



LUDIC APPROACH TO TEACH ITALIAN AS FOREIGN LANGUAGE (FL)

Aida GJINALI

University of Tirana, Faculty of Foreign Languages

aida.gjinali@unitir.edu.al

Manjola ÇULLHAJ

University of Tirana, Faculty of Foreign Languages

lolacullhaj@gmail.com

Abstract

This research aims to highlight how necessary and important is to apply the ludic approach as a teaching tool in teaching a foreign language. The use of the ludic approach in language classes is fundamental to create not only a playful, stimulating, and motivating atmosphere, but above all because, as the literature already points out, the game is fundamental for spontaneous and motivating learning.

For this purpose, this modest research aims to apply some games in Italian language classes that are chosen according to the age and language level of pupils. The research was carried out at a nine-year school in Albania studying Italian as a first and second foreign language. After utilizing the games listed below, a questionnaire was handed out to examine various aspects of the games used in the lessons, with particular emphasis on the participants' experience, preferences, advantages of language learning, and any barriers they encountered. The results of the questionnaire revealed that most pupils took part in games in foreign language classes and found them useful for improving their language skills. Pupils' favorite games included vocabulary, conversation, reading and writing. The participants appreciated different aspects of the games, including the fun they provided, the improvement in language skills, interaction with classmates and variation in learning activities. In addition, the use of games has been associated with increased student involvement and better motivation to learn a foreign language. However, some participants highlighted some challenges in the use of games, such as the difficulty in understanding the instructions of the game, the connection between the games and learning objectives, and the adaptation of the games to the different language skills of the students. Overall, the research highlighted the importance of using games in foreign language lessons to make learning more motivating, engaging and effective. The results

provided a broad understanding of pupils' experiences in using games and highlighted the importance of viewing games as a valuable tool for teaching foreign language classes.

Keywords: *game; foreign language; the ludic approach; teaching tools.*

1. Introduction

Learning a foreign language is a complex challenge that requires the acquisition of linguistic skills such as comprehension, oral and written production, grammar and vocabulary. Furthermore, learning a foreign language also involves exposure to a new culture and the appropriation of new cultural patterns (Chen et. al 2020). In recent years, there has been growing interest in using gaming as a teaching method in foreign language classes. The ludic approach to language learning offers a dynamic and engaging alternative to traditional teaching, which can make language learning more motivating and effective (Sun & Hsieh 2018). This paper will focus on the importance of ludic approach in foreign language (FL) classrooms, examining the reasons why gaming can be an effective teaching strategy to improve language learning. The characteristics of the game, its implications for language learning and the benefits it can offer to pupils will be explored. Furthermore, the different types of games used in foreign language classes will be analyzed, including role-playing games, group games, simulation games and digital games. Examples will be presented of how these games can be implemented in the classroom and how they can be adapted to different ages, language proficiency levels, and objectives of learning. Some of the potential disadvantages and challenges associated with using gaming in foreign language classrooms will be discussed, such as the need to balance gaming with learning objectives, classroom management, and adaptation to pupils' cultural contexts. Through an in-depth analysis of the use of games in foreign language classes, this paper will try to provide a comprehensive overview of the topic and highlight the importance of the ludic approach to language learning as an effective tool for improving motivation, student interaction and learning in foreign language classrooms.

The ludic approach is an educational approach that uses play as the main tool to facilitate the learning and development of children and adults (Zeybek & Saygı 2023); (Caon 2006). This methodology is based on the belief that play is a natural and fundamental activity for learning and growth, as it actively involves the body, mind and emotions in a complete experiential process (Surendeleg et al. 2014). In order to engage with a pedagogy of play in practice, and to recognize and hold the importance and value of play and playfulness, we argue that it is critical to embody a ludic ontology. Adopting a playfully way of being in the world obviously

allows for increased opportunities for playfulness (Leather & Obee 2021). Play-based outdoor learning increases interaction with a range of affordances giving opportunities for movement in learning. Children assign activities as either play or not play-based on a series of cues. Teaching approaches that incorporate cues associated with play can influence pupil engagement and involvement in learning (Wainwright et al. 2020). Using games and play as part of the curriculum for writing has the potential to reinvigorate contemporary thinking on memory, identity, and reflection. All of these allow for pupils to express themselves, reflect on their means and process of expression, and think through complex issues (Rouzie 2000).

The ludic framework works through rhetoric's of play as a frame of reference; rhetoric's of possibility and invention as a means of production; the acceptance of transformative failure; and engages with digital communities to further knowledge through social affinity while being grounded in constructionist learning theories. The principles that facilitate this are: curiosity, play, flexibility, metacognition, collaboration, invention, persistence, and creativity (Christopher 2020).

The topic "Ludic approach to teach Italian as foreign language (FL)" is of significant importance for several reasons: a) Innovative approach to language learning: The use of games as a teaching method in foreign language classes represents an innovative approach that can offer new perspectives on language learning; b) Improving student motivation and interest: Gaming is intrinsically motivating for pupils, as it offers a fun and rewarding experience; c) Development of language and communication skills: gaming can offer an authentic context for language learning, allowing pupils to develop language and communication skills in a concrete and contextualized way; d) Promotion of social and cultural interaction: The game can promote social interaction between pupils, encouraging communication in a foreign language between peers and teamwork; e) Adaptability to different ages, levels and contexts: The game can be adapted to different ages, levels of language proficiency and learning contexts; f) Potential for educational innovation: The use of gaming in foreign language classrooms offers opportunities for educational innovation and the integration of digital technologies, such as online games or language apps, which can enrich the learning experience. Student learning and improve their motivation and engagement. (Seaborn & Fels 2015).

2. Literature review

Games, gamification of learning, and game-based learning are not intended as replacements for any current effective pedagogy. Rather, these approaches can be valuable additions to the

teaching toolbox that educators can leverage to engage the modern learner.

