

# Escape Rooms as a Motivating Tool in the English Literature Classroom in Secondary Education



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Edited by

Verónica Membrive and Madalina Armie

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# FOREWORD

PETER BANNISTER

In the ever-evolving landscape of education, it is crucial for teaching practitioners and researchers to explore innovative methods that engage and inspire students. Building on the success of their previous volume, *Escaping Boredom in the Classroom* (Armie and Membrive 2022), the authors have returned with a new contribution which will undoubtedly be of use to practitioners and researchers alike. In this edited volume, *Escape Rooms as a Motivating Tool in the English Literature Classroom in Secondary Education*, the authors delve into the world of gamification once more and on this occasion comprehensively explore its potential to revolutionise the teaching of English literature which is in need of innovation.

Innovation in education is essential for furnishing learners with the tools to be successful in an ever-changing, globalised world (Bannister 2023). Embracing innovation in education promotes critical thinking, a sense of adventure, and an openness to adapt that will serve students in the classroom and beyond. Innovative educational practices not only ignite a passion for learning but also provide students with the necessary skills to tackle the challenges of their future workplace. As is referred to briefly here and expanded on by the authors of the volume subsequently, there are numerous affordances of employing this methodology as a means of teaching and learning innovation in the chosen context of focus.

Gamification has been shown to increase student engagement, aid in cognitive development, and make learning more accessible for students with diverse needs (Peterson et al. 2022). By incorporating game-like elements into the classroom, educators can create a more dynamic and enjoyable learning experience. Gamified learning experiences provide several pedagogical advantages that are particularly relevant in the domain of English and English literature education (Santamaría Urbieta & Alcalde Peñalver 2019). By increasing learner engagement through enjoyable and interactive game elements, gamification can enhance knowledge retention as students make real-world connections and hone problem-solving and decision-making abilities. Furthermore, collaborative game mechanics encourage teamwork and critical thinking as learners work together to achieve goals, apply logic, and make choices. Importantly, gamified lessons

can be adapted to suit diverse learning needs, making this an inclusive teaching methodology. In summary, thoughtfully designed gamification strategies leverage engagement, collaboration, and adaptability to provide immersive English language and literature education that activates critical thinking and facilitates deep retention of concepts.

Escape rooms have gained popularity in education due to their ability to engage students in problem-solving, critical thinking, and collaboration. By integrating these game elements into the teaching of literature, educators can create a more immersive and enjoyable learning experience for their students.

Some of the strategies presented in the book include creating immersive literary experiences, thereby designing escape room scenarios that incorporate elements from classic works of literature, allowing students to explore the story's setting, characters, and themes in an interactive manner. The authors also highlight the importance of incorporating problem-solving tasks and developing puzzles and challenges related to literary works, encouraging students to apply their knowledge and critical thinking skills to solve problems. Promoting collaboration and teamwork is an additional strategy of note which is recommended, that is, designing escape room activities that require students to work together, fostering a sense of camaraderie and collaboration while learning about literature. Furthermore, connecting literature to real-world issues is of importance here, given that using escape room scenarios to explore contemporary issues and themes, may indeed help students to see the relevance of classic literature in today's world.

Very much in line with the well-documented outlined previously, the book is structured in two parts. Part 1 provides what the authors term a "theoretical skeleton" for the book. They not only address the underpinnings of gamification as a theoretical model, whilst discussing the benefits of gamification for this pedagogical context of focus in general but also provide concrete examples of how to implement this methodology in the classroom. This combination of theoretical grounding and practical application makes the book a valuable resource for seasoned and novel teaching practitioners and researchers alike.

By establishing the value of these classic texts, the authors helpfully set the stage for the innovative proposals presented in the following part. In Part 2 the authors offer practical examples and strategies for using escape room-style games to teach popular works of English literature in the classroom. The practical examples and strategies provided in this part of the book penned by a range of seasoned collaborators serve as a valuable resource for educators looking to experiment with gamification in their classrooms.

Grounded in the setting of Secondary Education, these examples demonstrate how escape room-style games can be used to teach classic works of English literature, offering a fresh and engaging approach to literary education.

In conclusion, *Escape Rooms as a Motivating Tool in the English Literature Classroom in Secondary Education* edited by Membrive and Armie is a timely and insightful exploration of the potential of gamification in the teaching of English literature. By offering a compelling blend of theory and practice, the book serves as an invaluable guide for educators seeking to engage and inspire their students through innovative teaching methods.

