SEÇÃO: ARTIGO

"I just want to graduate!": Proposal of Cultural Digital Activities as a Tool to Increase Motivation in the Spanish Language Lab[1]

"Eu só quero me graduar!": proposta de atividades culturais digitais como ferramenta para aumentar a motivação no Laboratório de Língua Espanhola.

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Abstract: Motivating L2 students is challenging. Most learners are not interested in the language and must be reassured that learning a new language is beneficial and worth the effort (Krashen, 2015). L2 students are more likely to be successful when highly motivated (Schütz, 1998), which can be achieved with fun and engaging material. Games are one of the most motivating techniques when introduced properly (McCallum, 1980). They create a relaxed challenging atmosphere of healthy competition that increases students' desire of self-improvement and makes them forget the anxiety that is usually associated with language lessons (Schumann 1994; Constantinescu, 2012; Gozcu & Caganaga, 2016). The link between motivation and acquisition is positive especially when motivation is intrinsic (Tremblay & Gardner, 1995). However, getting students' interest is more difficult when their motivation is instrumental. This is the case of Gardner-Webb University students, who are required to take a language course in order to graduate. Motivating these students is harder when the target is culture. Culture has been traditionally taught with old-fashioned teacher-centered activities, but new technologies enable the development of effective and stimulating material (Dema & Moeller, 2012). The present paper focuses on a series of technology-based games addressing culture. The activities were used to increase the motivation of American university students learning Spanish as a L2 at Gardner-Webb University (North Carolina). The experience was designed by a team of Fulbright fellows to be implemented in their Spanish labs as part of the celebration of two *Cultural Weeks* during the first semester.

Keywords: language lab, motivation, teaching proposal, digital activities, Spanish as L2

Resumo: Motivar os alunos da L2 é um desafio. A maioria dos estudantes não está interessada na língua e precisam entender que aprender uma nova língua é um benéfico e vale a pena o esforço (Krashen, 2015). Os estudantes de L2 têm maior probabilidade de sucesso quando estão altamente motivados (Schütz, 1998), o que pode ser alcançado com um material divertido e envolvente. Os jogos são uma das técnicas mais motivadoras quando introduzidos corretamente (McCallum, 1980). Eles criam uma atmosfera relaxada e desafiadora de competição saudável que aumenta o desejo de autoaperfeiçoamento dos alunos e os faz esquecer a ansiedade que geralmente está associada às aulas de idiomas (Schumann, 1994; Constantinescu, 2012; Gozcu & Caganaga, 2016). A ligação entre motivação e aquisição é positiva, especialmente quando a motivação é intrínseca (Tremblay & Gardner, 1995). Entretanto, conseguir o interesse dos estudantes é mais difícil quando sua motivação é instrumental. Este é o caso dos estudantes da Universidade Gardner-Webb, que são obrigados a fazer um curso de idiomas para se formarem. Motivar estes estudantes é mais difícil quando o alvo é a cultura. A cultura tem sido tradicionalmente ensinada com atividades antiquadas centradas no professor, mas novas tecnologias permitem o desenvolvimento de material eficaz e estimulante (Dema & Moeller, 2012). O presente trabalho se concentra em uma série de jogos baseados em tecnologia que abordam a cultura. As atividades foram utilizadas para aumentar a motivação dos estudantes

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1 The didactic activities described in this paper will be presented on 29th September 2021 at the XXXV Congreso Internacional de la Asociación de Jóvenes Lingüistas (Universidad de Zaragoza), which will be held online due to the pandemic.
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universitários americanos que aprendem espanhol como L2 na Universidade Gardner-Webb (Carolina do Norte). A experiência foi projetada por uma equipe de bolsistas Fulbright para ser implementada em seus laboratórios espanhóis como parte da celebração de duas *Cultural Weeks* (Semanas Culturais) durante o primeiro semestre.

Palavras-chave: laboratório de línguas, motivação, proposta de ensino, atividades digitais, espanhol como L2

The present paper explores the way technology can be deployed to enhance learning of a foreign language and, more specifically, its culture; which develops cultural awareness. The paper reports on the development of a didactic proposal based on games as tools to increase motivation among L2 university students who are required to take a language course as part of their undergraduate studies. Approximately 99% of teaching consists of getting the students interested in the material (Chomsky, 1988). In fact, emotion influences language learning (Scovel, 2000). Gardner and Lambert (1972) were the first to develop a motivation theoretical model, which differentiated between integrative orientation and instrumental orientation. The former refers to the student's willingness and desire to learn the foreign language in order to become part of the target language community (p. 215), while the latter refers to the desire that the learner has to master the L2 for practical reasons (p. 132). Students are more successful in acquiring a L2 when their motivation is integrative (Ellis, 1994, p. 513; Gardner, 1968, pp. 145, 149, among others). Later et al. (1985) developed the Self-Determination Theory, which made a distinction between extrinsic motivation, or learning a L2 to obtain an outcome, and intrinsic motivation, or learning a L2 for inherent satisfaction (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 71).