What is game-based pedagogy: 1. An approach to teaching that uses games, including video games, to promote student motivation, engagement, and learning; 2. An educational philosophy, style and approach to promote learning in educational contexts through the use of video games, non-digital games, the principles and techniques of embodied learning of games and gamification (Gillern 2022).

There are several theories about gaming that have been developed by psychologists, sociologists, philosophers and other scholars, as following:

- a) Recreation Theory: This theory holds that play is a form of recreation or leisure, in which people engage in for fun, without a specific goal or purpose. According to this theory, gaming serves to reduce stress, improve mood and promote relaxation (De Freitas 2018);
- b) Learning Theory: This theory suggests that play is a way to learn new skills and acquire knowledge. Through play, people can experiment, explore and face new challenges, acquiring cognitive, motor and social skills (Coinu, 2007);
- c) Developmental theory: This theory states that play is an important factor in the development of children. Through play, children learn to understand the world around them, develop motor, cognitive and social skills and express their creativity and imagination (Bondioli,1996);
- d) Socialization Theory: This theory suggests that play is a social activity that helps people interact and form bonds with others. The game can promote socialization, improve social skills and promote group cohesion (Cassese 2002);
- e) Competition Theory: This theory focuses on the competitive nature of the game and emphasizes how the game can involve competition between players. Through competitive gaming, people can develop problem solving skills, strategies and learn to manage competition in healthy ways; (Caillois 2001).
- f) Catharsis Theory: This theory suggests that play can provide an opportunity for emotional release or tension release. Through play, people can express emotions that have been inhibited in other situations, promoting emotional catharsis and psychological well-being (Freud 1908); (Erikson 1993).
- g) Reality theory: This theory states that games can reflect or imitate reality, offering people the opportunity to explore real situations or problems in a safe and controlled context. The game can be used as a tool to understand, interpret and deal with reality (Piaget 1962); (Vygotsky 1968).

- h) The Theory of Pre-exercise: This theory of Groos saw in play a phenomenon of growth, growth of thought and of activity, and he was the first to ask why the various forms of play exist. The play contributes to the development of functions whose maturity is reached only at the end of childhood: general functions such as intelligence, etc., to which games of trial and error are related, and special functions or particular instinct (Gross 1901)

The term gamification first emerged in 2008 and has gained increasing relevance since the 2010s (Han 2015). Unlike games, gamification is characterized by its serious purpose. Definitions of gamification vary and usually focus on game elements and mechanics or on the game process and

gaming experiences in serious contexts (Deterding, et al. 2011) define gamification as “the use of game elements in non-game contexts.” The ludic approach is an educational approach that uses play as the main tool to facilitate the learning and development of children and adults. This methodology is based on the belief that play is a natural and fundamental activity for learning and growth, as it actively involves the body, mind and emotions in a complete experiential process. The ludic approach can be applied in different educational contexts, including pre-school education, primary and secondary school, vocational training and adult education. It is based on the principles of play, such as pleasure, voluntariness, creativity and active participation, and emphasizes the importance of creating a playful environment that stimulates exploration, discovery, experimentation and collaboration (Chen et al. 2020).

Table 1. The attitudes of some leading authors regarding the game in the learning process

Author/s	Main issues
Jean Piaget	According to Piaget, play plays a crucial role in the cognitive development and construction of knowledge in children. Piaget identified two main types of play in children: <i>1. Symbolic or pretend play:</i> This type of play involves the use of imaginary objects or situations, in which children attach symbolic or functional meanings to objects or situations. For example, a child might use a spoon as a sword, or play pretend to be a doctor or a mother. According to Piaget, symbolic play is a complex mental activity that involves the mental

	representation of objects or situations, and allows children to explore and develop their understanding of the world around them. 2. <i>Construction game</i>: This type of game involves the use of concrete objects to create and build, such as construction games, puzzles or assembly games. This type of play allows children to experiment with the physical properties of objects, develop their motor skills, and gain an understanding of spatial and causal relationships. (Sutton-Smith 1966)
Johan Huizinga	According to Huizinga, play is a form of human activity that has its own nature and intrinsic rules, separate from practical life and everyday reality. Huizinga emphasizes that game is not simply a leisure activity, but is a cultural phenomenon that permeates many spheres of human society, including language, art, religion, law and politics. Huizinga identifies some essential characteristics of the game (Von Sydow 2017); (Huizinga 1955) Voluntariness: Playing is a voluntary activity, which requires active and conscious participation. Separation from reality: The game takes place in a space and time separated from everyday life, creating an atmosphere of freedom from normal social and cultural restrictions. Rules: The game has fixed rules and conventions that define the limits and boundaries of the gaming activity and guide the behavior of the participants. Creativity and imagination: The game involves the creativity and imagination of the participants, who can invent new situations, roles or scenarios. Competition or challenge: Often the game involves a competition or challenge between participants, with the aim of achieving a goal or victory.

	Experience of pleasure: Play is often associated with a sense of pleasure, enjoyment or joy, both in its practice and in its outcome.
Maria Montessori	According to Maria Montessori, play is an essential part of a child's learning and development, as it allows them to explore, experiment and acquire skills in an active and engaging way. In the Montessori method, play is considered as a spontaneous and autonomous activity of the child, which develops through his interest and intrinsic motivation. Maria Montessori believed that play should be free and not imposed, allowing children to follow their interests and learn through exploration and interaction with the environment. Maria Montessori believed that play was a natural activity for children and a means through which they could develop their intelligence, creativity, autonomy and social skills. Through play, children learn about themselves, the world around them and develop their motor, cognitive, linguistic and social skills (Lestari 2020); (Lillard 2019).
Lev Vygotskij	According to Vygotsky, play plays a central role in the development of a child's thinking and language. He viewed play as a form of social and cultural activity in which children learn to use symbolic tools (such as toys, game rules, play roles, etc.) to construct meaning and understand the world around them. Play allows children to experiment, solve problems, communicate, collaborate and develop complex cognitive skills such as planning, organizing and regulating behavior. Vygotsky argued that play has a unique nature, as it offers an opportunity for the child to "be above himself", that is, to overcome the limits of his current capabilities through interaction with others and with the game environment (Nilsson & Ferholt 2014).
Sigmund Freud	According to Freud, play is closely linked to the child's psychosexual development and its intrapsychic dynamics.

