"Learning from real life and not books": A gamified approach to Business English task design in transatlantic telecollaboration

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Abstract

This paper deals with task design in the context of a telecollaboration project which was carried out in a Business English course among students from Spain and the United States. The goal was to provide students with opportunities to develop linguistic, intercultural and digital competences by interacting and collaborating online with native speakers of the target language. A task-based approach was adopted and enriched by gamification, the different tasks being designed with a view towards engaging students intrinsically in the learning process. This was achieved by means of the adoption of gamification strategies and techniques such as the use of points, performance graphs, quests, avatars, a reward system, peer assessment and the use of social media. Via technological immersion, students from both sides of the Atlantic Ocean were required to work together online to complete different tasks while exchanging peer feedback and assessment. The paper analyses and discusses participants' views and perceptions about the gamified telecollaboration exchange. The quantitative and qualitative data were gathered by means of pre- and post-treatment questionnaires. Results indicate that students found this way of learning beneficial in terms of the development of different skills and competences (namely linguistic, digital and intercultural) and motivation.

Keywords: telecollaboration, gamification, task design, Business English.

Resumen

"Aprendiendo de la vida real y no de los libros": Un enfoque ludificado del diseño de tareas del inglés de negocios en la telecolaboración transatlántica

Este artículo versa sobre el diseño de tareas en el contexto de un proyecto de telecolaboración que fue llevado a cabo en una asignatura de inglés para los negocios entre estudiantes de España y de los Estados Unidos. El objetivo era ofrecer a los estudiantes oportunidades de desarrollar competencias lingüísticas, interculturales y digitales por medio de la interacción y colaboración con hablantes nativos de la lengua meta. Se adaptó un enfoque basado en tareas y enriquecido por la ludificación a través de diferentes tareas diseñadas con el fin de implicar a los estudiantes intrínsecamente en el proceso de aprendizaje. Ello se logró gracias a la adopción de estrategias y técnicas de ludificación como el uso de puntos, gráficos de rendimiento, narrativas épicas, avatares, sistema de premios, evaluación entre pares y herramientas de comunicación social. Mediante la inmersión tecnológica, los estudiantes de ambos lados del océano Atlántico tuvieron que trabajar juntos en línea para completar las diferentes tareas al tiempo que intercambiaban *feedback* y evaluación entre pares. El presente artículo analiza y describe las opiniones y percepciones de los participantes en cuanto al intercambio de telecolaboración ludificado. Los datos cuantitativos y cualitativos se recogieron a través de pre- y post- cuestionarios. Los resultados indican que a los estudiantes esta manera de aprender les resultó beneficiosa en cuanto al desarrollo de diferentes destrezas y competencias (principalmente lingüísticas, digitales e interculturales) y motivación.

Palabras clave: telecolaboración, ludificación, diseño de tareas, inglés para los negocios.

1. Introduction

In recent years, the development of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has been considerable and the number of ESP courses offered in higher education institutions and elsewhere has increased exponentially. This increase can be explained by socioeconomic reasons, new linguistic perspectives and the emergence of learner-centred approaches (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Gatehouse, 2001). Among those reasons, scientific and technological progress, economic and linguistic reasons and the current position of English as the world's unofficial lingua franca (Warschauer, 2006) as well as an increase in vocational training and learning brought about by globalisation (Basturkmen, 2010) can be underlined. Over the past few years, experts have widely researched professional and academic varieties of English as a Foreign Language (Fuertes-Olivera & Samaniego, 2012). Parallel to the growing demand of ESP courses, educators are becoming more aware of the benefits of promoting the integration of Information and

Communications Technologies (ICT) into educational practices. In this respect, authors such as Clifford (1998) argue that even though teachers will never be replaced by computers and ICT, technology-savvy teachers will progressively replace teachers who don't use ICT in their teaching contexts. Moreover, the spread of ICT use worldwide has contributed toward the hegemonic role of the English language (Warschauer, 2006).

The obvious need for a change in the curriculum tailored to the needs and demands of society in the twenty-first century requires greater and committed strategies for appropriate teacher training. Moreover, technological resources in schools and higher education need to be provided in order to operate a number of practices aimed at the integration and effective implementation of educational technology in educational processes. The constant evolution of society regarding the use of technology in general, and education in particular, points out the need to embed the use of ICT in daily school practices. In this way, normalisation (Bax, 2000, 2003; Chambers & Bax, 2006) would be achieved and ICT use would no longer be disconnected from the curriculum. In this context, ICT "normalisation" is understood as the stage at which ICT is used in language education without our being consciously aware of their role as technologies but rather as effective and embedded elements in the language teaching and learning processes (Bax, 2003). Thus, a continuum between the use of ICT outside the classroom – for professional and personal purposes – and the use of technologies for learning would be established.

