



Gamification in the FLE classroom: A study on the Indian teachers' perspective: motivations, reasons and drawbacks

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Abstract

The language classroom is an ever-evolving space as teaching methodologies improve and develop from time to time, so does the teaching environment. With a more student-centred approach to teaching French, the need for innovation in the classroom becomes vital and thus, the use of fun, recreational and didactic games and activities also increases. This research paper aims at quantitatively measuring the use of games by French language teachers in India as well as understanding the reasons, motivations and hindrances to the activities and games played in a French as a Foreign Language classroom. The primary data was gathered through a questionnaire, based on a random selection of 150 teachers of French from all over India, as well as one-on-one interactions with senior academicians. This paper also lists the topics that teachers commonly use games for, and the challenges arising thereof, so as to develop the French Language teaching scenario in India and create apt pedagogical tools, especially by the key stakeholders in the French language education. It was found that teachers tended to prefer the usage of games to reduce language learning related anxiety and to ease the understanding and practice of grammatical and lexical concepts.

Keywords: Gamification, French as a foreign language (FLE), Games, Activities, Ludic, Innovative Pedagogy.

Introduction

The French as a Foreign Language classroom has been an ever-evolving space with the advent of newer technologies, teaching methodologies, pedagogical approaches and development of didactics of languages. What are known as the traditional approaches of learning, including but not limited to Audio-Lingual Method, Bilingual Method, Grammar Translation Method, and Direct Method, have been criticized for not being student centric. One even would say that the traditional forms were not good for the overall growth of the class^{1,2}. To overcome this limitation, newer, more modern approaches, like that of the Communicative Language Teaching approach (CLT), that put the focus on the student have been developed and propagated; among them, that of Gamification. Thanks to being technologically savvy, today's students demand to be engaged throughout the learning process³. This demand is met thanks to the incorporation of pedagogical activities and games, carefully didactized in order to achieve linguistic goals, which has been proven to have positive effects on individuals⁴.

Gamification, a relatively new term, coined in 2003, refers to the use of games, activities and experiences to encourage learning among students, in a way to bring out the curiosity of the learner and help them absorb the concept easily, thus increasing engagement, movement and focus, while reducing anxiety, monotony and passiveness.

Review of Literature: i. The process makes language use automatic, much like in a real-life scenario since the focus is on the end result. And hence, such games (specifically "board-games" or "jeux-de-société") and activities have been rightly termed "auxiliairespédagogiques" D'Alessio⁵, specialist of games as educational tools for teaching/learning languages, as the principal objective of use of activities and games, remains purely pedagogical in nature. Hence, their applicability in traditional school environments. Silva also goes ahead to broaden the definition of "board games" to include any games "which are also contemporary and from an industrial circuit, which offer support and specific playing instruments and which are intended for the general public". ii. Acquisition of linguistic and cultural knowledge and competencies, motivation through "out of class" activities, creation of authentic use case situations in classrooms, uniting the students and learners are few of the reasons that the majority of teachers choose to use games in the FLE Classroom (Tellier, InstitutFrancais de Russie). The use of lexical, pictorial, metalinguistic, narrative, logical and collaborative games not only ensures that the teacher's role remains as that of a mere facilitator, but also that the students' role turns into an active listener, and a proactive user of the language. More so, the students forget that they are studying, and end up learning better. iii. The aspect of choosing the right game for one's class is intense and involves various key aspects including understanding the objectives, and then the number of students in class because this may influence the kind of game, levels and personalities of the learner, time and space that is

available etc. Helme et al⁶ stated that various criteria hold major roles in how the game or activity is carried out and whether or not the said objective of the game is met. Many times, failure in correctly thinking these aspects through leads to failure of the activity that may lead to stress for the teacher and anxiety for the learner.

Objectives of the study: This empirical research paper has the following objectives: i. Measuring the extent of the use of games and activities in FLE Classrooms India. ii. Gaining an insight on the perspectives of teachers of French in India, in terms of their motivations, reasons and hindrances. iii. Understanding the aspects that affect the choice of use of such games and activities.

Methodology

Nature of the Study: The research undertaken follows the Quantitative and Qualitative Opinion method. It is an empirical research paper.