	Freud believed that play was one of the main ways through which children express their unconscious desires, internal conflicts and fantasies. According to Freud, children's play also reflected the process of development of infantile sexuality (Verenikina & Lysaght 2003; (Nicolopoulou 1993).
--	---

The use of games in language learning can increase pupils' motivation through the playful element, the provision of authentic contexts, competition or collaboration, immediate feedback and variety of activities. However, it is important to balance the use of games with learning objectives and ensure that they are appropriate for the pupils' skill level and the needs of the curriculum.

Table 2. Types of games in language learning classrooms

Type I	Vocabulary games
Type II	Grammar games
Type III	Conversation games
Type IV	Listening games
Type V	Reading games
Type VI	Writing games
Type VII	Culture games

The type of games used was drawn by different authors (Caon&Rutca 2004); (Katemba & Sinuhaji 2021); (Daloiso 2006); (Saricoban & Metin 2000); (Fiorentino 2023).

3. Methodology of research

The present study was conducted over a three-month period at a middle and junior high school located in Tirana, Albania. The research involved a sample of 231 students, encompassing a range of age groups and varying levels of language proficiency within the educational institution.

➤ Research question:

1. To what extent is the ludic approach implemented in Italian language classrooms?
2. What are the impacts of implementing this approach on student learning and engagement?

3. How do students perceive the use of the ludic approach in their language learning experience?

➤ **Research design**

The research design was delineated into four distinct phases:

1. The Preliminary Phase, focused on the selection and preparation of suitable educational games tailored to each class. This process was guided by a careful evaluation of the students' ages, developmental stages, and linguistic abilities, ensuring alignment with the instructional objectives of the intervention. Additionally, specific teaching materials were developed to enhance the implementation, including resources designed to meet the individual needs of learners.
2. The Implementation Phase, involved the practical application of the selected games within classroom settings. Systematic observations were conducted, accompanied by comprehensive field notes detailing the extent to which the learning objectives were met. Data collection focused on student engagement, participation levels, emotional responses, and any challenges arising during the activities.
3. Data Collection Phase. A structured questionnaire was developed and administered to gather insights into students' perceptions, experiences, and needs regarding the integrated activities. This instrument facilitated both qualitative and quantitative feedback from the participants.
4. Data Analysis Phase, incorporated the systematic evaluation of questionnaire responses, utilizing descriptive and inferential methods to elucidate trends, patterns, and potential areas for further pedagogical development

➤ **Materials and Resources:** The instructional materials utilized throughout the study included photocopies, colored markers, blank paper, photographs, visual images, scissors, glue, laptop and projector. (Every material and support was provided by us).

➤ **Classroom Organization:** Activities were conducted using a blended approach, combining collaborative group work with individual tasks, in order to promote both peer interaction and independent learning.

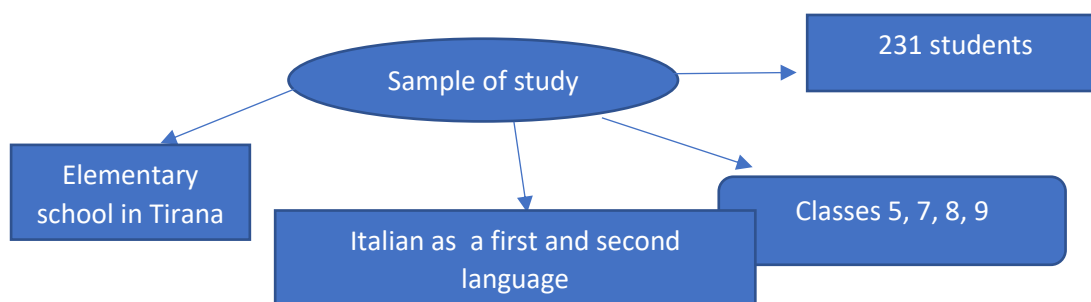
3.1. Questionnaire Design, Validation, and Data Application

Following the initial development, the questionnaire underwent a piloting phase with a purposive sample of fifteen (15) pupils. This phase aimed to assess the clarity, comprehensibility, and relevance of the questionnaire items, thereby ensuring face and content validity. Feedback from the pilot group was systematically analyzed to identify items requiring modification, removal, or expansion. Subsequent revisions were made to enhance the instrument's construct validity and ensure alignment with the research objectives. Prior to full-scale administration, the finalized version of the questionnaire received formal approval from the teaching staff and school leadership. Additionally, informed consent was obtained from all participating pupils, who were thoroughly briefed on the purpose and scope of the study, in line with ethical research practices.

The data generated by the validated instrument were analyzed through both descriptive and inferential statistical methods to ensure robustness and reliability of the findings. The insights derived from the analysis informed the iterative design and refinement of didactic materials, which were subsequently implemented in classroom settings. This cyclic process allowed for the empirical validation of the data in a real-world pedagogical context, where the materials and methods were effectively "field-tested" for their efficacy in supporting the acquisition of Italian as a foreign language through ludic methodologies.