According to Krashen (2015), "very few people are (…) interested in language for its own shake" (p. 34). Therefore, teachers must convince their students that learning a new language is beneficial and worth making an effort (Krashen,

2015, p. 34). Learning "presupposes a specific social nature" (Vygotsky 1978, p. 88); it happens in interaction (Donato, 2000, p. 27; Lantolf, 2000, p. 13). "It is dialogue that constructs linguistic knowledge" (Swain, 2000: 97), so successful learning depends on how students decide to engage in the L2 classroom (Lantolf, 2000, p. 13). A positive and relaxed environment, where the students' motivation and self-confidence are high and there is no anxiety, allows for the students to engage and learn (Schumann, 1994, p. 232-3). Therefore, it is useful to keep on introducing changes in the classroom occasionally, and that is what the author tried to do in her year as a Fulbright Foreign Language Teaching Assistant (FLTA[3], henceforth) at Gardner-Webb University[4].

Gardner-Webb University is a liberal arts university that requires their undergraduate students to take a language course as part of their core education[5]. This means that most of the students in the language labs are obligated to be in the class. That is, there motivation is instrumental, which makes it even more difficult to get to them and make them excited about learning a foreign language. This difficulty is increased when it comes to culture. During the 2017/18 school year at Gardner-Webb, the Spanish labs celebrated four Cultural Weeks, each week focusing on a different Spanish-speaking country. Since games have been proven to be effective motivation tools, the team of Fulbright fellows decided to use them to teach about culture as well and developed one for each country. In addition, culture has traditionally been taught in a teacher-centered way, and didactic proposals reminds those used with grammar and vocabulary. Hence, these games were created using the new technologies and the resources available in the classroom (Howard & Major, 2004, pp. 52-3). The technology-based activities reported in this paper were implemented during the two Cultural Weeks that were held in the first semester.

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[3] This is the official name that the position receives in the US. However, the grant is for Spanish Lecturers and the author performed all the duties that correspond to said job.

[4] As part of her job as a Fulbright Teaching Assistant, the author taught eight Spanish labs per week of 50 minutes each and she planned these lessons along with her fellow Fulbright grantees Luciana Ryndycz (Argentina) and Lizeth Martinez Burgos (Colombia).

[5] This implies attending three 50-minute language lessons and a 50-minute lab per week (see *Context and Addressees* section).

The paper will start defining what motivation is and the factors that are involved when it comes to learning a L2. The section will also review the characteristics of L2 games and their use as a tool to increase this motivation; along with covering the benefits and the importance of teaching culture in the L2 classroom and raising cultural awareness. Then, section 3 will present the didactic proposal itself, with the technology-based games that were developed. Finally, the last sections will discuss the outcomes and the main conclusions reached.

Theoretical Framework

Motivation in Language Learning

Motivation is "the process whereby goal-directed activity is instigated and sustained" (Pintrich & Schunk, 2002, p. 5). It is an internal process; an individual attribute that differentiates learners from one another and their likelihood of success. However, it also is a social construction: people desire certain things as a result of socializing with a certain community and the social environment constrains the extent to which they can act on their desires (Lamb, 2016, pp. 324-5). When applied to L2 students, the term refers to the individual's reasons for learning a language; their short and long-term goals; the strength of their desire to obtain these goals; their attitude towards the language, its culture and its people; their interest in the language and the enjoyment of the learning process; the effort they put into the learning process; and how they regulate their learning effort (Lamb, 2016, p. 324).

Motivation is a key factor when learning a L2 (Ellis 1994, p. 433) and it has three components[6] (Dörnyei, 2009, p. 29): *ideal L2 self* [the vision we have of ourselves as future L2 users[7]], *ought-to L2 self* [the attributes we believe we must have to meet expectations and avoid negative outcomes] and *L2 learning experience* [the executive motives related to the environment and experiences while learning the L2: the teacher, the classmates etc.].

The *ideal L2 self* and the *L2 learning experience* are the most powerful influences, the former being more influential in secondary and tertiary levels of education (Kormos & Czizés, 2008, pp. 349-350) and not so much in early adolescence and older learners (Lamb 2013, pp. 10-3). Moreover, there is a correlation between the two, since students who have a vivid *ideal L2 self* find their language classes satisfactory. In contrast, the *ought-to L2 self* is less motivational and has a bigger role in collectivistic cultures, where personal motives are influenced by relatives and other figures/relations, such as in Eastern countries (Chen et al. 2005, pp. 612, 622-3; Lamb, 2016, pp. 327-8).