The possibility of achieving normalisation in the language classroom is growing day by day thanks to an increasingly robust research body around innovative teaching approaches such as telecollaboration, also called virtual mobility, online interaction and exchange (Dooly & O'Dowd, 2012), or e-tandem. Telecollaboration involves the "application of global computer networks to foreign (and second) language learning and teaching in institutionalized settings" (Belz, 2003: 2). Thus, in telecollaborative exchanges,

> internationally-dispersed learners in parallel language classes use Internet communication tools such as e-mail, synchronous chat, threaded discussion, and MOOs (as well as other forms of electronically mediated communication), in order to support social interaction, dialogue, debate, and intercultural exchange. (Belz, 2003: 2)

The vitality of this teaching approach is shown by the growing number of participants and dedicated online platforms which demonstrate that

telecollaboration is much more present than ever in foreign language classrooms (Sevilla-Pavón & Haba-Osca, 2016). Another innovative teaching approach is the more recent approach known as gamification, which can be considered as the use of game elements in non-gaming contexts to improve user experience and engagement (Kapp, 2012; Kapp, Blair & Mesch, 2013).

In order to clarify the many reasons why a telecollaboration approach enriched by gamification is particularly convenient, we must highlight the fact that it assumes a social-constructivist view of the learning process (Vygotsky, 1978) which is student-centred (Vygotsky, 1978; Jones, 2007) and task-based (Willis, 1996; Skehan, 2003a, 2003b; Richards & Rodgers, 2014), all of which are of major importance in current language learning theories and approaches (Lee, 2000). Besides this, it is a form of virtual mobility increasingly used in different educational levels, including higher education, substituting and complementing the physical mobility of students (O'Dowd, 2013) by allowing both a first-hand contact with the target language and the achievement of cultural goals (Eck, Legenhausen & Wolff, 1955; Kern, Ware & Warschauer, 2004; Hauck & Youngs, 2008). Furthermore, this form of distant collaboration is characterised by the interaction between students from different parts of the world who attend parallel classes of foreign language(s) while using communication via the internet or mediated by synchronous and asynchronous tools (Belz, 2003). In this way, because communication is one of the main elements of telecollaborative tasks, this teaching approach promotes the development of students' Communicative Competence (CC). CC is an essential competence due to its importance in students' intellectual development, as established by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR, Council of Europe, 2001). The importance of the concept of CC was introduced a few decades ago and discussed by Habermas (1970), Hymes (1971, 1995), Jakobovits (1970), Canale (1983, 1995) and Widdowson (1972, 1978, 1995), among others. They all pointed out the urgent need to take into account the socio-cultural traits necessary for the use and acquisition of a foreign language. Therefore, as early as 1970 CC was considered a practical ability rather than an idealistic concept isolated from its context and linguistic knowledge. Currently, this wider vision has been enriched by the addition of a specific intercultural dimension resulting in the concept of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC). Particularly, the Council of Europe has stressed the importance of ICC in today's globalized society, which they define as follows:

> Intercultural dialogue is an open and respectful exchange of views between individuals and groups belonging to different cultures that leads to a deeper understanding of the other's global perception. (Council of Europe, 2008: 128)

Many authors have focused on different aspects and benefits of telecollaboration in language learning contexts (Eck, Legenhausen & Wolff, 1995; Kern, Ware & Warschauer, 2004; Hauck & Youngs, 2008) and there is also an increasing body of research about gamification in educational settings (Dominguez, Saenz-de-Navarrete, de-Marcos, Fernández-Sanz, Pagés & Martinez-Herraiz, 2013; Attali & Arieli-Attali, 2015; Hanus & Fox, 2015; Kingsley & Grabner-Hagen, 2015; Kim, 2015; Su & Cheng, 2015). However, to our knowledge, these two approaches have never been applied in an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) context and neither have they been used in combination. This paper aims to contribute towards filling in these gaps in the literature by exploring task design in a gamified ESP telecollaboration project for the development of students' ICC, linguistic, and digital competences. This is done following the recommendation of the Council of Europe, which advises that intercultural dialogue and communicative competence should be key areas of European policy, progressively replacing "assimilationist" and "multicultural" models for dealing with our increasingly diverse societies (Helm, 2013). "Assimilationist" and "multicultural" models have been criticised for being one-dimensional and for fostering inequalities based on culture, religion, race, gender, and socio-economic condition (Gitlin, 1995; Gwyn, 1995; Barry, 2001; Alesina & Glaeser, 2004; Bloemraad, Korteweg & Yurdakul, 2008). In response to this, the integration of the theoretical backgrounds of social psychology, interpersonal communication, and anthropology has been proposed so as to construct a multidimensional understanding of ICC (Arasaratnama & Doerfel, 2005) with a view towards fighting the aforementioned inequalities.