Classroom observations and post-intervention feedback revealed significant pedagogical benefits, including enhanced learner motivation, increased spontaneous participation, heightened learner satisfaction, and improved classroom management dynamics. These outcomes suggest that the integration of game-based learning strategies not only fosters greater engagement and learner autonomy but also contributes to the creation of a more positive and effective learning environment. The didactic materials and approaches presented in this study thus offer a replicable model for leveraging ludic methodologies in foreign language education.

Data related to the sampling of the study



3.2.Types of games

Following the selection of the games and their implementation in different classes, we are presenting only a selection of them. Although other games were conducted, in this paper we have chosen to present one game per grade.

The types of games used for this paper are presented as follows:

Title: "City Comparison Project" Developed for Fifth Grade.

- **First game**

Theme: Comparing Italian Cities - Exploring Culture and Traditions

Type of Activity: Group activity using authentic materials

Linguistic Objectives: Vocabulary related to Italy, culture, and traditions, comparing with my city, developing oral production skills.

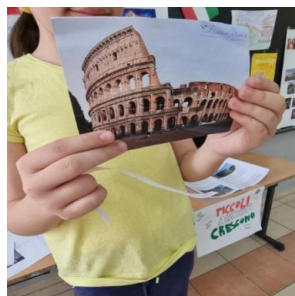
Cognitive Objectives: Developing skills in processing and selecting information, deepening understanding of Italian culture.

Relational Objectives: Ability to work in a group, mediate to achieve objectives in the interest of the group.

Language Level: A2

Language Type: FL

The teacher reports that at the end, for each student who works diligently and demonstrates interest and creativity in constructing the material, a certificate acknowledging the milestone achieved will be given.



- **Second game**

Title: "Childhood Memories" goose game to reinforce the use of the Imperfect, suitable for pupils concluding the A2 level path or pupils at an initial B1 level.

Linguistic Objectives: Correct use of grammar, expressing memories or past situations using the imperfect tense.

Cognitive Objectives: Developing the ability to recall imperfect tense rules and its usage in narration, creating sentences correctly.

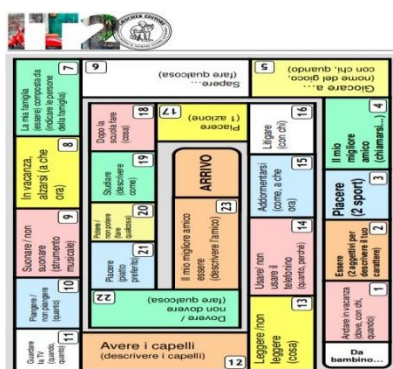
Language Level: From A2 onwards.

Language Type: FL Activity Suitable for Any Type of Student

Activity Organization: Groups of 3/4 pupils.

When to Use the Activity: At the conclusion of the imperfect tense theme

Estimated Duration: 15 minutes



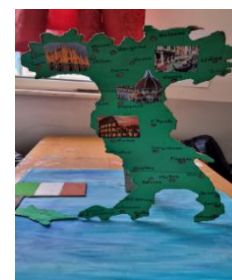
- **Third game**

Theme: Visiting Italy (where and why)

Type of activity: group activity with materials created by the pupils

Language objectives: travel/holiday vocabulary, develop comprehension skills, production.

Cognitive objectives: development of the ability to select and process information, knowledge of the euro and travel/holiday vocabulary.



- **Fourth game**

TRIS developed game

The game was developed during the hours where the theme of the superlative had to be explained. We show to the pupils a related video to the theme (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E2nAqGToIT0>), and to also be able to listen to the listening exercises that were found in their textbook.



Scheda 1

Regione più grande d'Italia	Fiore più lungo d'Italia	Monte più alto d'Italia
a. Piemonte b. La Sicilia c. La Lombardia	a. Il Po b. Il Tevere c. L'Arno	a. Il Gran Sasso b. L'Albanella c. Il Monte Bianco
Vicino più orientale d'Italia	Isola più grande d'Italia	Città più calda d'Italia
a. Nella Riviera b. In Val d'Aosta c. In Basilicata	a. La Sicilia b. La Sardegna c. La Valle d'Aosta	a. Napoli (Campania) b. Palermo (Sicilia) c. Roma (Lazio)
Canale più grande d'Italia	Città più verde d'Italia	Sport più praticato d'Italia
a. Il Canale di Napoli b. La Baia di San Pietro c. Il Canale di Firenze	a. San Geronimo b. Bologna c. Pisa	a. Il Tennis b. Il Calcio c. La Pallacanestro



The different teaching materials and image used were taken from the site (<https://italianoperstranieri.loescher.it/>)

• Fifth game

Theme: expressing emotions in the past tense

Type of activity: card game

Linguistic objectives: vocabulary/grammar emotions/telling in the past tense.

Cognitive objectives: develop the ability to remember emotions and feelings and describe them correctly in the past tense.

Relational goals: ability to express one's feelings or memories to others.



4. Findings and results

The quantitative data derived from the administered questionnaire offer significant insights into the extent of students' prior engagement with ludic activities within the realm of foreign language education. Specifically, as depicted in Figure 1, among the 231 respondents, 85.7% reported having engaged in game-based activities during their foreign language lessons, while 14.3% indicated no prior exposure to such methodologies.

This distribution underscores a predominant familiarity among participants with the incorporation of games as pedagogical tools in language instruction, suggesting a commendable level of exposure to ludic teaching practices. Conversely, the 14.3% minority signifies learners for whom these methodologies were either unfamiliar or inadequately employed in prior educational contexts. Thus, these preliminary findings establish

a valuable foundation for subsequent investigations into students' perceptions and the effectiveness of ludic approaches in enhancing their learning experiences and outcomes.



Fig. 1

The data illustrated in Figure 2 reveals that 37.6% of respondents perceive games as a highly effective tool for language learning, while an additional 26.8% consider them simply useful. In contrast, 13.5% of participants expressed neutrality regarding the role of games in language acquisition. Conversely, 12.6% viewed games as not very useful, and 9.5% assessed them as entirely ineffective.