This link between motivation and L2 acquisition is positive (Csizér & Dörnyei, 2005; Yu & Watkins, 2008) especially when it comes to intrinsic motivation (Tremblay & Gardner, 1995; Masgoret & Gardner, 2003; Carrió-Pastor & Mestre Mestre, 2014). Learners may already be motivated to learn a language and their motivation can increase when they reflect on their achievements (Lamb, 2016, p. 331). However, motivation is a dynamic system influenced by several factors (Lamb, 2016, pp. 331-2, 325), such as the learner's aptitude to learn languages, the difficulty of the L2, the efficiency of their learning strategies or the quality of the instruction (cf. Dörnyei, 2001; Wu 2003; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011; Carrió-Pastor & Mestre Mestre, 2014). It decreases with age (Tragant, 2006, Ghenghesh, 2010, referred in Canga Alonso & Fernández Fontecha, 2014, p. 17) and is expected to be higher in a non-compulsory course (Lamb, 2016, pp. 331-2). Therefore, students who are required to complete a course in order to graduate are more difficult to motivate, which is the case of the target students of this teaching proposal.

However, a community is created in the classroom through the interactions, and the relationship that exists between classmates and teachers also influences the learning experience and its success: teachers impact the learners' motivation and learning process when by making

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[6]   Dörnyei's Motivational Self-system.

[7]   The stronger it is, the more likely we will make an effort to learn the L2 to solve the discrepancy between our actual and ideal selves.

them feel accepted and valued (Arnold, 2015, p. 5). Group dynamics create a better quality of interaction, more cooperation and personal implication, positive changes in the behavior of the students, a better relationship with the teacher, more confidence and satisfaction (Arnold, 2015, p. 4). Success in language learning "depends less on materials, techniques and linguistic analyses, and more on what goes on inside and between the people in the classroom" (Stevick, 1980, p. 4, quoted in Arnold, 2009, p. 145). Hence, teachers must establish an atmosphere that facilitates teamwork (Arnold, 2015, p. 3) and develops positive attitudes in their students (Lamb, 2016: 331), while considering their student's social needs (Senior, 2002, p. 402), in order to create activities that are adapted to all types of learners[8]. Games are a good instrument to fulfill these goals.

Games in the L2 classroom

Acquiring a language results by obtaining truly interesting input (Krashen, 2015, p. 34). Thus, even though motivation, self-confidence and anxiety are part of SLA (Schütz, 1998), the learning process should be" interesting, easy and (…) fun" (Pivec & Dziabenko, 2010, p. 1). Students are more successful when they are highly motivated (Schütz 1998), and games are one of the tools that can be used to increase motivation. Games are "activities which have goals and rules", but they are fun (Gozcu & Caganaga, 2016, p. 127); and they can be one of the most motivating techniques when introduced properly, since they automatically stimulate interest in the students (McCallum, 1980, p. ix). With games, learner's motivation is increased by the competition, and students learn the target language unconsciously, since they are not focused on the language but on the activity (Cross, 2000, p. 153). Using games in the language classroom is effective when they focus on language use; are adapted to the level and type of students; and their content is appropriate, since their aim is not only to have fun but to motivate students (Constantinescu, 2012, p. 112).

Games have been proven to have many benefits:

> 1. They are student-centered: students are responsible for their own learning and cognitive level (Constantinescu, 2012, p. 115).
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> 2. They reduce the stress of L2 learning and help shy students to be interested and participate: by playing in the classroom, students do not think about being told off for making mistakes and they do not feel pressured to be perfect in the target language (Gozcu & Caganaga, 2016, p. 128).
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> 3. They create competition in a positive way (Gozcu & Caganaga, 2016, p. 127) and increase students' desire for self-improvement. The challenge makes them focus on completing the task (Constantinescu, 2012, p. 114): "students get very absorbed in the competitive aspects of the game" and "they try harder … that in other courses" (Avedon & Brian, 1971, quoted in Gozcu & Caganaga, 2016, p. 129).
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> 4. They can be adapted to different levels (Constantinescu, 2012, p.114) and types of students.
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> 5. They can be used as rewards (Constantinescu, 2012, p. 115).

Studies on both traditional and technology-based games have shown that games are an effective tool to increase motivation and language learning (Langran & Purcell, 1994; Uberman, 1998; Sorensen & Meyer, 2007; Song & Fox, 2008; Brunce, 2010; Cortez et al., 2011; Miangah & Nezara, 2012; Slovaček et al., 2014; Rico et al., 2015; Vasileiadou & Makrina, 2017). Learning through games has been a usual studying technique (Labrador Piquer & Morote Magán, 2008, pp. 71-3), but games continue to be used as elements to fill time rather than tools to relax the environment so that real learning takes place (Gozcu & Caganaga, 2016, p. 127). Games are not only a tool to increase motivation but a useful resource for students to learn different aspects of a language. The didactic proposal presented in this paper focuses on one

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[8]   Spatial-visual, naturalistic, musical, logical-mathematical, existential, interpersonal, bodily-kinesthetic, verbal-linguistic and intra-personal (Gardner's Multiple Intelligences Theory 1991, referred in Lamb 2016, p. 332).

of those aspects, once neglected, for the teaching of which a series of technology-based games were developed: culture.