2. Gamification in the classroom

Over the past decade we have witnessed a worldwide technological revolution which has deeply changed our society and the way we communicate, work, and access information. This new era is also characterised by an accelerated technological progress in which new

innovations keep emerging and spreading widely, making previous technologies obsolete within just a few years and producing dramatic changes (Bostrom, 2007) in social practices such as the way we communicate, access and share information. In this context, researchers and practitioners are faced with the challenge of adapting their teaching styles and practices to the changes brought about by our Knowledge and Information Society, characterised by rapid access to huge amounts of information via the internet and, in some cases, the risk of "infoxication" (Benito-Ruiz, 2009) or "infosaturation" (Dias, 2014). In spite of the challenges, there are many positive aspects about this new digital era, such as the emergence of a new type of collaborative individuals who co-construct knowledge and share, access and modify information over the internet thus contributing towards a co-constructed collaborative culture (Kessler, 2013). This has to do with the evolution from the Web 1.0, in which the WWW user was a passive receiver of information, towards the more participatory Web 2.0 or Social Web, in which the user plays a more active role (Sevilla-Pavón, 2015).

Bearing in mind the social and educational practices of today's collaborative, interconnected and digitally immersed students, language educators have tried to come up with new ways of integrating those practices into the classroom and even beyond its four walls (Peregoy & Boyle, 2005; Ponder, Vander Veldt & Lewis-Ferrell, 2011). Among those, gamification and telecollaboration have raised a lot of interest due to the myriad of affordances for language learning they offer thanks to the fact that they bring the outside world into the classroom while building bridges between the classroom and the external reality. Some of the most beneficial aspects of connecting social and learning practices inside and outside classrooms, as reported in the literature, include the enrichment of the learning process by means of higher levels of engagement and motivation (Bishop, 2012; Kapp, 2012; de-Marcos, Domínguez, Saenz-de-Navarrete & Pagés, 2014) collaboration (Kukulska-Hulme & Shield, 2008; Bradley, Lindstrom & Rystedt, 2010), intercultural awareness (Lee, 1998) and problem-solving (Leithwood & Poplin, 1992).

In spite of the increasing interest that gamification has raised among educators and researchers alike, there is no agreement on the definition of the concept of gamification. Werbach and Hunter (2012), as well as Deterding, Dixon, Khaled and Nacke (2011), understand gamification as the use of game elements and game design techniques in non-game contexts,

with the aim of enhancing the processes enacted and the experience of those involved (Caponetto, Earp & Ott, 2014). Meanwhile, Koivisto and Hamari (2014) prefer a broader view of gamification as "the phenomenon of creating gameful experiences", understanding "gameful experiences" as experiences which incorporate game mechanisms "for engaging people in individually and socially sustainable behaviours, such as exercise, sustainable consumption, and education" (Koivisto & Hamari, 2014: 179).

Gamification is based on the success of the gaming industry and social media and virtually any task, assignment, process or theoretical context can be gamified. Albeit, not all situations, contexts and tasks require it. Still, gamification has been applied to a broad variety of settings and contexts, including education and training, because of its perceived potential to make learning more motivating and engaging (Caponetto, Earp & Ott, 2014), while fostering participation, empowerment, autonomy and digital literacy. Deterding, Dixon, Khaled and Nacke (2011) consider that the main game design elements are: badges, stat and experience points, leaderboards, levels, time constraints, limited resources, turns, narratives, clear goals, variety of game styles, challenge, fantasy and curiosity. Moreover, among the different gamification mechanisms and dynamics we also find economy points, progress bars, performance graphs, quests, avatars, social elements and media, votes and reward systems, achievements, virtual goods, guilds and skill trees (Krause, Mogalle, Pohl & Williams, 2015). The gamification elements, mechanisms and dynamics chosen with a view towards enriching the telecollaboration project were points, leaderboards, progress bars, performance graphs, quests, avatars, social elements, votes and a reward system. This means that elements from both a thin-layer approach (e.g. points and badges) and a long-term deep-level (e.g. quests, social elements and media) approach (Marczewski, 2013) were used in the project, as discussed in the following section.

3. Dynamics and mechanisms of gamification

3.1. Point systems

The first gamification element which was applied to task design in the project was a point system. Points can be considered as numeric accumulations based on certain activities (Sheldon, 2010). In spite of being included in the category of thin-layer approaches to gamification, the use of

this point system can be very successful when used in combination with deep-layer elements. The point system was applied with a view towards fostering participation and communication in English among students at all times. By giving points to students who participated in class and interacted in English, and taking away those points when Spanish or Catalan was used instead of English, interaction in the L2 was intended to be promoted and rewarded.