These results indicate that a significant majority, totaling 64.4%, endorse the pedagogical value of games within language learning environments. This majority reflects a strong consensus regarding the effectiveness of playful methodologies among learners. However, the presence of a smaller, yet significant, percentage of students who adopt neutral (13.5%) or negative (22.1%) positions suggests that individual learning preferences and prior experiences likely influence attitudes toward game-based instruction. Such variability highlights the necessity for differentiated approaches when incorporating playful elements into language teaching practices, ensuring that diverse student needs are met.

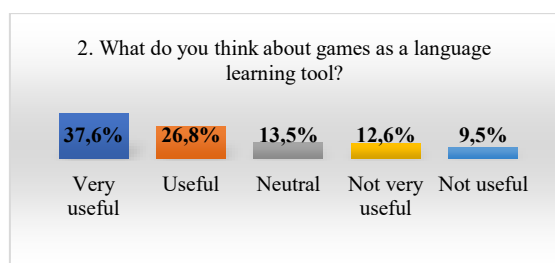


Fig. 2

The data presented in Fig. 3 indicate that a significant proportion of participants demonstrated a marked preference for vocabulary and conversation-based games in foreign language

instruction, with 24.2% and 26.4%, respectively, favoring these formats. In contrast, only 12.2% expressed a preference for grammar-centered games, while listening games garnered 7.4%. Reading and writing games were preferred by 20.7% and 8.3% of participants, respectively. A mere 0.8% selected the “Other” category.

These findings implicate that among various game-based activities, vocabulary, reading, and conversation games are notably favored. The remarkable inclination towards conversation games—26.4%—alongside a substantial preference for vocabulary games—24.2%—underscores the essential role of interactive and communicative tasks in enhancing student engagement and supporting effective language acquisition. This trend reveals that learners may be more inclined towards activities that not only promote active involvement but also facilitate the development of practical linguistic capabilities relevant to real-world communication.

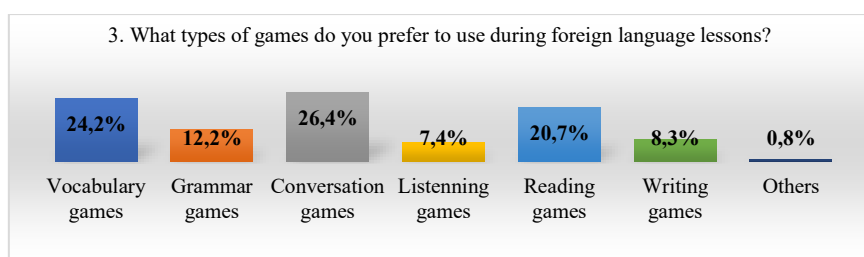


Fig. 3

The data presented in Figure 4 indicates that a substantial 37.2% of participants identify enjoyment as the primary benefit of integrating games into foreign language instruction. Additionally, 20.8% of respondents acknowledged that games contribute to the enhancement of their language skills. A noteworthy 23.9% highlighted the role of games in promoting interaction among peers, and 17.3% pointed to the diverse learning experiences facilitated by these activities. Remarkably, only 0.8% chose the "Other" category without providing any further details.

These findings suggest that the predominant appeal of games within educational contexts lies in their ability to create an engaging and enjoyable learning atmosphere. This enjoyment not only supports language acquisition but also fosters social interaction and introduces varied pedagogical approaches. The significant focus on enjoyment (37.2%) illustrates the motivational power of playful activities, affirming the numerous benefits associated with game-based learning in the realm of foreign language education.

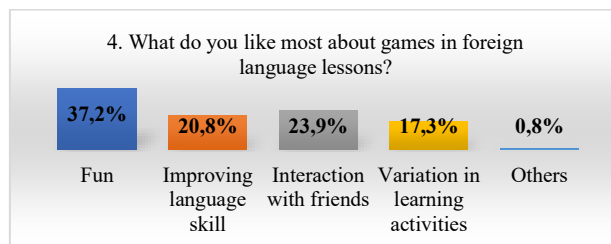


Fig. 4

The data illustrated in Figure 5 reveal that 26.4% of participants view the enhancement of pupil motivation as the foremost advantage of incorporating games into foreign language instruction. Additionally, 33.3% of respondents underscored heightened student engagement as the primary benefit. A further 25.2% indicated that game-based activities lead to more effective learning outcomes, while 15.1% recognized the diversity of learning activities afforded by games. Notably, none of the participants opted for the "Other" category.

These findings suggest that a significant majority of respondents acknowledge the principal benefits of game-enhanced learning in foreign language education, particularly in terms of motivation, engagement, and improved educational outcomes. This underscores the diverse impact of playful methodologies on the educational experience, highlighting their potential to enrich both the emotional and cognitive dimensions of language learning.

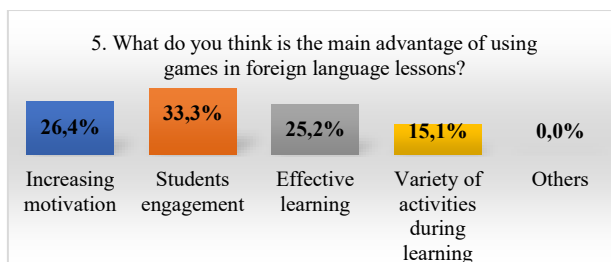


Fig. 5

In the findings presented in Figure 6, an impressive 93.9% of participants reported a marked improvement in their language skills attributed to the use of games in foreign language education, while only 6.1% did not observe such benefits. This considerable statistic indicates that a vast majority of participants recognize a substantial enhancement in their linguistic abilities resulting from game integration in the learning environment. Such evidence underscores the effectiveness of playful pedagogical approaches and emphasizes the role of game-based activities in advancing language acquisition outcomes.