Teaching Culture in the L2 classroom

The term *culture* is "a very broad concept embracing all aspects of human life" (Seelye, 1993, p. 15). It can be defined as "a fuzzy set of attitudes, beliefs, behavioural conventions, and basic assumptions and values that are shared by a group of people, and that influence each member's behavior and each member's interpretations of 'meaning' of other people's behaviour" (Spencer-Oatey, 2000, p. 4). This means that "a language is a part of culture, and a culture is a part of language"; and that they cannot be separated because one or the other will lose significance (Brown, 2001, p. 177). Therefore, it is surprising that, even though scholars and teachers recognized the relationship between language and culture related to language teaching, culture was not integrated in the language classrooms until 1950 (Cardona et al., 2015, p. 1362). Teachers and learners need to understand cultural aspects, that there are differences between groups and cultures, because developing *cultural awareness* leads to the acquisition of the L2 (Condon, 1973, p. 180, as referred in Gumar Karam, 2017, p. 4).

The development of cultural awareness is one of the many benefits of teaching culture. It enables the discovery and understanding of the speaker's culturally conditioned behavior, and the recognition of similarities and differences among cultures (Cardona et al., 2015, pp. 1363). Learners can choose if they want to adopt the practices and believes of the target culture; however, they must understand both in order to fully comprehend the L2 (Corbett, 2003, p. 20). The culture of each country is shared by its members; and the forms and uses of a language reflect the cultural values of its society. Teaching the language without teaching its culture is meaningless. This is why culture has become an important component of language teaching (Cardona, et al., 2015, pp. 1362-3), attracting the attention of many researchers (Brooks, 1968; Kramsch, 1987; Byram, 1989,

1997; Cullen, 2000; Tomlinson, 2000b; Quappe & Cantatore, 2005; Genc & Bada, 2007; Wang, 2008; Izadpanah, 2011). When they learn about another culture, students become more aware of their own culture, which develops their ability to know cultural norms in the target language [*cultural awareness*] (Gumar Karam, 2017, p. 5).

Other benefits of teaching culture are that it stimulates the curiosity about the target culture; it makes students understand that people have culturally-conditioned behaviors that are influenced by their age, social class and so on; it raises awareness of the conventions that exist in certain L2 situations and of the cultural connotations of words and phrases in the target language; and it develops the ability to refine existing stereotypes and the necessary skills to organize information in the target language (Tomalin & Stempleski, 1993, p. 7-8). However, culture has traditionally been taught in a teacher-centered way, probably because "teachers tend to teach as they themselves were taught. Given few alternative models, future teachers simply end up replicating stale and worn methods (…) uninteresting and unchallenging" (Nieto, 2009, p. 192). Nonetheless, technology has changed the nature of teaching and learning; and teachers are gradually including the use of authentic materials, movies, music etc. in their lessons. Teachers all around the world are using digital technologies to make learning more effective and engaging (Dema & Moeller 2012, pp. 80-2). This promotes "socially active language in multiple authentic contexts due to its accessibility, flexibility, connectivity speed and independence of methodological approach" (Gonzalez, 2009, p. 62, as quoted in Dema & Moeller, 2012, p. 82).

Technology enables L2 teachers to develop better and more effective instructional material to teach both the language and its culture (Dema & Moeller, 2012: 82). In fact, the use of technology facilitates the learning of culture (Kukulsa-Hulme, 2010, p. 12; Lee 2009, p. 440). By introducing the use of smartphones, computers or laptops in the classroom, the teacher and the students become part of an interactive environment. This

environment makes students understand the intersection of language-culture in tangible/intangible aspects of cultural understanding and develop the strategies that conduct to the learning of L2 cultural concepts (Dema & Moller, 2012, pp. 82-5). Therefore, a series of technology-based games were developed to teach culture. The games involve the use of computers, laptops and phones and address several cultural areas of two Spanish-speaking countries.

Didactic Proposal to Teach Culture through Technology-based Games

Context and Addressees

As mentioned in the introduction, Gardner-Webb University is a Liberal Arts University, which means that all the students must take a certain number of hours of specific courses as part of their core education. One of those requirements is taking a language course (Spanish, ASL, German or French) for three semesters, which consists of three 50-minute language lessons plus a 50-minute language lab per week during each of the semesters. This means that most of the students that are taking language classes do not really want to study them; that is, they are required to complete a language course in order to graduate. That makes it more difficult to engage their attention and make them motivated in learning a foreign language, especially when it comes to learning something new or practicing their speaking skills. In addition, labs usually are just lessons to make the students practice what they have already been taught in the lessons with their primary professors. However, that year the Department introduced the teaching of Spanish-speaking countries in the labs. Getting students interested becomes even more difficult when the aim is for them to learn the culture of the L2 they are studying, as in the present case. In the author's view, becoming interested in a culture comes from being interested in the language and viceversa; and this makes being interested in learning about a culture very difficult when forced to learn its language.