Having many points by the end of the semester would mean receiving up to 0.25 points added to their final grade. The point system was organized so as to follow the basic gamification principle of giving many chances to achieve the expected outcome (e.g. participating and interacting in L2 so as to gain more points), thus focusing on rewards rather than punishments. In addition, students were encouraged to reflect on the fact that they did not have many opportunities to interact in English outside of class, in spite of acknowledging that they found this interaction both enjoyable and beneficial. This reflection was aimed at helping them realize that they should take advantage of class time to practice the language. In this way, it was hoped that extrinsic motivation could be turned into intrinsic motivation (Dörnyei, 1998). Extrinsic motivation is understood as performing a behaviour as a means to an end, that is, to receive some extrinsic reward (e.g. better grades) or to avoid punishment (Dörnyei, 1998). Meanwhile, intrinsic motivation is defined as behaviour performed for its own sake, in order to "experience pleasure and satisfaction such as the joy of doing a particular activity or satisfying one's curiosity" (Dörnyei, 1998: 121).

3.2. Quests and epic narratives

Another important gamification element in the project had to do with quests and epic narratives, which were related to the tasks students were asked to fulfill. Because a quest can be understood as a mission with an objective that leads to rewards, it contributes towards fulfilling honour and individualism. Moreover, quests add an epic dimension to tasks while promoting comradeship and a sense of justice (Zichermann & Cunningham, 2011). However, a lot of time and effort need to be invested in the design of a quest and in creating a powerful and relevant story. Furthermore, students need to be persuaded that a quest is worth doing.

In the project, the epic narrative behind the "Developing a revolutionary product" quest was that of young entrepreneurs – the students from the

Universitat de València (UV) – who had created a start-up and were about to launch a revolutionary product for the American market. They were going to be advised by a group of consultants from the USA – the students from Northern Arizona University (NAU) – who were familiar with the target market and its needs and expectations. The UV students' task was to persuade investors – in this case, their classmates – to finance their product by means of an oral presentation in a business fair and a digital story in which they would present important aspects of their product. The presentation should incorporate an introduction (team, position, structure of the company, etc.); design, features and consumer benefits; feasibility; pricing strategy; distribution (sales outlets and channels); promotion (advertising, product launch and sales promotion); competing products or technologies; strategies: packaging, branding, guarantee; and a conclusion.

By framing the tasks within the "Developing a revolutionary product" quest students were asked to go beyond the simple completion of tasks so as to achieve a better grade at the end of term. Instead, they were persuaded that they could fulfill an important mission which would potentially have a positive impact in society: developing an innovative and revolutionary product which would improve people's lives.

3.3. Other elements: Leaderboards, avatars, social elements and social media

Other gamification elements that were used in the project included leaderboards, avatars, social elements and social media, and a reward system, as explained below:

Leaderboards: These were rankings of participants based on success (Domínguez, Saenz-de-Navarrete, de-Marcos, Fernandez-Sanz, Pages & Martinez-Herraiz, 2013). Examples of these include progress reports in Aula Virtual, the UV's Virtual Learning Environment, showing whether or not students had submitted their work on time and if it was well done.

Avatars: They were visual representations of students or their alter egos (Kapp, 2012). For instance, the avatars chosen by students as their public image, which were displayed as their profile pictures on the Google+ Community, as shown in the following figure:
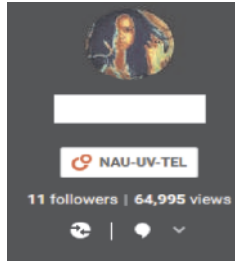
Figure 1. Screenshot of a student's avatar.

Social elements and social media: These were used to foster relationships and collaboration with other students. They had to get in touch through various media: text and video chat, online forum, email, etc., in order to organize their work and make decisions about how to go about completing the different tasks of the project.

A reward system: This system was used to motivate students to accomplish their quest. It included peer assessment in the form of votes in assessment rubrics and voting polls for digital stories (Fig. 2) and oral presentations; prizes which were given in an Award Ceremony celebrated at the end of the term; and investments from investors according to their ratings in the assessment rubrics as well as in the "investors' reports" students were asked to write.

Figure 2. Screenshot of the NAU-UV voting poll.

4. The "NAU-UV Telecollaboration" project: A gamified approach

The telecollaboration exchange described in this article was supported by the Lifelong Learning and Educational Innovation Service from the Universitat de València. It was carried out between this university and Northern Arizona University (United States) during the first semester of the academic year 2015-2016, from October to December. The students had 4 hours per week of face-to-face classes over 14 weeks, half of which were devoted to completing the different tasks of the project. 50 students in total (21 students from different degrees at NAU and 29 International Business students from UV) participated in the project, which combined gamification and telecollaboration. Among those, 27 Spanish participants who were first-year students enrolled in a Business English compulsory course of the Degree in International Business at the University of Valencia completed the online post-questionnaire about the project. The following tables show:

(a) the different phases and themes as well as the tasks which students were asked to complete throughout the "NAU-UV Telecollaboration" project (Table 1);

(b) the categorisation of the thin-layer and deep level gamification elements used in the design of the tasks within the project (Table 2).

