be crucial for that round, so the communication with the team must be precise and clear because each player has a function to help win the round. That function is going to depend on their roles, so it is important that they develop some skills which help them to be energetically involved with the environment (García et al., 2014). The most common roles in five-vs-five FPS (First-Person Shooters) games such as Valorant are controllers or those who use abilities like smokes; duelists, who have to break the enemies' defense, initiators, who provide information about the battle; and sentinels, who stop the enemy pushes.

Now, being aware of the roles, gamers will need time to execute each of their plays. In other words, the team has to discuss the strategy to predict at what moment of the match the different previous plays will happen according to the roles. Finally, the team displays performance and results at the end of the round. It means what steps gamers followed and how they did that to achieve victory for their team.

Gamer

The beneficiary of all of these is the gamer because a gamer has gone from just playing the game to committing to the whole game elements (Sánchez & Sanmartín-Arango, 2020). When gamers commit to a gaming context, they have the disposition to gain more knowledge to improve their gaming skills. Game sense is part of this identity because gamers consider all the elements, such as maps, enemies, or abilities, to improve their gameplay.

When players start a new path in a game, they start without any background knowledge about that game, so to improve in that game, they start to watch professional players learn new ways of playing and strategies they can apply later in-game. The last

mention constructs an identity that will be present while they play the video game and improve their skills.

Game Elements

Even though game elements are all the features that make the game a whole composition (Mazo & Sánchez, 2021), game sense focuses more on map features, opponents, position, and utilities. The key to those tools is to increase the new knowledge and reinforce the previous comprehension of the gamer about his/her gaming environment.

The last mentioned are the keys that gamers must focus on when they are playing a video game because if they identify the knowledge of those features, they will have control of the actions and the decision-making during the game. Therefore, these elements will allow gamers to think critically about the problem situation and give them enough resources to act immediately and solve it.

Literature Review.

According to Jarrett & Harvey (2016) "the term game sense which is often used to refer to the practical understanding of games" (p.96). Mainly this term has been used in sports such as soccer in order to change the ordinary workouts to more dynamic and engaging workouts. On the other hand, this concept was making its incursion into video games in order to improve the gaming knowledge and the skills. According to a post made on August 10, 2021 by The Wired Shopper website in the gaming section they said "Gamesense or game sense/intuition/understanding is a player's ability to understand the state of the game they are currently in.", so basically every gamer has to take into account the different scenarios where they participate because their knowledge and skills will help their teammates, and the only way to improve in a video game is to use the previous information to identify the new outcomes in order to know how to use them in game.

As I mentioned before, Game Sense creates thinking players and according to Pill (2018) "the Game Sense approach, the practice environment is designed to employ a wide variety of information to represent the dynamics of play so the players become increasingly attuned to the information." (p.46). This means, in a gaming context, where players need to be aware about what is happening in the moment and focus their attention on the specific task they have to do, according to their role of course, in order to help the team to win the round. Another thing game sense has is when gamers transfer the previous and new information from the practice to the game, and according to the authors Zuccolo, Spittle & Pill (2014) they said "the importance of replicating match situations in practice as a means of improving performance." (p. 26). In other words, this is not only proof that players are improving their gameplay, but they are contributing with their experience in order to support and win matches.

Methodology

One of this study's goals is to comprehend better the concept of game sense and its application in educational environments. In that sense, my objective is to show how the basis of game sense works and how it involves teachers and students in interactive and engagement activities. To do the analysis, I will share my gaming perspective, where game sense has improved my gaming skills in every game I have played. Furthermore, the analysis will include my teaching perspective at the moment of applying game sense in my classes.

The method I am going to use is Digital Autoethnography. According to Musgrave (2019), Digital Autoethnography details "how to perform these methodological techniques on oneself – to observe oneself, to interview oneself, to take notes about one's own experiences, to analyze one's cultural productions." (p. 2). As a gamer, I have had the opportunity to participate in different gaming communities. I have learned a lot about games and improved my skills thanks to interacting with that gaming context. Therefore, this method will shape

my findings about how game sense can improve our knowledge and skills in gaming environments and how we could apply some elements of that to the class to rethink a new way of teaching.