In the case of author's Spanish labs, the students in each of the groups and levels (101, 102, 201, 202)

were in different stages of their undergraduate studies, and all of them had different levels of the language: most of them had studied Spanish in High School, but many had forgotten everything they had learned. Thus, in the same class, there were students with a very good level of Spanish and students with a very low level. Furthermore, these freshmen, sophomores, juniors and seniors were not only mixed in class, but they were also mixed in the lab according to the lab time that could fit their schedules. This meant that their labmates did not always coincide with their classmates. Also, each lab group had lessons once a week, while their language classes took place several times during the week. As mentioned before, students experience a lot of anxiety in language lessons, even more so when their level is not very high. The fact that they are surrounded by people they do not know may increase this anxiety. It is the author's view that games can ease anxiety because they get all types of learners engaged, no matter their L2 level; and they also make even the shiest student participate and learn while having a good time.

Designing the games

As shown in sections 2.2 and 2.3, many papers report on the use of games in the foreign language classroom, mostly focusing on the teaching of grammar and vocabulary (e.g. Constantinescu, 2012; Calvo-Ferrer, 2017). Many papers also focus on the importance of teaching culture in the L2 classroom, addressing mainly the theoretical aspects of doing so (e.g. Dema & Moeller, 2012; Cardona & Sarmiento, 2015). Didactic proposals have been developed, but some remind of the activities that are used to teach other aspects of the language in a traditional way (e.g. Negro, 2013). On the other hand, teachers started to include the use of technology (videos, songs etc.) in their L2 lessons long ago. This trend is highly increasing nowadays that technology seems essential in our lives, but not many studies have focused on the use of games and/or technology to teach cultural aspects of a language (e.g. Nguyen & Nguyen, 2019). Hence, the present paper aims to

contribute to the SLA field with a proposal that combines both games and technology to teach about culture and raise cultural awareness.

Language teachers traditionally use games as warm-up activities, as a way to reward students, or at the end of the class if time is left. However, games should be a part of the learning process instead of being used only when there is nothing else to do in class or to kill time (Lee, 1979, p. 3). They are powerful tools that language teachers can use to motivate students: through games, students learn without being conscious about it; without making a real effort. Games can be used to show them that learning a language can also be fun and does not always have to involve anxiety. For the students to enjoy in the classroom, there should be a relaxed and entertaining atmosphere, and games provide it (Ruíz Campillo, 2015). Games are also linked to culture, which make them a fundamental factor in the teaching of foreign languages (Labrador Piquer & Morote Magán, 2008, p. 71-3). Therefore, the *Cultural Weeks* were planned by using student-centered methods[9]; and a different game was developed for each of the target Spanish-speaking countries, instead of just telling the students cultural facts about them. Creating this proposal, instead of using already-existing L2 material, allowed for considering the specific group of students it was targeted to, as well as their individual needs. Moreover, the use of technology helped make the material more attractive to them (cf. Howard & Major, 2004), and the games were carefully planned in order to obtain positive outcomes (Gozcu & Caganaga, 2016, p. 129).

During the first semester, the target cultures were Spain and Mexico. There were only 50 minutes to work on each country, since the different groups only had one lab per week. Nonetheless, the students already had information about them in their textbooks, such as what their typical dishes or main festivities are. The cultural lessons were split in two, the first part lasting around 5-10min. In the case of Spain, the beginning of the lesson was teacher-centered: a PowerPoint with media resources was used to introduce different aspects of the Spanish culture. Some of these surprised the students greatly, such as that Spain has a Royal Family, or that Spanish is not the only official language but there are four co-official languages. Moreover, since sports are an important part of the American culture, information about famous Spanish athletes was also included. In the case of Mexico, the first part of the lesson was student-centered: the students had to find out information about Mexico in two teams by answering some questions in the form of the game *Verdad o Atrevimiento* ('Truth or Dare') The questions and dares were written in Spanish and separated in two piles depending on their category. Each time, one member of the team would choose between *verdad* ('truth') o *atrevimiento* ('dare'), and then take a piece of paper from the pile they had chosen. If they chose *verdad*, they had to answer factual questions about Mexico, such as ¿Cuál es su moneda? ('what currency do they use?'). If they chose *atrevimiento*, they had to perform some sort of action, such as *Busca una Catrina y dime de qué color es* ('Find a *Catrina* and tell me what color it is'). The students were allowed to use their phones whenever they did not know the answer to a question, Phones have become part of our daily life, and teenagers and college students use them for almost everything nowadays: "the ubiquity of the cell phone makes it a preferred technology for students to communicate, and when used for education it increases the relevance of an assignment to students' lives and potentially intensifies their motivation for learning" (Chiverton 2017, p. 2). Allowing the students to use their phones in these lessons for learning purposes revealed that it made them more engaged; and it made them discover many facts about the Mexican culture.

The second part of the lesson, in both cases, consisted of presenting the technology-based games and playing them, which also was student-centered. In his article "Who Wants To Be A Millionaire®: The Classroom Edition", Cochran (2001) designed a classroom version of the famous television show to engage students in learning

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[9] Following the example of Montessori (1912), Piaget (1936), Rogers (1969) or Dewey (2011).

about statistics. The game has been also used to practice English as a L2, so we adapted the game to teach about Spanish culture. On the other hand, teachers of different subjects and educational contexts around the world use the app Kahoot in their lessons. This platform enables teachers to create questions related to their lessons [they can add videos and pictures], and students have to use their phones or laptops in order to answer them. Kahoot is not a novel teaching practice. However, it has been proven to be very fun, so the game about Mexico was developed using this tool. The goal of the questions in the two games was both for the students to review what they had just been taught and for them to learn new things about the countries. Special emphasis was put into changing their common belief that all Spanish-speaking countries are Mexico and that their culture is the same.