PHASE 1: PRE-EXCHANGE / PREPARATION Theme: Getting to know each other and breaking the ice TASKS	
1. Creating a digital profile 2. Pre-questionnaires about telecollaboration and digital storytelling 3. Diagnostic test	4. Writing ice-breaking questions 5. Recording an introductory video
PHASE 2: EXCHANGE (1) Theme: Challenging stereotypes TASKS	
1. Making groups 2. Exchanging stories about experiences communicating in the L2	3. Watching *TED* video by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie "The danger of a single story" and exchanging comments in the forum about their "single story" 4. Discussing and reflecting about stereotypes from the different countries
PHASE 3: EXCHANGE (2) Theme: Higher education in Spain and in the United States TASKS	

1. Getting information about their partner's institution
2. Sharing information
3. Discussing the differences and similarities of both education systems and student life in their respective cities and campuses

4. Writing a critical account regarding their oral discussion about the different higher education systems

PHASE 4: EXCHANGE (3) Theme: Intercultural Communication TASKS	
1. Oral and written tasks about cultural shock 2. Discussing and creating a list of the top 5 countries which do the most good for the world	3. Watching *TED* video by Simon Anholt: "Which country does the most good for the world?" and exchanging comments in the forum on whether they would change their lists and why 4. Discussing and writing posible solutions regarding scenarios of issues with intercultural communication in business environments
PHASE 5: MAIN COLLABORATIVE TASK Theme: A revolutionary product to be presented in a business fair TASKS	
1. Step-by-step creation of digital stories about revolutionary products developed in their groups 2. Oral presentation in a business fair 3. Writing an investors' report about the products they would invest in and why	4. Peer assessment and exchange of feedback and comments in the forum and through the assessment sheets for the digital stories and oral presentations 5. Discussing with foreign consultants how to adapt the product to the foreign market
PHASE 6: POST- EXCHANGE & ASSESSMENT Theme: Project assessment and farewell TASKS	
1. Post-questionnaires about telecollaboration and digital storytelling 2. Focus groups interviews	3. Recording a farewell video and exchanging farewell comments in the forum

Table 1. Phases, themes and tasks within the "NAU-UV Telecollaboration" project.

Gamification elements	Approaches	Phase(s)	Pros	Cons
POINTS (Sheldon, 2010)	thin-layer	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	They can be used to promote appropriate behaviours. They foster acceptance and order	They are useless if the system lacks many other mechanisms.
LEADERBOARDS (Domínguez et al., 2013)	thin-layer	1, 2, 3, 4	They create the feeling of progress and encourage students to work harder.	They foster competitiveness which might result in lack of willingness to collaborate.
AVATARS (Kapp, 2012)	thin-layer	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	They enable students to express their personality and beliefs in a non-threatening way.	They might make people uncomfortable or even sceptical when they have to "talk" to an alter ego instead of seeing the real person behind it, leading to trust issues.

REWARD SYSTEMS (Kapp, 2012)	thin-layer	4	They motivate students to work towards reaching a goal and encourage them to do better so as to be rewarded.	They might put too much emphasis on the outcome instead of the process. They might discourage students to keep playing if goals are unclear or too hard to reach.
QUESTS (Zichermann & Cunningham, 2011)	deep level	4	They contribute towards fulfilling honour and individualism. They create epic meaning within tasks while promoting comradeship and a sense of justice.	A lot of time and effort need to be invested in their development together with the creation of a powerful and relevant story. Students need to be persuaded that a quest is worth doing.
SOCIAL ELEMENTS AND SOCIAL MEDIA (Simões et al., 2013)	deep level	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	They foster interaction, communication, collaboration and the sense of belonging to a learning community. They foster problem-solving skills, critical thinking and digital literacies.	They can be distractive. There might be cases of cyberbullying or netiquette issues. They might discourage face-to-face discussions.

Table 2. Classification of gamification elements used in task design within the "NAU-UV Telecollaboration" project.

5. Methodology

Upon completion of the project, the participants filled in an online questionnaire, available on *GoogleForms*, which consisted of 60 open- and closed-ended questions. The questionnaire was divided into 5 sections, A to E. The questions of Sections A to D were closed-ended, and students had to rate the different statements on a 5-point Likert scale according to their level of agreement or disagreement, 1 being "completely disagree" and 5 being "completely agree". As for the final section (Section E), it comprised open-ended questions about students' experiences and opinions about learning languages in multicultural settings. The questionnaire provided both quantitative and qualitative data. Moreover, it was anonymous so as to guarantee the veracity of the participants' answers as well as to prevent potential bias (e.g. students delivering the perceived "right answer").

The questionnaire was divided into the following sections:

> Section A: Demographic data, and information concerning internet and social media use;

Section B: Attitudes and views on language learning and the use of technology for that purpose;

Section C: Telecollaboration and development of skills and competences;

Section D: Cultural awareness;

Section E: Previous language learning experiences in multicultural settings, views on the most beneficial aspects and challenges of learning English in a multicultural setting and definitions of intercultural communication.