Object of Study

In this case, I will focus on the video games *Valorant* and *Clash of Clans* to show both the perspective of PC games and mobile games where game sense appears similarly. The idea is to understand how gamers of these different platforms use game sense to improve their skills over time. In addition, I will talk about two platforms that gamers worldwide can use to improve their game sense.

Valorant. Valorant is a tactical hero shooter 5vs5 developed by Riot Games, where players will find a competitive experience and stages. More than just shooting, gamers are also going to find 13 agents with adaptive and lethal abilities. The game's goal is to involve gamers in multiple situations where they must use their critical thinking to solve problems, plan strategies and execute them to beat the enemy team.

The game also allows players to play in standard and competitive matches. The former involves regular matches to play with one's team to practice skills, line-ups, or micro; micro means playing as a team, using their abilities to create a clean entry to the enemy side and plant the bomb. The latter involves matches with a high level of experience and skills in the game, where gamers can compete to get the highest rank in the season and challenge their skills and knowledge about the game. Finally, there is a vast community where players can find people to play with or join a clan to improve their skills and rank up.

Clash of Clans. Clash of Clans is a strategy and building mobile game developed by Supercell where players can customize their villages, train troops, and attack other villages to loot resources. As the last game mentioned, Valorant, this game also has an extensive and robust community where gamers will find clans and people from other countries.

Additionally, its goal, on the one hand, is to build strong bases to protect resources from others. On the other hand, one can create unique base designs to win trophies and rank up to the highest league. Also, several strategies and ways to attack will keep players engaged over time.

Twitch. Twitch is a platform owned by Amazon, Inc., where gamers come together to chat, interact, and watch other gamers play their favorite games. Also, there are many categories according to their tastes, such as just chatting, food and drink, and gaming, which is the most important category here. As in the last two games mentioned above, this platform also has a vast community where players feel identified and comfortable. They can also connect with the steamer gamer and share their ideas.

YouTube

YouTube is another platform owned by Google where gamers may discover millions of videos about their preferences. In addition, gamers can upload and share videos with anyone able to access the site, and they usually use this platform to watch guides, strategies, and everything related to games in order to increase their gaming knowledge.

I used my experience using these apps, so basically I took some notes about my daily activity and how I used them to improve my gaming knowledge, for instance, how many hours I watched strategy videos such as learning line up, combos, and so on, then how all of this was reflected in my gaming practice.

Findings

Going through these games and platforms, I have used my gaming experience to see when and how I improved my skills. Therefore, it is important to remember that the idea of using game sense is related with game elements in order to understand the gaming background and adapt it into the classroom (Mazo & Sánchez, 2021). Game sense could add value to how students learn a second language in an educational environment. Game sense

creates another view of gaming where gamers work and interact collaboratively with all the elements of the environment which allow them the use of game-based mechanics and game thinking to engage people, motivate action, promote learning, and solve problems. This creates unique engagement for learners who will immediately focus their attention on certain areas where the information is new or unknown and then apply their new skills to the task in order to accomplish a goal. In addition, game sense develops thinking players when they are immersed in different activities in which they must use their new knowledge and adapt it to their skills.

The last mention is represented in the practice task because they focus on specific elements involved with interaction in the environment. However, suppose they must gain the necessary knowledge to do the task. In that case, they must watch and analyze what the other people are doing, then try to replicate what they are doing and understand how and why they are doing certain things they did not do before. This creates a sense of working in different areas connected to solving problems.

As a result, my findings link game sense from a gaming perspective to English classes for engaging and motivating students and teachers to learn and teach in a different way. The examples below will illustrate how. In addition, the following screenshots show the basis of game sense to comprehend its features and how it works in a gaming context. Furthermore, you are going to know my whole process, as a gamer, using game sense to improve my gaming skills through the time.