The author of the foreword is highly confident that by engaging with the following lines, the foundling flames of pedagogical inspiration will begin to ignite. Adventure awaits as your journey into innovation and learning is about to begin...

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## **PART I**

# INTRODUCTION

VERONICA MEMBRIVE  
AND MADALINA ARMIE

## Abstract

The introduction sets the background for the understanding and the motivations that lie at the very heart of the creation of this volume. First, here is explained the new context against which education should be read. The Covid-19 pandemic, globalisation and the advancement of new technologies have made imperative the need for change in the field of education. Gamification is one of the most dynamic and up-to-date teaching methodologies that is gaining momentum nowadays, as it allows educators to design desirable experiences that set into motion motivational mechanisms that engage learners. One of the most popular gamified resources in the panorama of the education of the 21st century is the escape room. Later, the second part of this volume is introduced. This presents 11 practical proposals based on literary contents addressed to students that belong to secondary education and are learning English as a second or foreign language.

**Keywords:** Connectivism, Covid-19 pandemic, digital literacy, Knowledge Society, teacherpreneurship

“Before the turn of the [20] century, there was no subject ‘English’ (in the sense of an acknowledged, unified field of study)” (Protherough and Atkinson 1994, 5), even for native English-speaking students. However, 123 years later, English is the global language of excellence and the most widely spoken (BSC Education n.d.). According to ETS Global (2020), “English is widely spoken and taught in over 118 countries”. Moreover, BSC Education (n.d.) claims that “English is the official language of 53 countries and is used as a lingua franca (a mutually known language) by people from all around the world”.

From the sixteenth century onwards, the British Empire, one of the most powerful empires, helped spread the English language as a vehicle for

communication between the old continent and the numerous recently discovered and remotest of its colonies and protectorates. Moreover, in the past four decades, the cultural influence of countries such as the United States and, indirectly, their multinationals (partly due to capitalism and rapid globalisation), has given rise to the phenomena known as Americanisation, McDonaldisation (Ritzer 2014) and Coca-colonization (Pendergrast 1993). Consequently, English has attained the privileged position of the language of politics, business, education, science, research, thought, media, and travel.

Learning a second or a foreign language enhances students' cognitive and analytical abilities. Learning English opens doors in one's professional and personal lives. Firstly, students can access an enormous amount of information in this language, widening their knowledge in any field. By extension, studying, speaking and writing English can help learners obtain a better job in an international company either at home or abroad. The ability to speak English would also make travel easier, whether for employment or tourism, because airline announcements, bus and train timetables, restaurant and bar menus, and tenants all use English (although the alphabet is different), even when travelling through the most inaccessible areas of Asia.

William Shakespeare, Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, Edgar Allan Poe, Oscar Wilde, and Virginia Woolf are well-known writers worldwide, demonstrating that writing a book in English and translating it into other languages facilitates its distribution, commercialisation, and popularisation. English is also the language of the media industry and the communication tool used by channels such as CNN, BBC News, and Fox News. Public entertainment, notably Hollywood productions such as television shows, films, and series are available in English with subtitles in many languages on Netflix and HBO and are watched globally. Similarly, English is used in numerous popular songs written by thousands of well-known and minor artists. Songs are frequently disseminated using catchy language in posts on popular social media platforms, such as Instagram, TikTok, and Spotify, and often go viral overnight. According to ETS Global (2020), "an estimated 565 million people use the internet every day, and about 52% of the world's most visited websites are displayed in English. Therefore, learning this language gives access to over half the content of the internet, which might not be available otherwise". Considering these starting premises, the current significance of English cannot be underestimated or ignored. However, teaching and learning English as a second (ESL) or foreign (EFL) language are challenging tasks, particularly when involving analogue and digital resources.