The quantitative data were analysed by performing a descriptive analysis so as to quantify the opinions of the students, closed-ended questions within a questionnaire being the most widely used method for quantitative analysis (Giddens, 2014).

5.1. Participants

The qualitative and quantitative data analysed in this article were gathered by means of a post-questionnaire, as mentioned earlier. Out of the 29 Spanish students who participated in the project together with 21 students from the United States, 27 answered the post-questionnaire (N=27). Among those, 74.1% were female and the remaining 25.9% were male. Most of them (89.9%) belonged to the 17-20 age group. They were registered in the subject Business English III, a compulsory 6 ECTS-credit course offered in the International Business Degree. 74.1% of them considered that their English level was a B2, that is, Upper Intermediate (CEFR, 2001). The group which was studied was very homogeneous: Students were studying the same degree, they belonged to the same age group and they came from similar social and cultural backgrounds, as shown by their responses in the questionnaire.

5.2. Procedure

The 50 participants from NAU and UV were split and mixed in 10 groups of between 5 and 8 students each so as to make sure that there were at least two native speakers from each nationality per group. Within those groups, students were paired up for the completion of certain tasks, such as the synchronous videoconferencing sessions, whereas they participated as a group in other activities (e.g. debates and discussions). A separate *Google+*

Community was created for each of the groups so that students could easily interact and organize their work.

Bearing in mind that task design should take students' level, needs, interests and preferences as departing points (Nunan, 1993; Hampel, 2006), the members from the different communities were asked to fill in an online questionnaire on *GoogleForms* and 27 responses were obtained.

6. Results and discussion

Students' responses regarding their internet use on a weekly basis revealed a very frequent use, as illustrated in Figure 3:
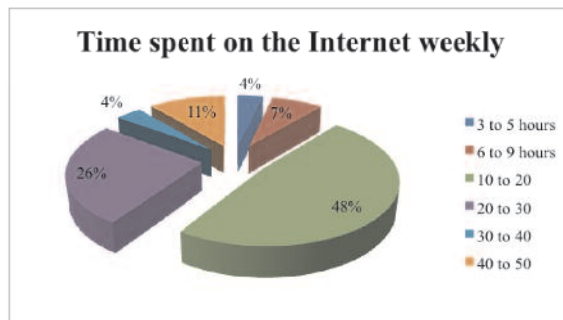
Figure 3. Students' time spent on the internet weekly.

13 students (48%), nearly half of the participants, manifested using the internet between 10 and 20 hours per week, while 7 other students (26%) declared using it even more often, from 20 to 30 hours per week. Therefore, a wide majority of the participants (74%) used the internet quite frequently. This, together with the fact that most of them (89.9%) were in the 17-20 age group, could be related to their belonging to a "digital native" generation (Prensky, 2001), accustomed to working and interacting with electronic resources and ICT.

Concerning internet and social media use, students' responses showed that they used mainly *Facebook* (88.9%), *Instagram* (85.2%) and *Skype* (81.5%). This demonstrates that ICT and social media play a major role in their social practices. However, in the case of the *Google+* platform, this had been used by only 5 students (18.5%) prior to the project, as shown in Figure 4:
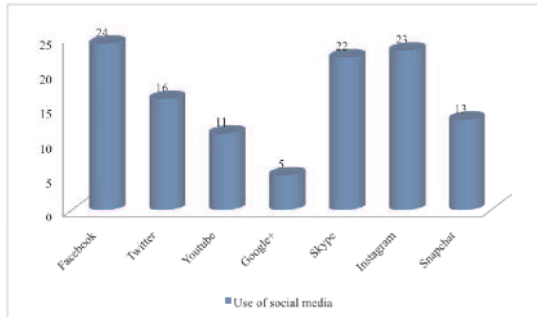
Figure 4. Students' use of social media.

The limited number of *Google+* users prior to the project was seen as an advantage, since by using a platform that they did not usually use for social interaction (e.g. *Facebook*) possible distractions could be avoided. In addition, this contributed towards achieving one of the main goals of the project: developing their digital literacy. Through the use of *Google+* and other *Google-*based tools (*Drive, Docs, Forms*) in telecollaboration, students learnt how to use those tools and they declared finding them useful for other subjects and academic purposes beyond the project. Thus, students displayed very positive attitudes towards them, as illustrated by this example of responses to the open-ended question about *Google Drive:*

> *Google Drive* was…
>
> Response 1: …very useful, I didn't know it existed until the telecollaboration.
>
> R2: … useful. I had never used it before.
>
> R3: … a fantastic tool.
>
> R4: … helpful to do the work.
>
> R5: … an amazing tool.
>
> R6: … an essential tool.