In addition, I made a survey about game sense, and I asked some of gamer teachers in the research lab #TeamLaV in order to know their perspective about game sense in video games and how it could work outside the game. For this, I chose the following questions of the survey: *Since there is a growing interest in using gaming features for instructional practices (gamification/gamifying), what potential do you see in bringing game sense into*

our language teaching practices? How important is game sense to improve one's gaming experiences? What would you say is the potential impact of game sense for noob players?

Autoethnographic Analysis: Andrés Martín Martínez (Aka Apolo) - Insights Of A Hardcore Gamer.

As a hardcore gamer, I have participated in different kinds of games, and most of them had English interfaces that one could interact with. Thanks to that, I learned some specific vocabulary related to the game context. I could also interact with people worldwide to improve and practice my L2 speaking skills. I created my identity and defined a specific role that would be reflected later in the game. As every new gamer, I had to watch guides and strategies. I watched pro players and practiced. So, I was building my future gaming knowledge to become a better player. Spending time on something we like gives us enough motivation to keep going and never give up, and when we see results, that pushes our knowledge and skills to the next level.

Now, as an English and Spanish gamer teacher, I can see the benefits of games, especially game sense, in my practice. In other words, I can use the recognition of a new context to take some elements from it and apply them to our context. In the case of the English classes, this reflects on how my students understand new knowledge, such as vocabulary in its original context, and use it properly, according to their context. By doing this, students can learn and practice new information through native English videos while they find a way to adapt it to their identity.

Fig. 1.

Competitive ranks from the game Valorant.

This first example is from the game *Valorant*. As I mentioned before, there are two types of modes. The first one is the normal mode, where we just play for fun alone or with our friends. The second one is the competitive mode, where we can see the different ranks in the game. Iron is the lowest rank; Radiant is the highest one. If a gamer is new, a whole process is waiting for them because while they are playing the game, they will improve their gaming through the matches. In that way, every rank requires specific skills to rank up, so gamers need to be aware of what they will find and how they can improve it. Here is when game sense appears in their process because they need to push that new knowledge with experience. That is why they join communities or watch pro players learn new things, become better players, and replicate it in their gameplay.

Fig. 2.

Match history from the game Valorant.

From this example, we can see multiple matches where the gamer can win or lose. In this case, when a gamer notices that they have lost a couple or more matches, they start thinking about what they are doing wrong. This kind of question helps gamers to identify their areas of weakness. For instance, those areas could be map position, impaired communication with the team, not getting used to the agent and his/her abilities, and other items that can emerge while they are asking themselves. This will cause the gamer to start searching about how to improve those areas. The best way to do that is by watching professional players because first, they can see the accurate play with a minimum margin of error. Second, they can try to imitate different playing styles that will help them create or find yours in the future. The last point is that they start to predict and read the possible enemy plays and how to counter them.