Firstly, students require subsidiary skills that could help them to distinguish between reliable and unreliable information whether written in English or another language. According to data provided by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) and reported by Yahoo, *The Journal*, RTE, Head Topics, *Irish Times*, and *Irish Examiner*, 62% of all information found on the internet in 2022 was unreliable (Yaquub 2023). Connectivism, also known as the learning theory of the digital era,<sup>1</sup> is an approach to teaching and learning that aims to address knowledge and close the gaps between traditional teaching ideas and the need for new methods to align education with the requirements and challenges of today's society. Accordingly, connectivism seeks to offer learners the necessary tools to thrive in the 21st century in educational centres and beyond by developing the necessary competences. According to the principles of connectivism, its success requires students to be able to combine thoughts, theories, and general information in a useful manner and become “nodes” in learning networks. The relevant dimensions of connectivism in this book and for understanding gamification (defined later) and, by extension, escape rooms are twofold. On the one hand, learning is a social activity (Siemens 2005); that is, individuals learn from others. On the other hand, individuals learn from digital devices (Downes 2008). These two dimensions of connectivism emphasise the fact that in contemporary society, not only do people learn differently, but also, in the past four decades, have learned how to live, work, communicate, and relate differently.

Reasons underlying this metamorphosis include the vertiginous development and spread of new technologies, globalisation, multiculturalism, and the COVID-19 pandemic, which have altered traditional identities and socio-cultural practices. These transformations became possible due to the creation of environments that challenged distance and time. Information is immediately available and communication is possible despite physical remoteness. The borders between the virtual and physical dimensions have become porous, intangible, and almost limitless. This new era is frequently referred to as the “digital age”, “information age”, “technoculture”, and the “fourth industrial revolution” (Pratt-Johnson 2019). In this newly created context, the world has been altered by “the culturalization of technology and the technologization of our relationship to culture” (Octobre 2021). In other words, “digitality can be thought of as a marker of culture because it encompasses both

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<sup>1</sup> George Siemens and Stephen Downes's contributions have settled the pillars of this approach back in 2004. For more information on Connectivism consult Siemens's “Connectivism: Learning as a Network Creation” (2005) and Downes's “An Introduction to Connective Knowledge” (2008).



the artefacts and the systems of signification and communication that most clearly demarcate our contemporary way of life from others” (Gere 2008, 12).

Since digitalisation is ubiquitous, the teaching field is also under continuous strain to innovate as it attempts to address the transformations affecting classrooms globally, no matter the educational stage. Numerous studies highlight how these changes affect educators and students. Researchers have observed students’ capabilities, diversity, and level of engagement in the classroom. They have investigated how easily certain subjects might become sources of frustration due to low motivation that frequently regularises and defines the outcomes of the learning process. Moreover, they have explored the apparent obsolescence and ineffectiveness of traditional schooling approaches. These studies also highlight the direct connection between these considerations and the high levels of cheating, disengagement from school, and concerning attrition rates. Theorisations about learners and motivation in the classroom aim to solve several of these problems in the current educational system by attempting to go beyond the traditional classifications of motivation as intrinsic and extrinsic and its evaluation in terms of social and emotional conditionings.

Educators are aware that teaching, including teaching a second or a foreign language, currently requires significant creativity, many attractive resources, and distinct approaches that mix old and new methodologies and techniques that must appeal to students, who are placed in this eclectic panorama at the centre of the learning process. In this new context, the teacher’s role is by no means secondary but diversified by the imperative for change. Teachers are motivators, sources of information, facilitators, guides, observers, planners, counsellors, mentors, tutors, and participants, to mention but a few examples. Furthermore, educators are not safe from scrutiny and pressure because they are expected to lead change through teacherpreneurship; that is, they should apply an entrepreneurial mindset and skills to learn, plan, publish, share, collaborate with colleagues (Heick 2022), and create appealing materials for improvement, knowledge, and the progress of education.

The need for innovation is not surprising since the new generation of children and adolescents “have not just changed incrementally from those of the past, nor simply changed their slang, clothes, body adornments, or styles, as has happened between generations previously. A really big discontinuity has taken place. One might even call it a ‘singularity’” (Prensky 2001, 2). At the root of this uniqueness or disruption described by Prensky as being typical of new generations is the fact that these are “digital natives” (Prensky 2001; 2010). Entire generations “have spent their entire

lives surrounded by and using computers, video games, digital music players, video cams, cell phones, and all the other toys and tools of the digital age” (Prensky 2001, 1). Digital literacy, then, becomes for them almost a necessity to be added to school curricula and even for new pedagogies that incorporate computer games taught in tandem with traditional subjects such as mathematics, history, and English. Aside from building their digital skills, resourcefulness, and ability to multitask, today’s students must also cultivate what is known as soft skills (Chadid 2023), as these enable them to function as adults in tomorrow’s society, this “knowledge society” (Hargreaves 2003). The new generation of students faces novel challenges in a highly skilled job market that requires staunch competence in any given professional role. Therefore, new models in education should be all-encompassing rather than simply aim to deliver knowledge. In other words, students should learn hard, or technical, skills, acquired and enhanced through academia, but also practise soft skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, public speaking, teamwork, leadership, work ethics, career management, and intercultural fluency.