Fig. 6

The data presented in Fig. 7. reveals significant insights regarding the obstacles associated with incorporating games into foreign language instruction. Notably, 25.5% of participants indicated that difficulties in understanding game instructions serve as a considerable barrier to effective utilization. Additionally, a similar subset of 27.3% expressed concerns about the alignment of games with defined learning objectives. More prominently, 38.9% of respondents emphasized challenges in adapting games to meet the diverse language proficiency levels of students. Only a minority, 8.3%, chose the "Other" response without elaboration.

These findings imply that, despite a general acknowledgment of the advantages of game-based learning, several critical challenges must be addressed to facilitate effective implementation. Specifically, issues surrounding the clarity of instructions, alignment with educational goals, and adaptability for varying proficiency levels warrant further exploration to enhance the integration of gamified strategies in foreign language education.

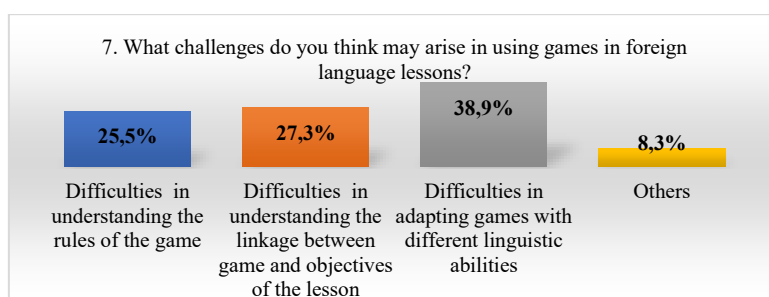


Fig. 7

The data presented in Figure 8 reveals significant insights into educators' perceptions regarding the integration of games in foreign language instruction. Notably, 29.4% of respondents assert the importance of selecting games tailored to the pupils' proficiency levels. Additionally, 22.0% emphasize that it is essential for teachers to provide clear explanations of the game rules. Furthermore, 31.2% acknowledge challenges in aligning games with specific learning objectives, while 17.4% advocate for incorporating a variety of games. These findings

underscore that effective use of gaming in language education necessitates clarity in instructions, alignment with educational goals, and consideration of students' diverse language abilities.



Fig.8

The data presented in Figure 9 reveals that 25.1% of participants expressed a strong motivation to learn a foreign language when games were incorporated into their lessons, while 26.4% indicated a general sense of motivation. A notable 22.6% maintained a neutral stance regarding their motivation levels, in contrast to 17.7% who reported feeling slightly motivated and 8.2% who stated they experienced no motivation whatsoever.

These results indicate that a significant portion of participants—51.5%—demonstrated moderate to strong motivation when engaging with gamified learning approaches. Conversely, 30.5% of the respondents conveyed either neutral or minimal motivation, suggesting variability in individual reactions to game-based pedagogy. This underscores the potential for games to enhance learner motivation broadly, yet it also emphasizes the necessity for educators to tailor their strategies to accommodate those who may not find such methods equally effective.



Fig. 9

Regarding the last question, the pupils' suggestions are summarized as follows: Choosing appropriate games; incorporate elements of competition; customize the games; use role-based games; leverage technology; game diversity.

Regarding our experience, the problems encountered:

- a) Lack of interest on the part of pupils in considering this language as a language that will not create many opportunities for them, for example compared to the English language;
- b) Very poor student vocabulary;
- c) The lack of many teaching materials as an obstacle for teachers but also for pupils, and if a teacher has the desire to use gaming as much as possible during the lesson, he must spend time, energy, but also has economic costs for private purchase of tools, even if these "tools" are very basic in nature.

We tried to overcome the problems:

- a) Increasing the motivation of pupils to be involved in learning the Italian language in a natural way through games that have a specific purpose related to the achievement of the objectives of the lesson;
- b) Regarding the weak vocabulary of the pupils, this problem highlights the importance of performing as many games as possible related to the vocabulary;
- c) The lack of didactic tools due to the lack of public funding was solved through games created with circumstantial tools, provided by the "teacher" himself and which can often be recycled material.

5. Conclusions

The conclusions of this research can be divided into theoretical and practical levels. At a theoretical level, through an in-depth review of the literature, they can be summarized as follows:

The use of games in learning Italian as a foreign language is important for several reasons:

1. **Active Engagement:** Games provide an opportunity to actively engage pupils in learning. They actively participate in gaming activities, stimulating their participation, motivation and interest. This helps them maintain attention and enthusiasm during the learning process.
2. **Meaningful learning:** Games provide a context in which pupils can apply language knowledge in a practical and meaningful way. Through games, they can practice language skills, such as speaking, listening comprehension, reading and writing, in authentic and fun situations. This type of experiential learning promotes better memorization and understanding of new words and linguistic structures.

3. **Motivation and fun:** Games offer an element of fun in language learning. Pupils perceive the activity as a moment of leisure and entertainment, and this helps to keep motivation high. The fun that comes from playing games can create a positive atmosphere in the classroom, increasing pupils' interest and enthusiasm in learning Italian.
4. **Social Interaction:** Games promote interaction and collaboration among pupils. They often require teamwork, discussion and communication in Italian. These activities encourage oral practice, the exchange of ideas and cooperative learning, improving pupils' communication skills and developing their confidence in using the language.
5. **Reduction of language anxiety:** The game creates a relaxed and informal environment in which pupils can experiment with the language without fear of making mistakes or being judged. This helps reduce linguistic anxiety, encouraging greater participation and confidence in using the Italian language.
6. On a practical level, the conclusions of this study can be summarized as follows:
 - a) The use of games in learning Italian as a foreign language offers numerous advantages, including active involvement, meaningful learning, motivation, fun, social interaction and reduction of linguistic anxiety. Gaming in learning a foreign language make language learning more effective, enjoyable and stimulating for pupils.
 - b) Of the 231 pupils involved in the study, 85.7% reported that they actively participated in the games during lessons. This indicates significant student interest and participation in this teaching methodology.
 - c) 20.8% reported that they had improved their language skills thanks to the use of games. This result suggests that games can have a positive impact on learning the Italian language, stimulating pupils' interest and attention and allowing them to practice the language in a fun and engaging way.
 - d) Another interesting data is that 37.6% consider games as an indispensable educational tool. This result shows that games are not just an optional activity, but are perceived as an essential component of language education.
 - e) 37.2% said they prefer games for the fun they offer. This highlights the motivating aspect of games in the learning process, as pupils find pleasure in participating in playful activities that actively involve them.