Methodology: The research is based on primary data collected from a random sample population. The paper has followed the ‘questionnaire’ method data collection. The study was carried out on 150 teachers selected on a random sampling basis. The Questionnaire collects qualitative opinion and reasoning related data that anonymous respondents have shared.

Statistical tools: Basic statistical tools have been used for the analysis and interpretation, wherever necessary.

Key Stakeholders: The key stakeholders in the French learning scenario in India, including the primary and secondary schools, colleges, universities, private language schools, freelance French language teachers, the numerous French teachers’ associations, the French Institute in India and the 14 centers and the 13 annexes of the Alliance Française in India, play a vital role in development of not only pedagogical tools and resources but also in training personnel in the newer methodologies to make classes more interactive, captivating and student-driven. The need for proper training of human resources, especially in the domain of gamification is at an all-time high, whereas the availability of such training seems to be considerably inaccessible. Moreover, in a situation that doesn’t allow for games in the physical format, the importance of online games and activities increases exponentially; so as to overcome challenges that the virtual platforms bring up such as difficulty in maintaining motivation, drastic reduction in classroom interaction and most importantly, lack of effective means of evaluation of the students’ progress. This is where the role of the stakeholders, primarily as that of innovators and also, that of propagators and training bodies, becomes of prime importance.

Advantages of incorporating games in the FLE Classroom: Research has been able to prove the numerous advantages that gamification brings to the teaching process, including: i.

Breaking the monotony and offering spaces of rest, ii. Encouraging interaction, higher levels of interest and active participation⁷. iii. Promotion of self-learning and autonomy of language learners⁸. iv. Bringing out the competitive spirit among learners⁹. v. Serving as effective ice breakers, vi. Changing the role of a teacher in the classroom: to a facilitator of learning, vii. Reducing foreign language anxiety in new learners and alleviating stress, viii. Providing intense and meaningful practice of language.

Results and discussion

The results of the questionnaire are analyzed and significant data has been reported and appropriate statistical tools have been used to study the data and report information from the teachers’ perspective:

Use of games in the FLE Classroom: The questionnaire’s responses revealed that out of a total of 150 teachers, 125 of them used games in class. These teachers teach at schools, colleges, private language schools, Alliance Française in India or have their own private practice.

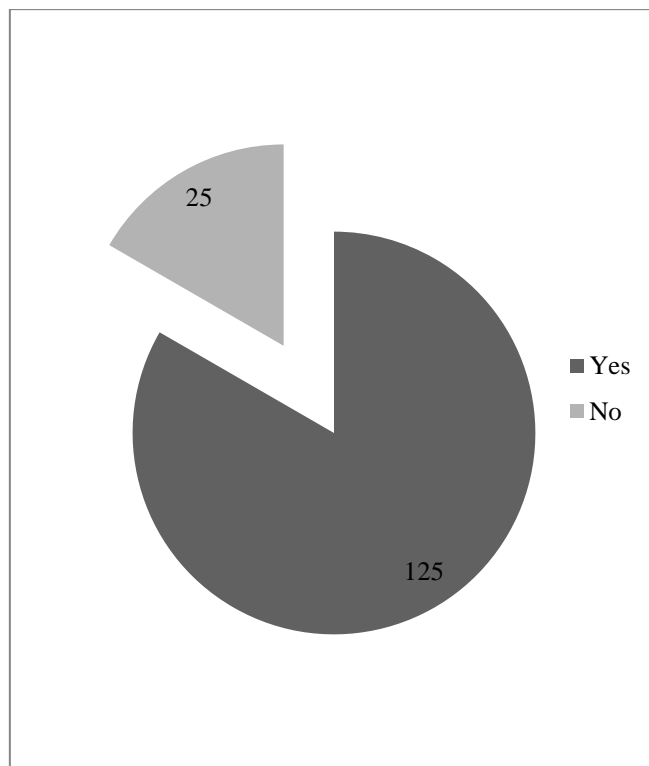


Figure-1: Number of teachers who use activities in class.

Dependence between the age of the teachers and the use of games in classes: The following Table-1 has been drawn up with data collected and a Chi Square Test is carried out to find out the dependence between the age and choice to use games in class:

Table-1: Chi Square Test of Primary Data sourced form the questionnaire.