Moreover, practising these soft skills should be urgently prioritised, as the COVID-19 pandemic has negatively affected human interaction and behaviour in many students’ experiences of schooling, including extended periods of isolation for at least two years. In this context, “collaboration and socialisation have been deprioritised to ensure academic progression during a stressful and disruptive period” (The Lego Foundation n.d.). Therefore, students’ abilities to communicate, negotiate, socialise, and collaborate, have dwindled. Consequently, many students are now more “dependent on adults supporting and leading their learning. They are, therefore, less able or willing to take risks and show leadership. They also lack some of the reflective skills necessary for their cognitive development” (The Lego Foundation n.d.).

One of the most up-to-date teaching methodologies that is currently gaining momentum is gamification, as it allows educators to design tasks that combine hard and soft skills. Implementing games in education could offer a solution to quandaries in class planning, management, teaching, and learning. Games provide desirable experiences that set into motion motivational mechanisms that engage learners and teachers by delivering dynamism to the lessons while consolidating content through play. This book proposes using educational escape rooms in the classroom for teaching and learning English as a second or foreign language using literary works.

The initial part of the project is the theoretical framework underlying this proposal. Chapter 1 explores the role of gamification in education, the elements of the game, and its benefits and drawbacks when teaching and

learning a second or foreign language, in this case, English. Focusing on escape rooms, the theoretical premises demonstrating how gamification could be beneficial in the classroom are here provided. Research has shown that escape rooms are gamification tools that aim to promote motivation (Wood & Reiners, 2012). This dynamic method enables the student to play an active role in the learning process. Escape rooms could be used as a reinforcement activity or an evaluation tool. The activity could take place in a single session, over days, or an entire school year. Implementing escape rooms can alleviate the boredom associated with conventional exercises through novelty. Although pressure still exists, it is a different experience from that infused by traditional examinations. This innovative pedagogical tool can not only serve to teach second or foreign languages but also to develop theoretical–practical content based on literary works.

The second part of this volume comprises nine practical proposals from different educators addressing the English classroom at a secondary education level. Since literature is used to teach English, the escape rooms are based on literary content. All the escape rooms included in this volume follow the same structure inspired by the template proposed by Madalina Armie and Verónica Membrive in *Escaping Boredom in the Classroom: Breakouts, Breakout Boxes, and Escape Rooms* (2022). The first proposal, Chapter 2, “Escaping the Island!” is an interactive escape room project that draws inspiration from William Golding’s renowned novel *Lord of the Flies* (1954). Through an engaging and immersive experience, students work collaboratively in small groups to solve language puzzles and challenges, honing their reading comprehension, vocabulary, critical thinking, and communication skills. The escape room captures the novel’s themes of leadership, morality, and the struggle between civilisation and savagery, fostering a profound connection between students and the English language.

Chapter 3, “The Battle of the Four Houses”, based on J. K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* saga (1997-2007), aims to foster motivation by providing students with the opportunity to become part of this fantasy universe while improving their English skills through this experience. Chapter 4, “Looking for Answers”: The Case of the Tart Thief introduces a digital escape room in which students face six challenges based on a spin-off of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), a literary classic of the fantasy genre written by Lewis Carroll. Activities involve matching columns, resolving crosswords, filling in gaps in context, answering quizzes, and constructing sentences. Through a collaborative story-driven experience, the game is designed to revise animal world vocabulary, occupation vocabulary, phrasal verbs, adverbs of manner, and the passive voice.

Chapter 5, “The Lost World” is based on an adapted version of the novel *The Lost World* (1912) by Arthur Conan Doyle. Students are immersed in the age of the great explorers. They undertake an important mission to expose fraud and discover the truth about the dinosaurs of the Lost World. The teacher creates an appropriate atmosphere by using dinosaur footsteps, locks, green lights, torches, and jungle sounds. The escape room activities focus on the oral and written use of key vocabulary and the past simple tense.