Fig. 3

TenZ's twitch channel.
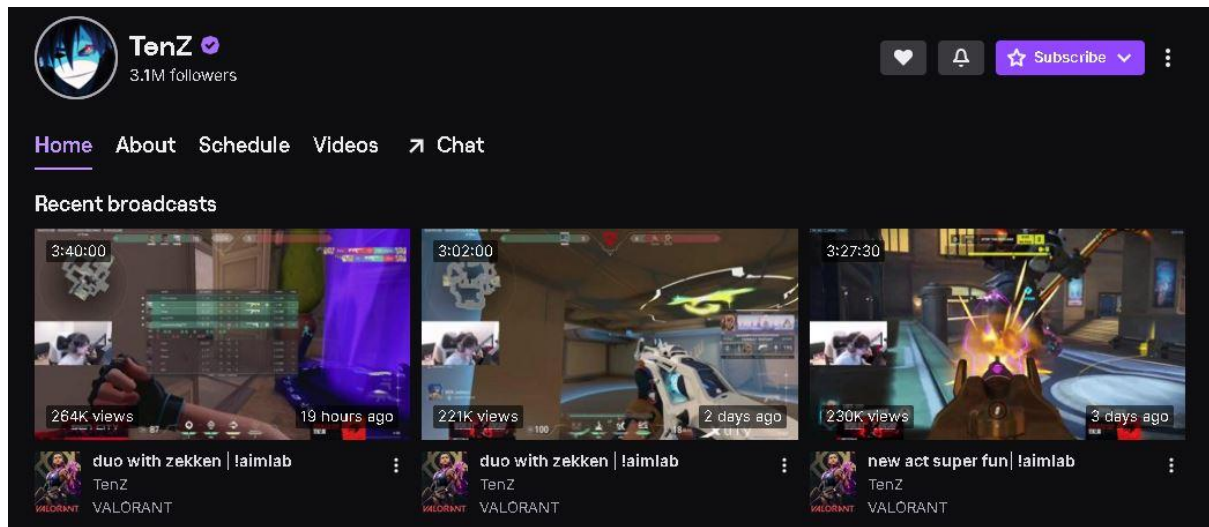
This picture from a Twitch channel shows a content creator and professional player of Valorant. Some aspects, such as the nickname, are related to the gamer identity (Ramírez & Gaviria, 2017). Although the most important thing here, as the basis of the game sense, is what gamers can get from this kind of content, and the answer is straightforward: they can learn new things from a context completely different from theirs. This competitive context will motivate them to play like those players, predict and memorize strategies to apply them in their own game. Believe it or not, these actions are reflected at the moment to close the stream, go to the game, and practice either in the shooting range or in standard matches. What this does is that it will help gamers to watch, practice, and memorize the actions immediately, and over time they will acquire knowledge that will influence their game sense, how they play, and how they make important decisions to win the game.

Fig. 4.

Clan war league map from the game Clash of Clans.
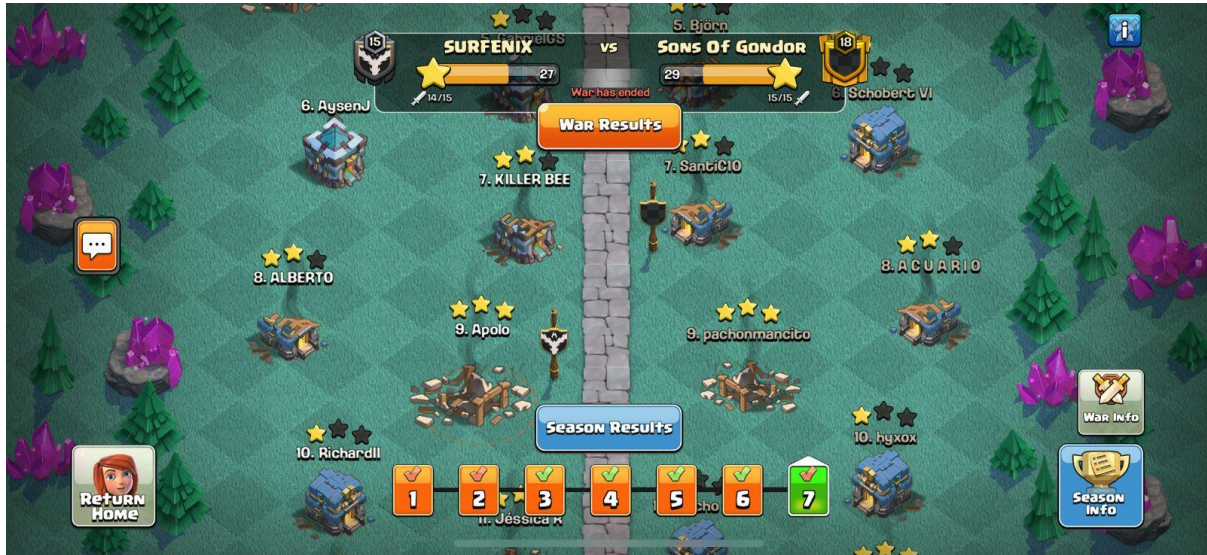
This screenshot is from a game called Clash of Clans, also known as CoC. This gaming experience is different because we are talking about a mobile game, but we can still apply game sense to these games. As Valorant, this game also has competitive environments where they can show their skills. This example is from a game mode called Clan War League, and basically, one clan fights with seven other clans for a week. The best two get a promotion to the successive league. In this case, they need to have good skills to attack to win stars because the higher up the league they go, they will find better bases that require more strategy to defeat and better players.