Observed Frequency			
Age	Yes	No	Total
15-22	20	2	22
23 – 35	62	8	70
35-50	27	10	37
Above 50	16	5	21
Total	125	25	150
Expected Frequency			
Age	Yes	No	Total
15-22	18.33333333	3.666666667	22
23 – 35	58.33333333	11.66666667	70
35-50	30.83333333	6.166666667	37
Above 50	17.5	3.5	21
Total	125	25	150

The following hypotheses are drawn: H_0 : There is no dependence between age and choice of using games in class. H_1 : There is dependence between age and choice of using games in class. The calculations show that the Chi Square value is lower

than that of Critical Value and hence, we accept the H_0 , following the Critical Value Approach.

Hence this test shows that the choice of using games in a FLE Classroom has a low dependence on the age of the teacher. This may be due to various reasons including the openness of teachers to attend training sessions and improve their teaching methodologies, adapt to the levels of interest and focus of the younger generation of students, etc.

Motivations to use games in the FLE Classroom: The following are reasons that teachers used games and activities in the French as a foreign language classroom, according to anonymous responses received on the questionnaire: i. “I include games in my classes because it’s a very effective way to learn a language. It makes us think beyond our imagination and we can remember [a] lot of things, it makes the process smoother for a student.” ii. “Games, the word itself sparks curiosity. Books can hold your attention for 10 minutes max but a game even if played for 30 minutes straight would keep you engrossed. I try including games for every aspect possible, they don’t just grab your attention but help you learn and engage better.” iii. “It is an effective way of encouraging interaction between the students in class. It can motivate the students to speak, learn better and assimilate concepts better.” iv. “Games create interest in learning and motivate [us] to learn more, while creating a friendly atmosphere. Students’ interaction increases and helps to learn quickly rather than sitting at one place.”

From these reasons, it is evident that teachers in India use games in order to improve the efficiency of their teaching, while encouraging interactions and helping students understand better and remember more easily.

Table-1: Calculation of P-Value of Primary Data sourced from the Questionnaire.

O	E	O - E	(O-E) ²	(O-E) ² E	Significance	Degree of Freedom	Critical Value	P-Value
20	18.33	1.67	2.78	0.15	0.05	3	7.81	0.115425368
2	3.67	-1.67	2.78	0.76				
62	58.33	3.67	13.44	0.23				
8	11.67	-3.67	13.44	1.15				
27	30.83	-3.83	14.69	0.48				
10	6.17	3.83	14.69	2.38				
16	17.50	-1.50	2.25	0.13				
5	3.50	1.50	2.25	0.64				
		Chi Square		5.92				
		Test Statistic		5.92				

What concepts are taught/practiced using games and activities?: The following chart (Figure-2), gives us information of the linguistic skill that is practiced the most using games and recreational activities by the 125 teachers of French as a Foreign Language in India who responded to the questionnaire. Retention of vocabulary, which may be regarded as the hardest linguistic skill, is the most practiced through games by a majority of teachers. This is closely followed by the practice of verb conjugations, given the complexity due to the various tenses and modes in the French language. The comprehension of texts, being the least practiced skill through activities, seems to

require a lot of time for preparation, which sometimes, the teachers do not have.

The time factor in French classes: The research also revealed that the time factor played an important role in the possibility of incorporating games into the pedagogy. Figure-3 and 4 give information about the number of hours a teacher normally spends in class on games, as well as what according to them is an apt amount of hours that a teacher may/must spend on such activities (For this, a course is assumed to have a duration of 100 hours).