In Chapter 6, “The Mysterious Manuscript of Romeo and Juliet” students must find a manuscript that contains a version of the tragedy of the two lovers. Players are expected to solve a series of riddles and puzzles that lead to clues within about an hour without being caught by the Montague family while improving their vocabulary and general knowledge of the play and 16<sup>th</sup>-century English literature and society.

Chapter 7, titled “The Mystery of ‘The Speckled Band’”, is inspired by Arthur Conan Doyle’s short story. In this experience, students become detectives and overcome different challenges to help Sherlock Holmes solve a case. This gamified activity aims to promote motivation, participation, cooperation, and curiosity for literature in the English as a foreign language classroom. Simultaneously, students practise the four key English language skills, review and consolidate the vocabulary related to crime from the short story, and recall the plot and roles of the characters.

Chapter 8, “Sleepy Hollow: Night in the Woods”, prompts students to practise their knowledge of the English language to solve five challenges connected to “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” by Washington Irving. Each group must follow the guidelines and the clues given by the game master to solve mathematical operations, riddles, crosswords, and a puzzle, among other challenges, to escape the room and win the game.

Chapter 9, “Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows” focuses on the final book in the Harry Potter series and aims to ignite students’ motivation and enthusiasm by creating a dynamic and fun learning environment where language skills and camaraderie flourish. Finally, Chapter 10, “The Wonderful Wizard of Oz” revolves around the story of *The Wizard of Oz* (1900) by the American author L. Frank Baum. By immersing students in the narrative, this escape room aims to enhance motivation, engagement, and language knowledge retention while incorporating cultural aspects.

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# CHAPTER 1

## THEORETICAL CONCEPTS

### VERÓNICA MEMBRIVE AND MADALINA ARMIE

#### **Abstract**

The basis of this volume is gamification as the use of game elements in a non-ludical context. Thus, the aim of this chapter is to provide a comprehensive literature review on the foundational aspects of gamification, the concept of “play” to present, and the potential advantages and disadvantages of gamification in educational contexts. Besides, this chapter tackles the rise of gamification in secondary education and, in particular, in the English as a Foreign Language classroom from an array of perspectives. The second part of the chapter focuses on a wide-ranging history of the escape room as an innovative educational tool and its diverse applications in the English classroom, intermingled with the use of literature as the teaching method.

**Keywords:** gamification, literature, EFL, escape room, secondary education

#### **1.1 The Concepts of “Play” and “Game”**

There have been many theoretical and practical approaches to defining the word “play”. Johan Huizinga’s foundational work *Homo Ludens* (1938) tackles the term from a cultural perspective, going a step further than previous definitions which approached it from a purely biological or psychological angle or both. Huizinga (1998) establishes that play is inherent to culture as it “arises and unfolds in and as play [...] and] culture itself bears the character of play”. Huizinga is thus the scholar who introduced the first theoretical definition of “play” as “an activity which proceeds within certain limits of time and space, in a visible order, according to rules freely accepted, and outside the sphere of necessity or

material utility” (1998). He adds, “[t]he play-mood is one of rapture and enthusiasm, and is sacred or festive in accordance with the occasion. A feeling of exaltation and tension accompanies the action” (1998). Huizinga’s proposal underlines some of the most abstract features of play and argues that play cannot be simultaneously absorbing and not serious; however, Huizinga leaves out the fact that play is an experiential and subjective activity.

Huizinga also posits important elements that complement the definition of play. One of the most relevant terms that have persisted in contemporary definitions of play is the so-called “magic circle”, which Huizinga defines as consisting of “temporary worlds within the ordinary world, dedicated to the performance of an act apart” (1998, 10). Huizinga believes that play is a free and voluntary action and that when entering or exiting the act of playing, the player is trespassing an imaginary barrier that defines the game’s time and space where rules apply and offers infinite possibilities contained within the real world but separated from it by a fictional borderline that is nonetheless permeable, as players take elements from the real world into the magic circle. The second component of play, denoted by Huizinga as an essential element, is the ludic agreement that players accept when entering the magic circle—that is, a kind of imaginary contract between the player and the game that includes all the rules and terms of the game, and through which the player adopts a playful attitude.