Fig. 5.

Enemy base from the game Clash of Clans.

As Valorant, we can find a bounce of videos depending on our interests. Two ways to improve our attacking skills are watching videos about how to do it and watching pro players perform the strategies. Thus, through videos, we can learn some tips that are helpful to attack a base. As we can see in the example, there are several ways to attack a base, but the way we execute our strategy depends on our knowledge of the game. If we are new, we must watch as many videos as possible to acquire the information. Then if we are experimental players, we can use our knowledge to guide and help newbies doing this strategy. We highlight how we would attract the base and explain how, when, and why. Thus, newbies can replicate it in their attacks. This process will create a sense of what is happening in the battle and an understanding of when and why we must deploy the troops. As a newbie, one can use the same strategy for similar bases to practice the new information.

Game Sense in Teaching Practice.

As I mentioned before, game sense is the way to develop our skills through competition and engagement activities. When I talk about game sense in an educational setting, I mean how students learn something by playing and understanding their skills and when, where, and why they apply them (Light et al., 2014). Gamers use game sense in video games to understand map location, enemy position, and team execution. Suppose we extrapolate game sense to educational environments. It can help students understand the L2 context, how they use their previous skills to reinforce them and learn new information through what they observe. Therefore, how can teachers implement game sense into the classroom? I know it may be tricky because we do not live in an English context where everyone speaks English. However, game sense would be the form to introduce a strategy in the classroom where it would involve teachers and students in a new learning world. They could use game sense as methods and approaches of a language through the context. At the same time, teachers could learn different ways based on this structure to move past traditional lectures with the final purpose of engaging and motivating students to improve their skills and acquire new knowledge about the second language through this process.

That is why the context plays an important role, and according to Seedhouse (2019), "the form and accuracy context interaction which students are involved in bears little resemblance to real-world meaning." (p. 12). That is going to allow students to understand how they use language and then how they can apply that L2 context to their context. In other words, they are comparing the new information understood from that context and the knowledge that surrounds them and adapting their skills to that to express personal meanings. An example of this is when ESL students can adapt the L2 in their Spanish context to

comprehend how it works and why they do not have to do that in the same way they do in the Spanish process. So, they are transferring L2 context to the L1, intending to create critical thinking to solve real problems in a specific environment.

The benefits of game sense approach in education will give students the understanding and skills to function effectively in a context completely different from their own, and as in the video games, students will be able to identify the role they play most in the classroom in order to solve problems, communicate well with their classmates, and help those who are just beginning to learn.

Conclusion

The concept of game sense would be the best way to teach gamifying activities in schools. This would contribute positively to the learning experience of the student and teachers in the sense of creating a meaningful experience inside the classroom. Additionally to that, teachers know the ways of teaching enhance, and game sense would be the strong possibility of motivation to innovate the learning process where students will understand the changes of mind that the L2 requires. They will be interested in the acquisition of new knowledge through the interaction with the context and the other classmates.

In gaming environments, gamers must quickly adapt their abilities to the different situations that the gameplay could have. In educational environments, students need to understand language works in their context and how they can use it to help their classmates and solve problems. So, game sense is essential to make decisions based on all the activities' characteristics and the roles they play in the group.

When thinking of applying game sense in educational settings, it is possible to see how the use of it can generate motivation in the students' learning process through the interaction with the L2 context, so the idea is that teachers start to incorporate different

scenarios where students can use their previous and new skills, and making a comparison between the new information with their background knowledge.

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