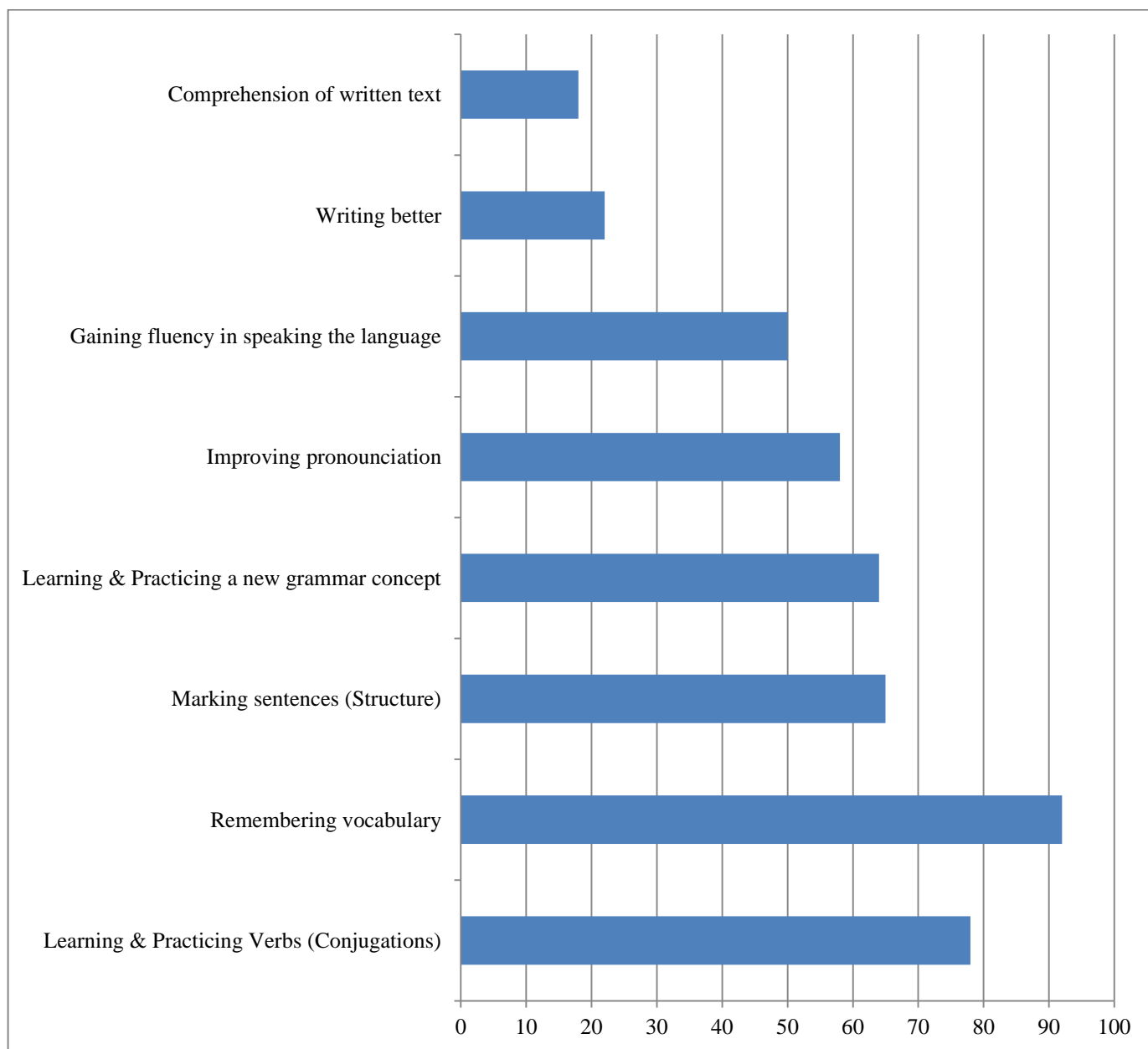


Figure-2: Chart showing the areas of use of games in the FLE Classroom.

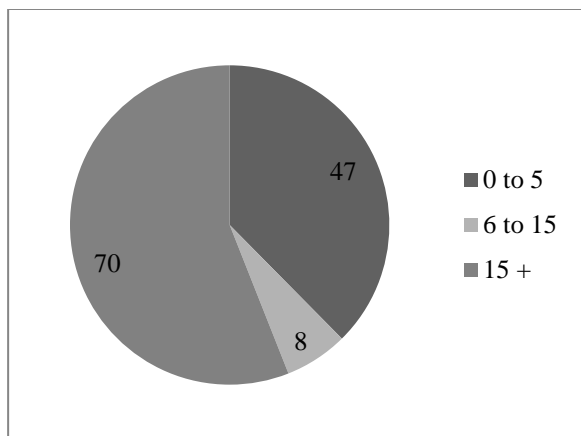


Figure-3: Time spent on games in class.