In summary, the results of the study demonstrate that the use of games in learning the Italian language was well received by pupils, contributed to the improvement of their language skills and aroused positive interest and motivation. These results suggest that integrating games as a teaching tool can be an effective strategy to make learning the Italian language more stimulating and engaged.

5.1. Suggestions

The adoption of innovative methodologies in foreign language education, specifically in the teaching of Italian, is increasingly recognized as a crucial strategy for elevating student engagement and improving academic outcomes. This paper delineates various effective solutions aimed at overcoming the challenges that arise during the integration of language learning games into educational practice.

- a) To begin with, it is vital to create an engaging learning environment that sparks students' interest. Educators can foster motivation by involving learners in projects that explore Italian culture, such as the production of videos, podcasts, or presentations on topics that resonate with students' personal interests. Additionally, organizing cultural events or establishing partnerships with Italian educational institutions can provide authentic opportunities for students to experience the language and culture firsthand, thereby enriching their overall educational experience.
- b) The integration of information and communication technologies (ICT) serves as another transformative opportunity for language instruction. The strategic use of mobile applications, online platforms, and other technological resources can rejuvenate the learning experience, rendering it more interactive and accessible. Modern technology not only captivates students' attention but also accommodates individualized learning pathways tailored to the diverse learning styles present within a classroom.
- c) Project-based learning represents another effective strategy that emphasizes the practical application of language skills in real-world scenarios. By engaging students in projects that require them to utilize the Italian language to solve relevant problems or engage in meaningful discussions, educators can significantly enhance both motivation and practical competence. This method not only bolsters language proficiency but also fosters critical thinking and collaborative skills among students.
- d) In situations where teaching resources may be scarce, educators are encouraged to seek supplementary materials from external sources. Collaborating with local libraries or

community organizations can greatly enhance the availability of valuable resources such as books, magazines, and digital platforms that support Italian language education.

- e) Furthermore, the incorporation of language games into the curriculum proves particularly advantageous for vocabulary enrichment. Activities involving vocabulary challenges, word games, and crosswords actively engage students in the learning process. The utilization of mobile apps or online platforms can further enhance the interactivity of these activities, transforming vocabulary acquisition into an enjoyable experience.
- f) For educational institutions that face limitations in teaching materials, it is essential to inspire educators to develop innovative resource materials. Initiatives such as the creation of video tutorials, interactive e-books, or dedicated websites for Italian language study not only expand resource availability but also captivate students' imaginations in novel ways.
- g) Promoting the use of digital educational tools is also vital, especially when students privately acquire resources. Advocating for the adoption of free or low-cost digital tools can democratize access to high-quality learning materials. Many platforms provide engaging exercises, games, and instructional content that can be shared in workshops designed to empower students to maximize the utilization of these resources.
- h) Finally, engaging the local community profoundly enriches the learning experience. Initiatives such as establishing cultural exchanges with Italian institutions, inviting native speakers as tutors, or facilitating access to Italian cultural events significantly broaden students' exposure to the language beyond the confines of the classroom. Such collaborations deepen understanding and appreciation of the Italian language and culture, ultimately enhancing student learning and engagement.

In conclusion, the implementation of creative and collaborative strategies involving students, educators, parents, and the community holds substantial promise for improving the teaching and learning of Italian as a foreign language.

6. References

- Caillois, R. (2001). *Man, play and games*. University of Illinois Press.
<https://voidnetwork.gr/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Man-Play-and-Games-by-Roger-Caillois.pdf>
- Caon F., 2006, *La glottodidattica ludica. Fondamenti, natura e obiettivi*, in In.IT, 19, 2-5, Perugia: Guerra Edizioni.