As for their attitudes and views on language learning and the use of technology for that purpose, 20 students declared that they were very motivated to learn English at their university (74.1%) and 21 students (77.8%) said they felt very comfortable using technology in their English classes, choosing the highest values for those questions in a 5-point Likert scale. Moreover, 26 students (96.2%) said they enjoyed working with other

students and 23 (85.2%) considered that this helped them learn. When specifically enquired about telecollaboration, 88.9% of the respondents (24 students) found it a very engaging language learning approach. As for the kinds of skills, competences and attitudes students thought telecollaboration had enhanced, these were linguistic competence (17 students, 62.9%), motivation (18 students, 66.6%), digital literacy (17 students, 62.9%) and intercultural communication competence (25 students, 70.3%), as shown in Figure 5:
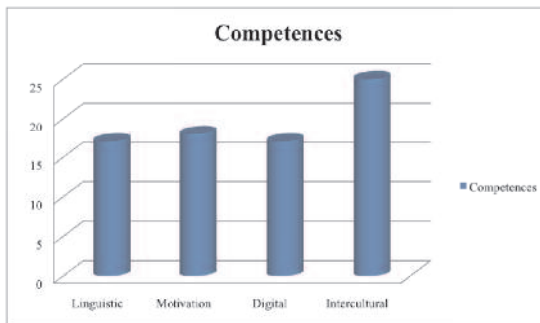
Figure 5. Students' perceived development of skills through telecollaboration.

Section D dealt with (inter)cultural awareness. The questions from this section were inspired by the literature on intercultural awareness and intercultural communication. Regarding cultural awareness, students overall showed positive attitudes towards other cultures, as well as mixed feelings of curiosity and fear, as shown in Figure 4. 96.3% of the participants (26 students) said that they agreed or completely agreed with the statement: "all cultures have something to offer the world", choosing the highest value in a 5-point Likert scale. Meanwhile, they completely disagreed with the statement "I think that my culture is the only right one" (24 students, 88.9%). Moreover, 81.5% of the participants (22 students) considered they were aware of their own culture biases and how they affected their thinking.

As for their attitudes towards racism and discrimination, 66.7% (18 students) said racially offensive comments or jokes made them feel very uncomfortable, and 70.3% (19 students) declared that they spoke up if they witnessed another person being humiliated or discriminated against. Moreover, 66.7% (18 students) stated they very much appreciated the richness of other cultures, 92.6% (25 students) said they were interested in the ideas and beliefs of people from different ethnicities, 55.6% (15

students) declared they made conscious efforts to learn from other cultures and 88.9% (24 students) considered it was exciting to get to know a person from a different culture. Nevertheless, 66.6% (18 students) manifested not having any friends from other ethnicities, 59.2% (16 students) acknowledged that most of their friends were from their own ethnic background and 44.4% (12 students) said they did not interact at all with people from different countries in their everyday life.
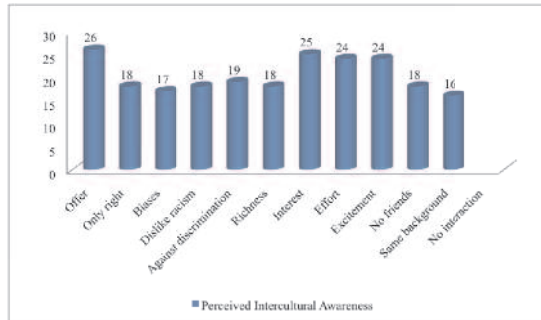

Figure 6. Students' perceived cultural awareness.

In the last section, Section E, students had the opportunity to share their accounts of previous experiences learning languages in multicultural settings, their views concerning the most beneficial aspects and the challenges of learning English in a multicultural setting and their own definitions of intercultural communication. Students were free to write their answers in Spanish, Catalan or English. Nevertheless, all of them chose to reply in English, probably due to the fact that the questionnaire was written in English and delivered in the context of an English class. The following quotes illustrate some of the students' accounts about their previous experiences of contact with foreign people their age, as well as their feelings about the opportunity to learn English with speakers from the target language and culture through telecollaboration. Among those accounts, many instances of not having had significant previous opportunities to learn the target language in multicultural or immersion contexts were found. Moreover, in some cases, mixed feelings were expressed (e.g. fear combined with excitement):

Response 1: I could do an exchange years ago but I didn't go.

R2: I was only 10 days in Ireland with my school four years ago.

R3: Sadly, I haven't had any opportunities. That's why I'm so excited and scared at the same time.

R4: I spent a week in the Pyrenees with people from all over the world so we could improve our English level, for example, I met people from Florida, India, Ireland, Pakistan, etc.

Regarding their views on the most beneficial aspects and the challenges of learning English in a multicultural setting, the following quotes illustrate the fact that students were aware of both the beneficial aspects and the challenges of such experience, and that they were looking forward to experiencing learning in a multicultural, diverse setting:

R5: Benefits: Learning from real life and not books. Challenge: Timetable?