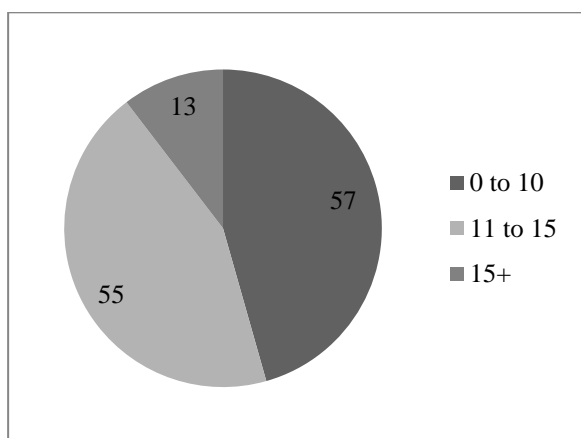


Figure-4: Ideal number of hours to spend on games.

The effectiveness of games and activities in higher levels:

The questionnaire sought responses relating to whether such activities continue to be as efficient and effective on higher levels (B2, C1 and C2); the following were the results thus obtained:

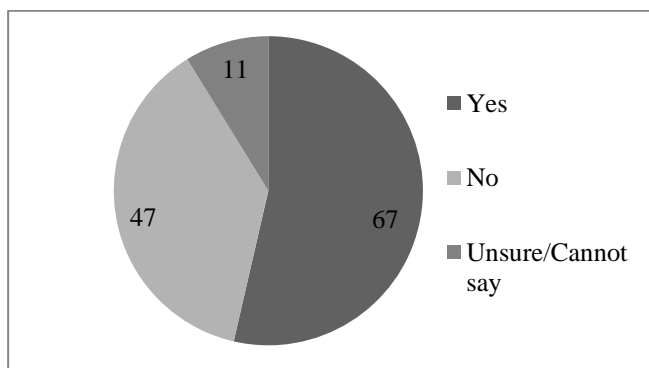


Figure 4: Are games effective on higher levels?.

The majority of the teachers agreed that the activities continued to be as effective on higher levels, with the following specifications: i. "They are as effective in the lower levels as in

the higher levels as long as you alter the complexity of the games and the objectives of the activity." ii. "As the level increases, the games are less entertaining as compared to lower levels." iii. "On lower levels, the games are targeted towards Vocabulary Retention and increasing Participation. On higher levels, the games are more of sentence construction and grammar perfection." iv. "At A1 and A2 levels, the games lead the candidates to pursue the course further. At higher levels, frequency and quality of games will change. At a higher level, it will involve deeper knowledge. I would call it an activity rather than a game."

In general, the teachers agreed that at lower levels, the games and activities may focus on the teaching aspect or an introductory aspect whereas the activities on higher levels focus on the aspects of a higher understanding of French and reinforcement of the language.

The following is a summary of the reasons as to why teachers did not use games or activities on higher levels: i. The creation of activities is time consuming and is a difficult task. ii. The focus on a higher level is shifted to more serious concepts like debates, "exposés" and "synthèses". iii. The objectives that are attained by games and activities, relate to those that may be classified in lower levels and may have nothing to do on higher levels.

Are teachers willing to start using games in class?: The questionnaire also gives information about whether the teachers who did not use games in class would like to start. 22 out of the 25 teachers agreed that they would like to start incorporating gamification in class as they understand its importance.

Limits of the study: Keeping in mind the sample size (n=125), the study may not be able to portray the best average results of all teachers in India. Moreover, an inability to compare the said data with any historical evidence makes it difficult to understand the gradual evolution of gamification in India, which may be a good scope for further research.

Conclusion

Based on the research undertaken and the responses received, thorough analysis of the same reveals that the concept of Gamification is widespread in the French language education scenario in India. Teachers today are more open to using games and recreational activities even in primary and secondary schools, where limits like that of the syllabus and time exist. Teachers are willing to spend an average of 10 hours to ensure that students get an opportunity to practice and improve their French, through innovative and interesting methods. With the existence of some hindrances including complexity, seriousness and time limits, teachers now must shift their focus on working around these limits in order to make their teaching more effective as well as enhance the learning ability of students

while helping students from various age ranges come together, interact and develop a more keen interest in the language.

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