Huizinga’s canonical work would later be revisited and complemented by Roger Caillois’ *Men, Play and Games* (1961). Caillois expands the theoretical basis of the concept of play as a cultural constituent and attempts to refine some elements overlooked by his predecessor. Thus, “play” is a free and voluntary act that is governed by the rules of the magic circle and whose development is uncertain and unproductive. The most relevant and innovative contribution of Caillois’ work is his taxonomy of play in which he includes four categories: “*agon*” comprises games related to the abilities and capacities of the player; “*alea*” consists of those games whose outcome is determined mainly by luck; “*mimicry*” refers to the act of becoming a different person or acting like another person; and “*ilinx*” encompasses games based on the pursuit of vertigo so the player has the feeling of temporarily destroying their stability of perception.

Among more contemporary approaches to the concept of “game”, Elliott Morton Avedon and Brian Sutton-Smith’s 1971 proposal is useful in expanding the limits of the definition of this complex and kaleidoscopic term. The proposal appears in their seminal book *The Study of Games*, which offers the first formal definition of a game from a practical slant: “Games are an exercise of voluntary control systems in which there is an



opposition between forces, confined by a procedure and rules in order to produce a disequilibrium outcome” (6). Avedon and Sutton-Smith’s main contribution consists of the introduction of conflict as an essential element of games and a differentiation between the terms “play” and “game” that was not considered by previous expert voices. Another relevant author who regards conflict as a key component of games is Chris Crawford. In his book *The Art of Computer Game Design* (1982), he combines his expertise in game design with narrative and interactivity and describes four features common to all games: representation, interaction, conflict and security. Crawford conceptualises the term “game” as a combination of elements that interact in a close system to solve a conflict.

Almost two decades later, the influential book *Game Design Fundamentals* (2004) by Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman combines all previous approaches to the concept and defines “game” and “play” in a more practical and simplified way. In their approach, a game is defined as “a system in which players engage in an artificial conflict, defined by rules, that results in a quantifiable outcome” (80), while “play”, characterised by the absence of conflict and the lack of a quantifiable outcome, is described as “free movement within a more rigid structure” (304). In 2011, Jesper Juul offered a novel and more practical angle to defining the term “game”, attempting to synthesise all previous attempts to define the term by identifying five key features. For Juul (2011), all games have rules; they all have quantifiable, variable and appraisable results; each player’s efforts matter; there is a link between each players’ actions and the possible results; and the consequences of the game are negotiable. In *Half Real* (2011), Juul also pigeonholes those activities which cannot be labelled games but are nonetheless “playful”, as well as those which are in a liminal position between the two categories.

Based on the preceding diachronic and conceptual review of the different approaches to the terms “play” and “game”, it can be concluded that defining them is a challenging if not almost impossible task due to their inherent liminality, and trying to establish a formal taxonomy entails contradictions between the diverse viewpoints of the various expert voices quoted in this section.

## 1.2 The Elements of a Game

The elements of a game are the fundamental building blocks that contribute to the structure, engagement and overall experience of play. These elements must be carefully designed to create a sense of challenge,

motivation and enjoyment for the participants or players. The elements of the game are as follows:

- **Objectives and Goals:** Every game has specific objectives and goals that players strive to achieve. Clear objectives provide a sense of purpose and direction, motivating players to participate and progress within the game. In any game, the following types of goals or objectives can be found: global or general objectives, sub-objectives, and external objectives. Järvinen (2007) argues that objectives are linked to rules and mechanics.
- **Rules and Mechanics:** Games have defined rules and mechanics that determine how players interact with the game world and each other. These rules set boundaries, establish challenges, and create a structured gameplay experience. Salen and Zimmerman (2004) identify the following features of rules: they limit players' actions and must be explicit, fixed, binding, and shared by all players. In addition, Pérez-Latorre (2010) provides a taxonomy for rules as operational, constitutive, and implicit. Mechanics are slightly different from rules, in the sense that they establish the way in which the player participates in the game and they are "essential game [activities] that players perform over and over again in a game" (Salen & Zimmerman 2004).
- **Challenges and Obstacles:** These introduce difficulty and create opportunities for problem-solving and skills development by engaging players with tasks or puzzles that require adopting different strategies and using critical thinking and decision-making.
- **Feedback and Rewards:** Feedback mechanisms inform players of their progress, performance, and achievements within the game. Rewards such as points, badges or levels serve as incentives and reinforce positive behaviours, motivating players to continue playing and improving. Hallford et al. (2001) differentiate between four general types of rewards: rewards of access, rewards of facility, rewards of sustenance, and rewards of glory.
- **Immersion and Storytelling:** Immersive elements, such as captivating narratives, interesting characters, and engaging visual or audio resources, draw players into the game world. Storytelling enhances the player's emotional connection and makes the experience more memorable. Lindley (2002) distinguishes between history (a series of events), plot (the selection and arrangement of those events to present them with an intention), and background (all events leading up to the start of the plot). Narrative, then, means the structuring of a plot with a particular intention.