R6: A language and how it is used [sic] is normally conditioned by the culture of its speakers and that's why it's important to get to know different cultures in order to understand their language and how to use it correctly. In my opinion, the most challenging aspect is to learn and understand the different meanings and expressions.

R7: I think that the most beneficial aspects are that you get to know different cultures in class.

R8: This may make lessons more interesting as everyone has different opinions and ways of thinking. The most challenging aspects may be agreeing with people that hold different beliefs. Personally, I think the most benefits are the variety of new things that you can learn and the most challenging aspects are to get on well with someone different from you and with different ideas.

Finally, when asked to give their own personal definition of "intercultural communication", most students tended to focus on what they perceived as positive aspects about communicating across cultures, as illustrated by the following responses:

R9: I would state that it is a way of breaking down personal barriers and limitations and the best way of evolving as an individual.

R10: It is a way of meeting new people and learning about them and other cultures so that you become a really open-minded person.

R11: I would define it as a way of sharing and learning from other cultures improving your own and yourself as a student and as a person.

> R12: Intercultural Communication would be being able to speak with people from other places all over the world, having a complete comprehension of their environment and situation.

Some of the aspects related to intercultural communication and awareness which were underlined by students can also be found in the literature, such as the keywords "interaction" and "communication", "culture", "flexibility" and "adaptability", "learning", "identity', "sharing", "speak" and "situation": Concerning interaction and culture, Guilherme (2004) understands intercultural communication as the ability to effectively interact with people from other cultures. As for "adaptability" and "flexibility", these are considered by Meyer (1990) as the key abilities to be developed by foreign language students. With regard to the concepts of "identity" and "context", authors such as Byram and Fleming (1998) argue that intercultural communicative communication involves interaction among different social identities, their perceptions of other identities and even the awareness of the participants' own identities depending on the context. It is worth noting that the students' understanding and knowledge of intercultural communication was acquired following a "learning-by-doing" approach (Shank, Berman & Macpherson, 1999), as these concepts were not explicitly taught in class. This can be considered as an illustration of what was perceived by one of the participants as "learning from real life and not books".

7. Concluding remarks

This paper has focused on the task design process of a telecollaboration project which was enriched by gamification and carried out in a Business English course offered at UV. A study was carried out in order to gather students' perceptions and opinions about the gamified design of the different tasks they were asked to complete through telecollaboration with other students from the United States. To our knowledge, no previous studies have attempted to combine telecollaboration and gamification. Moreover, these two approaches have never been applied to ESP settings. Therefore, the authors have contributed towards filling a double gap in the literature by dealing with the combination of gamification and telecollaboration; and by exploring their application to ESP learning contexts. The synergy resulting from the combination of telecollaboration and gamification in ESP contexts is perceived by students as beneficial in

terms of the development of different skills and competences (namely linguistic, digital and intercultural) and motivation.

The tasks design process of the Business English gamified telecollaborative exchange took into account the social and educational practices of nowadays' students: collaboration, interconnectedness and digital immersion (Kessler, 2013). The goal was to cater for the needs, interest and preferences of students in terms of the development of 21st century skills while going beyond the classroom's four walls (Peregoy & Boyle, 2005; Ponder, Vander Veldt & Lewis-Ferrell, 2011). To achieve that goal, real business contexts where brought into the ESP classroom thanks to different gamified and telecollaborative tasks which students completed throughout the semester and thanks to the digital tools they used for interaction and organisation. Moreover, students were provided with opportunities to meet and collaborate with real people from the target language and culture for the completion of those tasks.

The students' perceptions, views and attitudes towards the project were gathered by means of an online questionnaire which included both open-ended and closed-ended questions concerning their views on language learning and the use of technology; their opinions about the level of usefulness of telecollaboration in term of the development of different skills and competences; the students' cultural awareness; and their overall opinions and comments about the project.

Results indicate that students were aware of both the challenges and the benefits of the project and, in spite of experiencing the fear of the unknown, they were willing to face the challenges and to intrinsically engage in their learning process through gamified telecollaboration. According to their answers to the different questions, they found this way of learning Business English beneficial in terms of their development of different skills and literacies (namely linguistic, digital, and intercultural) and their intrinsic engagement on their learning process. In addition, their answers to the open-ended questions showed very positive attitudes towards the project and high levels of engagement, as they saw this as a unique opportunity to experience the target language and culture while preparing for their future multicultural business working contexts.

Nevertheless, several limitations of this study should be borne in mind, namely, the small size of the sample, which does not allow for the generalisation of the results; and the aforementioned possible bias in relation

to students' potential delivery of perceived "right answers" to the questions included in the questionnaire. Another limitation is that the study relied too much on students' self-perceived benefits. Future research could focus on the application of similar studies with bigger samples so as to increase its validity and generalisability, as well as on confronting students' perceptions with their actual performance. Moreover, future studies could look into the relationship between different variables so as to determine how this relationship might affect the students' development of competences and motivation.

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