In the case of Spain, following Cochran's (2001) example, a power point with questions about Spain in the format of the TV show was designed. The topics covered many areas of culture: Music, Writers, Geography, Athletes, Official Languages, Currency, Traditions and so on. The students got to answer the questions just as if they were in the actual TV show. The reason to include so many areas of the Spanish culture was that the students could learns as much and as broadly as possible. The questions were created using both the information that was going to be presented at the beginning of the lab and new information. They were not grouped based on the topic; instead, they were mixed so that the game would be more dynamic. Furthermore, all the questions were written in Spanish, even though students were not going to understand all the words. This way, they were totally immersed.

These are two examples of the questions that were designed[10]:
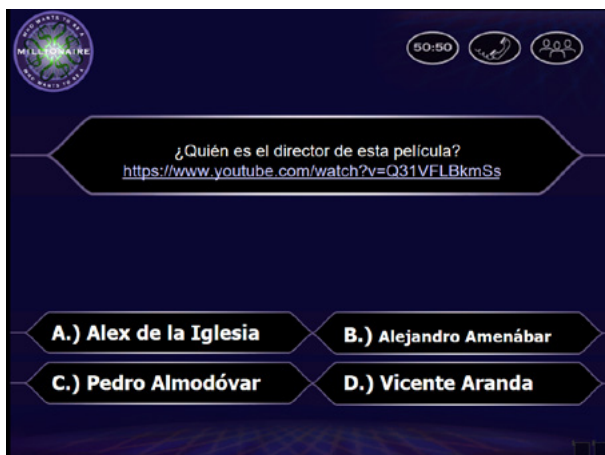
Figure 1 – ¿Quién quiere ser millonario?/Who wants to be a millionaire? (I)

Figure 2 – ¿Quién quiere ser millonario?/Who wants to be a millionaire? (II)

In order to play, the group was split in two teams and a chair was placed in front of the board, facing the students. The questions were projected in the interactive digital board and read out loud by the teacher. When any member of a team knew the answer, they had to run to the chair and sit down in order to give their answer. In the case a member of both teams had gotten up, the fastest to sit down was the first to answer. If their answer was wrong, there was a rebound and the other team had the chance to answer. Some of the questions were easy for them to answer because they had been included in the PowerPoint presentation at the beginning of the lesson. They already knew, for instance, that in Spain there are both a King and a President.

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[10]   These questions are original material created by the team of Fulbright grantees.

However, there were other questions they had no idea about, such as what time Spanish people have dinner. In any case, it was fun for them to try and answer. The reviewing questions made them want to remember what they had been learning at the beginning of the class; and the new questions about different topics made them learn interesting facts about Spain that are not normally explained in a language lesson.

Each of the rounds, of two questions each, equaled imaginary money that the team won. The questions became more difficult as the game progressed, and the money they could earn increased. The author used some of the questions to explain cultural aspects further and also showed other videos: e.g. one of the questions showed a picture of a *castañuela* ('castanets') and the students had to guess that it is a musical instrument. *Castañuelas* are a big part of Spanish culture, especially in the south, where they are used to dance *sevillanas*. What many people do not know, even inside of Spain, is that there even are concerts composed for this instrument. Thus, the students were very surprised when the author showed them a video of the intermission of *La boda de Luís Alonso* by J. Giménez[11]. At the end of the game, the money that each of the teams had won was summed up and the team with the most money won. They did not earn money as in the real TV show, but the real price was all the knowledge they gained about Spanish culture.

In the case of Mexico, the second part of the lesson consisted on playing Kahoot. The questions created were similar to the ones used when teaching about Spain, as well as their goal: reviewing the information in their books and learning other aspects of the Mexican culture, such as their famous singers and actors. The way this website works is as follows: the teacher can create as many questions as he wants, and he can include pictures or YouTube links in the questions. Then, he can write four possible answers, each with a different color provided by the platform. The students see the question and the answers in the board, but they only see the colors of the possible answers in their devices. This makes the game both more fun and more difficult, since someone may make a color mistake even if they know the correct answer. Points are given depending on the correct answers and the speed in selecting the answers in the device. Thus, the fact that each answer has a different color and that the students can only see the color but not the written answer in their devices, makes it more difficult to answer correctly when they are trying to be fast.