- Caon F., Rutka S. (2004), La lingua in gioco: Attività didattiche per l'insegnamento dell'italiano L2, Guerra, Perugia.
- Cassese, S. (2002). Dalle regole del gioco al gioco con le regole. *Mercato concorrenza regole*, Il Mulino, 2, 265-276.
- Chen, S., Zhang, S., Qi, G. Y., & Yang, J. (2020). Games literacy for teacher education: Towards the implementation of game-based learning. *Journal of Educational Technology & Society*, 23(2), 77–92.
- Chen, Z.H., & Lee, S.Y. (2018). Application-driven Educational Game to Assist Young Children in Learning English Vocabulary. *Journal of Educational Technology & Society*, 21(1), 70–81. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26273869>
- Christopher Michael Stuart (2020). *Rhetorical Invorical Invention in a 21st Centurention in a 21st Century Technoculture: A New Ludic Framework for Learning*. Clemson University.
- Coinu, M. (2007). *Le teorie dell'apprendimento*. Dispense didattiche per il Corso di Progettazione Didattica per la Formazione a Distanza. https://www.academia.edu/4054034/1_TEORIE_APPREND_COINU_dispense_copia
- Daloiso M. (2006), “La metodologia ludica per l'insegnamento dell'italiano a giovani adulti: dai fondamenti teorici all'esperienza in classe”, in *Bollettino Itals*, 17: <https://www.itals.it/la-metodologia-ludica-linsegnamento-dellitaliano-giovaniadulti-dai-fondamenti-teorici-allesperienza>
- De Freitas, S. (2018). Are Games Effective Learning Tools? A Review of Educational Games. *Journal of Educational Technology & Society*, 21(2), 74–84. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26388380>
- Deterding, S., Dixon, D., Khaled, R., & Nacke, L (2011). From Game Design Elements to Gamefulness: Defining Gamification. In *Proceedings of the 15th International Academic MindTrek Conference: Envisioning Future Media Environment*, 9-15. ACM. <https://doi.org/10.1145/2181037.2181040>
- Erikson, E. H. (1993). *Childhood and society*. Second edition. W. W. Norton & Co.
- Euteneuer, J. (2020). Developing a Ludic Identity in Writing: Play as a Means of Reflection. *Journal of Higher Education Theory and Practice*, 20(8), 66-71.
- Fiorentino, G. (2023). Giochi linguistici per la didattica dell'italiano. *Italiano LinguaDue*, 14(2), 220–237. <https://doi.org/10.54103/2037-3597/19659>
- Freud, S. (1962). *Three essays on the theory of sexuality*. Basic Books.
- Gillern S., et ali (2022) Minecraft and Elementary Literacy Learning: The Perspectives and Ideas of Preservice Teachers, in *Handbook of Research on Acquiring 21st Century Literacy Skills Through Game-Based Learning*,
- Huizinga, J. (1955). *Homo ludens: A study of the play-element in culture*. Boston, MA: The Beacon Press.
- Katamba, C. V. & Sinuhaji, G. V. (2021). Can ESA Method Through Quizizz Games Enhance Vocabulary Knowledge?. *International Journal of Game-Based Learning (IJGBL)*, 11(3), 19-37. <https://doi.org/10.4018/IJGBL.2021070102>
- Leather, M., Harper, N., & Obee, P. (2020). A Pedagogy of Play: Reasons to be Playful in Postsecondary Education. *Journal of Experiential Education*, 44(3), 208-226. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1053825920959684>

- Lestari, M. (2020). Montessori Game Tools for Children Literacy. In 1st International Conference on Early Childhood Care Education and Parenting (ICECCEP 2019) *Atlantis Press*, 33-36. <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.201205.081>
- Lillard, A. S. (2019). Shunned and admired: Montessori, self-determination, and a case for radical school reform. *Educational Psychology Review*, 31(4), 939–965. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-019-09483-3>
- Nicolopoulou, A. (1993). Play, Cognitive Development, and the Social World: Piaget, Vygotsky, and Beyond. *Human Development*, 36(1), 1–23. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26767422>
- Nilsson, M., & Ferholt, B. (2014). Vygotsky's theories of play, imagination and creativity in current practice: Gunilla Lindqvist's "creative pedagogy of play" in U. S. kindergartens and Swedish Reggio-Emilia inspired preschools. *Perspectiva*, 32(3), 919–950. <https://doi.org/10.5007/2175-795X.2014v32n3p919>
- Piaget, J. (1962). *Play, dreams and imitation in childhood*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Saricoban, A., & Metin, E. (2000). Songs, verse and games for teaching grammar. *The Internet TESL Journal*, 6(10), 1-7, <http://iteslj.org/Techniques/Saricoban-Songs.html>
- Seaborn, K., & Fels, D. I. (2015). Gamification in theory and action: A survey. *International Journal of Human-Computer Studies*, 74, 14–31. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhcs.2014.09.006>
- Sun, J. C.Y., & Hsieh, P.H. (2018). Application of a Gamified Interactive Response System to Enhance the Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation, Student Engagement, and Attention of English Learners. *Journal of Educational Technology & Society*, 21(3), 104–116. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26458511>
- Surendele, G., Murwa, V., Yun, H.-K. and Kim, Y.S. (2014) The Role of Gamification in Education—A Literature Review. *Contemporary Engineering Sciences*, 7, 1609-1616. <http://www.m-hikari.com>
- Sutton-Smith, B. (1967). The Role of Play in Cognitive Development. *Young Children*, 22(6), 360–370. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42720714>
- Technology & Society, 23(2), 77–92. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26921135>
- Titone, R. (1996), *Imparare le lingue giocando. Il metodo ludico nell'insegnamento delle lingue dalla scuola materna alla scuola elementare*, ELI, Recanati.
- Verenikina, I., Harris, P., & Lysaght, P. (2003). Child's Play: Computer Games, Theories of Play and Children's Development. In https://kk.up45.ac.id/scholarhub/Child_s%20play,%20computer%20games,%20theories%20of%20play%20and%20children_s%20development.pdf
- Von Sydow, T. (2017). From Huizinga to Frasca: The emergence and establishment of games as a field of study. <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1112467/FULLTEXT01.pdf>
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. MA: Harvard: University Press.
- Wainwright, N., Goodway, J., Whitehead, M., Williams, A., & Kirk, D. (2020). Playful pedagogy for deeper learning: exploring the implementation of the play-based foundation phase in Wales. *Early child development and care*, 190(1), 43-53.

Zeybek, N., & Saygı, E. (2023). Gamification in Education: Why, Where, When, and How? A Systematic Review. *Games and Culture*, 19(2), 237-264. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15554120231158625>

Website:

1. <https://italianoperstranieri.loescher.it/>
2. <https://italianoperstranieri.loescher.it/news/l-italia-superlativa-32573>
3. https://italianoperstranieri.loescher.it/uploads/10/4800_100_giochi_A2_01.pdf
4. <https://italianoperstranieri.loescher.it/news/emozioni-raccontare-al-passato-4577>
5. <https://italianoperstranieri.loescher.it/news/da-bambino--6816>