- **Social interaction:** Many games incorporate social elements enabling players to interact and compete with others. For example, multiplayer modes, leaderboards, and cooperative gameplay foster collaboration, competition, and social engagement.

When designing a gamified experience, it is essential to carefully consider and balance these elements to create an engaging, challenging, and rewarding experience for players. By understanding how these elements interact and influence players' behaviour, game designers can create meaningful and effective gamified experiences in diverse contexts, including entertainment, business, training, and education.

### 1.3. Gamification, Serious Games, and Game-Based Learning

If Huizinga postulates that play is inherent to culture, is it also inherent to education? Children learn by playing and imitating, and the grading system to assess students can be regarded as a means of “playing” in education. At this point, it is necessary to define terms such as “gamification” and “game-based learning”, which are usually misinterpreted but are essential for studying the impact of the concepts of “play” and “game” on education, especially over the past decade.

Throughout history, the concept of “gamification” has evolved and been defined and redefined by various scholars and professionals. Early conceptualisations from the 1970s reveal that the term was not commonly used but the elements of gamification were very much present in different fields. For example, Thomas Malone (1970) coined the term “intrinsic motivation” to describe the use of game-like elements to engage individuals in non-game contexts. However, it is necessary to fast forward to the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century to find the first definitions of the term, with Pelling (2002) and Deterding (2011) postulating the canonical demarcation of the concept of gamification. Deterding (2011) defines gamification as “the use of elements of game design in non-game contexts” (2). Later, Burke (2016) and Werbach (2014) expand the concept of gamification to include the process of game-thinking and game mechanics to engage users and solve problems. In recent years, definitions have become more refined and focused on specific aspects. Deterding (2019) himself has relatively recently proposed a revised definition of gamification as “the use of game design elements in non-game contexts to foster engagement, motivation and behaviour change”. In 2017, Huotari and Hamari referred to gamification as “[the] process of enhancing services with affordances for gameful experiences to support users’ overall value creation”. Finally, in 2023,

Hamari et al. (2023) slightly refined Deterding's 2019 definition by describing gamification as the use of gameful elements in non-game contexts to foster user motivation, engagement, and behavioural change. All things considered, the evolving understanding of the concept has shifted from a focus on superficial game elements to a more holistic approach that considers the underlying psychological and motivational aspects of the "game" and "play" concepts.

A non-game context where gamification has gained significant attention and popularity in recent years is education. Gamification has emerged as an innovative strategy and a promising approach to enhance students' engagement by leveraging their intrinsic motivation, thus driving their active participation in the learning process. Gamification is based on an array of theoretical bases, starting with the theory of flow, which is defined as "a mental state in which a person performing some activity is totally immersed in a feeling of energised concentration, full involvement and enjoyment in the process of the activity" (Csikszentmihalyi & Larson 1975). The flow theory suggests that students experience a heightened sense of focus, amusement, and fulfilment when confronting challenges that are in equilibrium with their skills. If the challenges of a task are too difficult for an individual's skill level, they may feel overwhelmed or anxious; conversely, if the challenges are too simple, they may experience boredom and apathy. By contrast, flow is achieved when skills and challenges are properly aligned.

The theory of self-determination, developed by Deci and Ryan in the 1980s, also intertwines with gamification and education, as it focuses on understanding the factors that influence human motivation and the conditions that foster optimal functioning and well-being. This theory highlights the importance of satisfying the basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in order to promote intrinsic motivation. Finally, game theory has gained momentum in education as another pillar of the application of gamification in teaching and learning processes. The concept of game theory first appeared in 1944 with the publication of *Theory of Games and Economic Behaviour* by John von Neumann and Oskar Morgenstern. Game theory analyses the rational behaviour of decision-making in situations of social conflict, claiming that an individual's success depends on not only their own actions but also the actions of others. Thus, game theory begins when different individuals or organisations interact. *Theory of Games and Economic Behaviour* was a landmark in the gradual development of game theory up until the 1970s, when it became the dominant methodology of mainstream economics and even, shortly afterwards, started to resonate in other social science

disciplines. All things considered, if, as mentioned above, to gamify is to use playful elements in a non-ludic context, then to gamify educational processes means, first, to combine flow theory, the theory of self-determination, and game theory to make a task or activity more entertaining and enjoyable and, second, to engage in a global redesign of processes—that is, to extract and manipulate several game components to apply them to learning (Landers and Callan 2011).