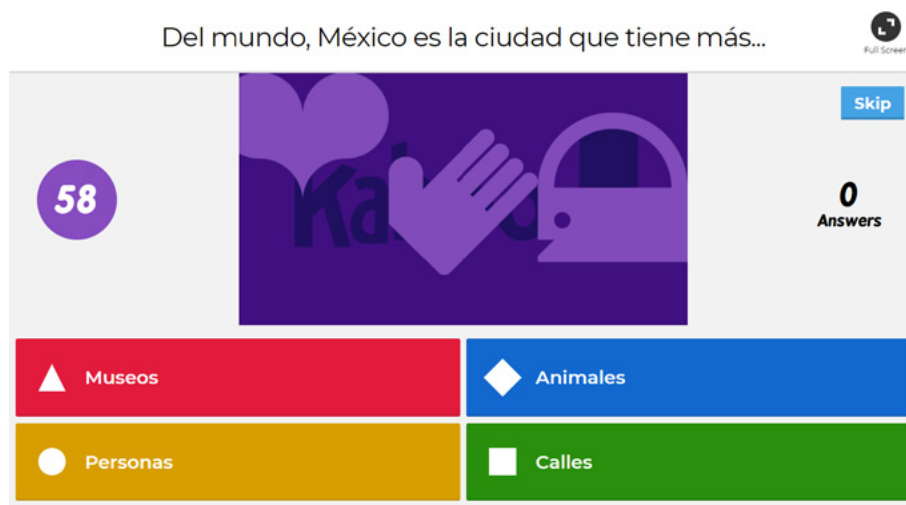Hereafter some examples of the questions[12]:

Figure 3 – Kahoot (I)

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[11]   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nfgypRpbZMA.

[12]   These questions are original material created by the team of Fulbright grantees.
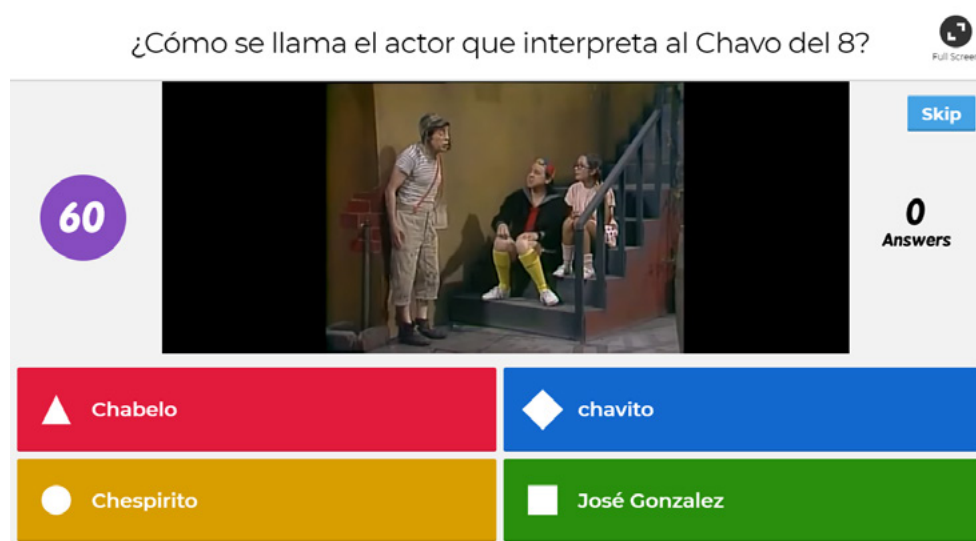
Figure 4 – Kahoot (II)

Before playing, the students were explained how to join the game, for which they also had to choose a username. This username, which could or not coincide with their real name, appeared on the interactive board once they had joined the round. Then, the questions were shown in the board and the students used their devices to answer. The fact that the only thing they see in their screens are the colors of the answers makes them pay extra attention to the board. When the correct answer of the question was given, the screen showed who had won points and how many. The students could also see the amount of points they were summing up as the game progressed, before the screen showed who the winner was when the class had gone through all the questions.

Discussion

Hereafter, impressions on the students and the atmosphere of the class will be discussed from a qualitative perspective. The reported outcome was based both on the observation of the development of the lessons and the attitude that the students showed while taking part in them, and the feedback forms the students completed at the end of the semester. Thus, no tool was used to measure the motivation of the students.

The games described above were used during the two *Cultural Weeks* that were celebrated in the Fall semester at Gardner-Webb University. The games were implemented in the 101,102 and 201 groups, without being altered nor adapted depending on the level of the lab. It was noticed that the level of understanding depended more on the individual students than on the group as a whole and its "level" (e.g. 102). Some students had difficulty in understanding the questions because they are not used to being exposed to real Spanish (e.g. the activities in their textbooks do not represent real language; they are very simplistic and the *listenings* are slow-paced). Therefore, it was made sure they all understood the questions before they tried to answer them. Furthermore, most of the students do not read or listen to Spanish outside of class, so their learning goal mostly consists on studying to pass their exams. Hence, it would have been counterproductive to make it easy for them with very basic questions or English translations. All the students needed was encouragement to believe they are able to understand and speak Spanish. This way, they learned new vocabulary and they were exposed to real input, which is something they lacked. Nonetheless, all the questions worked well with the groups and students benefited from the games being completely in Spanish: they improved their grammar and syntax while learning about culture. In fact, learners' understanding of written and spoken L2 improves when using

games, since they learn correctly pronounced and spelled words and structures in context (Constantinescu, 2012, p. 114).

Regarding the attitude of the students, all of them were very motivated. By playing, they forgot they were in a lesson, learning, and they used their language abilities more spontaneously (Roth, 1998, as referred in Pasovic Petrovic, 2014, p. 13). They were following the game and learning both cultural facts and grammar/vocabulary, not matter their personal or lab level. They were having a great time and laughing; and this was noticeable not only in these lessons, but during the whole year. The fact that games were common in the lessons made them come to the lab with a different attitude: happy and with disposition to learn. This was also reflected in the feedback forms. Students became more motivated as the semester went on; and the fact that the games were also a way for them to check their progress, made them study harder so that they would come prepared to lab. Healthy competition had a positive effect on them, and it was the engine that propelled them to put their knowledge into practice and improve.

As a university foreign language instructor, the author found that her students' knowledge about the countries and cultures they studied increased greatly by playing games. The facts they were taught stayed in their minds without studying them, just because they were having fun while learning. Also, the use of their laptops and cellphones made them more engaged with the lessons. When students felt motivated, the atmosphere in the classroom changed and they felt excited and got more involved in the activities. Games made them lose the anxiety that usually accompanies language lessons: they made them interact with one another and with the teacher, and it became easier for them to learn and participate in the language classroom without worrying so much about any mistakes they could make. Motivation, as research has shown, makes a great difference.

Therefore, the students enjoyed the activities and learning about Spanish-speaking countries. This confirmed that games would increase their motivation, since culture was not a topic of interest

for most of them due to the mandatory nature of the course. Indeed, games "turn subjects that are mostly seen as 'boring' by learners (…) into something enjoyable and fun without the fear of ridicule" (Pasovic Petrovic, 2014, p. 13). Also, Spain is a great unknown in the US and the author's country of origin; and teaching the target culture from the perspective of a native speaker is more meaningful to students (Lee, 2009, p. 433). Being passionate about teaching cultural aspects in all the lessons also had an impact on the students' motivation.

Conclusion

Motivation plays a big role in any classroom, but especially in language lessons. Students engage more in the learning process when they are learning while having fun, which makes them forget about making mistakes or feeling anxious. When students feel confident and motivated, their attitude towards the target language changes positively (Carrió-Pastor & Mestre Mestre, 2014, p. 243). There are many tools that language teachers can use to increase the motivation of their students, and two of them are games and technology. Games should be part of language lessons because they have many benefits besides being fun, such as healthy competition or collaborative learning. However, they must be wisely used and developed, taking into consideration the level, the knowledge and the age of the students, among other factors. At the same time, technology shall also be used wisely so that student focus on the activity that is being carried out and do not get distracted by the world of the Internet.

The didactic proposal in this paper offered three technology-based games that can be used to teach cultural aspects. The games included authentic language and materials (Howard & Major, 2004) which made the learning process more engaging and effective. The main problem that was found when implementing the activities was the students' previous lack of exposure to real input. This is an aspect that should be solved both in their language lessons and outside of class. Nonetheless, it did not stop the students

from learning the content in the culture labs. In fact, exposure to real Spanish input contributed to increasing their knowledge of the Spanish language as well. The second problem was due to time limitations: labs are held once a week. This meant that, having only a day per country, both the presentation of the target culture and the game had to be done in the same lesson. The ideal would have been to hold two labs per country, dedicating one lesson to present the cultural content, and another lesson to play the games and test quantitatively if an increased motivation equaled retention of content. Despite these problems, technology-based games were found to increase students' motivation. Nonetheless, this was only tested qualitatively, so future research could validate these findings with other methods.

Finally, the aim of this paper is not reducing culture to trivia. Instead, it aims to present an approach to better understand how technology can be used to teach culture and raise *cultural awareness.* The activities presented were developed for a very specific context that was restricted due to time limitations: they were planned for university students that were required to take a language course as part of their core education. However, they can be extrapolated to other contexts, languages and countries, even without the use of technology. In the same way, the proposal can be used with learners of different ages, since adults enjoy games as well. Games should not be meant to replace the teacher's role, but in words of Constantinescu (2012, p. 155), "it is the teachers' duty to re-create the old education in such a way to fit the personalities and needs of the 21st century students". Technology allows for the creation of personalized material specially targeted to the type of students in the class, which is likely to increase their motivation and engagement (Howard & Major, 2004, pp. 50-1). Therefore, didactic technology-based proposals such as the present work are needed to increase the motivation of L2 students, especially those who feel obliged to learn the language; whose motivation is instrumental. Nevertheless, further research is needed in order to confirm quantitatively if technology-based games increase students' motivation. In the same way, future studies could analyze if technology-based games are influential in other educational contexts.

Conflicts of interest disclosure

I have no conflicts of interest to disclosure.

Authors' contributions

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