The terms “gamification” and “serious game” are commonly misused. The latter term has evolved and diversified over the years in parallel with gamification. Abt initially defined a serious game as an activity conducted with a primary purpose other than pure entertainment, emphasising the specificity of the game’s aim. Decades later, the game designers and researchers Sawyer and Rejeski (2002) provided a refined definition of serious games as using the technologies and mechanisms of gaming to achieve educational, training, or societal goals, thus placing the focus on different areas of knowledge not previously considered. Zyda’s definition (2005) highlights the immersive and engaging nature of serious games and their application to entertainment technologies, while Van Eck’s (2006) definition underscores the distinction between serious games and entertainment games. More recent definitions include Sawyer and Smith’s (2008), which incorporates the use of these games for various objectives and emphasises the rule-based nature of games. Meanwhile, Djaouti et al. (2011) combine all previous attempts to define the term and claim that serious games are “a subset of digital games that are designed for a primary purpose other than pure entertainment, aiming at training, advertising, simulation or education” (118). All these definitions represent an array of perspectives that reflect an evolving understanding of the concept through history. While the specific wording may vary, the common thread among all these definitions is the use of games for purposes beyond entertainment.

The final term that usually goes hand in hand with gamification and serious games is “game-based learning”. The first definition of this term is found at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, showing the term’s contemporaneity. Prensky (2001), an advocate for the use of digital games in education, defines game-based learning as the use of games and simulations for educational purposes in order to enhance learning experiences. Writing in 2003, Gee, a prominent scholar in the field, emphasises the transformative potential of games in fostering deep learning and the acquisition of new knowledge. Kirriemuir and McFarlane (2004) go a step further, as their definition focuses on the active involvement of learners in the game design process and the use of games as educational tools. Later, in 2008, Kebritchi and Hirumi become the first expert voices to label game-based learning as

a teaching methodology that helps to create an immersive and interactive learning environment. Meanwhile, Kapp's approach to game-based learning in *The Gamification of Learning and Instruction* (2012) emphasises the integration of gameplay mechanics, such as rules, challenges, and feedback, into learning and training experiences, while Novak and Johnson's (2012) analysis revolves around the emotional and motivational aspects of games and their potential to support and enhance the learning process. Finally, Ketamo et al. (2013) define game-based learning as a pedagogical approach that uses game design principles to support the learning process and promote specific learning outcomes. These definitions underscore the common themes of game-based learning, including the use of games and simulations in educational settings, the integration of game design elements and mechanics, an emphasis on engagement and motivation, and the potential for transformative learning experiences.

#### **1.4. The Potential Benefits and Drawbacks of Games in Education**

The existing literature discusses the potential benefits and challenges associated with the use of gamification in education and/or game-based learning. Studies suggest that gamification has the potential to enhance students' motivation and engagement by tapping into the inherent enjoyment and excitement of games. Accordingly, Morschheuser et al. (2016) explore the psychological mechanisms through which elements of gamification such as points, badges, and rewards influence students' engagement, suggesting that these elements can enhance motivation by providing clear goals, feedback and a sense of achievement. Similarly, Sailer and Homner (2020) argue that gamification positively influences students' learning experience, while Hamari et al. (2014) emphasise learners' intrinsic motivation and active participation as a result of implementing gamification in the classroom. Additionally, Dicheva et al. (2018) provide a systematic literature review on the effect of gamification on students' motivation in online learning environments, concluding that it influences their level of diligence in virtual education.

Gamification is also believed to promote active learning by providing hands-on experiences and opportunities for experimentation and exploration (Wu and Wang 2014; Dicheva et al. 2015; Hamari and Koivisto 2018; Morschheuser et al. 2019; Chen and Wu 2020). Similarly, studies have proven that the application of game elements in the classroom allows for personalised learning experiences, catering to individual students' needs and preferences, thus enabling differentiation (Kapp 2016; Zhuhadar et al.