

## **Integrating Ludopedagogy in FFL Classes: Using Serious Games to Promote Active Engagement among Middle School Students**

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### **Abstract**

*This article explores the potential of serious games as a pedagogical tool for teaching French as a Foreign Language (FFL) in middle school. In light of the limitations of traditional methods, which often struggle to engage adolescents, it examines whether serious games can enhance student engagement as well as linguistic and cultural competencies compared to classical approaches. A case study involving the game *At the Oriental Restaurant* illustrates its practical application, in which students practice the language through immersive role-play. A corpus of classroom interactions highlights both the teacher's facilitative role and the students' progress. The results indicate that game-based pedagogy outperforms traditional methods in terms of student engagement and communicative effectiveness.*

**Keywords:** FFL (French as a Foreign Language), simulation games, ludopedagogy, language learning, middle school.

## **L'intégration de la ludopédagogie en classe de FLE : le serious gaming pour favoriser l'engagement actif des élèves au collège**

### **Résumé**

*Notre article explore le potentiel des jeux sérieux comme outil pédagogique pour l'apprentissage du français langue étrangère (FLE) au collège, face aux limites des méthodes traditionnelles qui peinent à engager les jeunes apprenants. Il s'interroge sur la capacité des jeux sérieux à améliorer l'engagement et les compétences linguistiques.*

*tiques et culturelles des collégiens par rapport aux approches classiques. Une étude de cas, comme le jeu « Au restaurant l'Oriental », révèle sa mise en œuvre pratique, où les élèves pratiquent la langue via des rôles immersifs. Un corpus d'interaction met en évidence le rôle facilitateur de l'enseignant et les progrès des élèves. Les résultats montrent que la ludopédagogie surpasse les méthodes traditionnelles en engagement et en efficacité communicative.*

**Mots-clés :** *FLE, jeux de simulation, ludopédagogie, apprentissage des langues, collège.*

## Introduction

The learning of French as a foreign language (FFL) in middle school represents a major challenge in a globalized world where proficiency in foreign languages has become a key skill. However, traditional teaching methods, often focused on grammatical exercises and memorization, struggle to engage adolescent learners, who face motivational challenges and a fear of making mistakes. In light of this observation, ludic-pedagogical approaches, particularly serious games, are emerging as promising alternatives.

French as a Foreign Language (FFL) is a difficult subject matter in middle school in a globalized world where learning a foreign language is viewed as critical skill, both educationally and professionally. Moreover, in our current context, it is necessary to rethink our teaching methods to best meet the needs of students who are increasingly shaped by digital tools and interactive environments. Traditional pedagogical approaches, which are often driven by exercises focused on grammar, repetition and memorization, struggle to engage adolescents who often express a lack of motivation; anxiety caused by the fear of making mistakes; and a sense of disconnection between what is taught and their own learning interests.

In light of this, ludic-pedagogical approaches, and serious games in particular, are appearing as promising alternatives to revitalize FFL. Serious Games are pedagogically significant because they combine learning with enjoyment, immersion and interactivity, creating a motivating context where the student becomes the actor of their own learning. Serious games allow learners to engage with their linguistic skill sets in real and meaningful contexts while developing the cultural, social and cognitive competencies required for authentic communication.

By drawing on scenarios and role-playing games, serious games actively promote participation; peer collaborative learning; and improved memory retention.

**The issue** that guides this reflection is the following: to what extent can serious games, as a ludopedagogical approach, promote the active engagement of middle school students and improve their linguistic and cultural skills in French as a Foreign Language (FLE) compared to traditional methods?

To answer this question, **two hypotheses** are proposed. First, we assume that serious games, due to their immersive and interactive nature, increase students' motivation and reduce their anxiety, thereby facilitating more spontaneous and frequent participation in oral activities. Secondly, we hypothesize that the use of serious games, supported by appropriate pedagogical guidance from the teacher, enables contextualized and meaningful learning, leading to a better mastery of linguistic structures and a heightened awareness of Francophone cultural norms.

By recreating authentic communicative contexts, these games allow students to practice the language in a curious and interactive way, while reducing anxiety related to oral expression. This article aims to explore the potential of game-based learning as a teaching tool for learning French as a foreign language, by examining their impact on motivation, interaction, and the acquisition of language skills.

## **1. Ludopedagogy and the Learning of French as a Foreign Language (FFL)**

Ludopedagogy, or the integration of play into learning processes, stands out as an innovative educational approach, particularly relevant in the context of teaching foreign languages such as French as a Foreign Language (FLE). This concept is based on the idea that play, far from being just a recreational

activity, can become a powerful vehicle for acquiring knowledge and skills when it is structured and directed towards specific educational objectives.

To understand the foundations of ludopedagogy, it is essential to rely on classical theories of play as well as on recent research that explores its didactic potential in modern educational contexts.

One of the first theorists to conceptualize play is Roger Caillois, whose work *\*Les jeux et les hommes\** (1958) proposes a classification of playful activities into four main categories: agon (competition), alea (chance), mimicry (imitation), andilinx (vertigo). Caillois emphasizes that play is a free activity, confined within limits of time and space, and governed by structured rules accepted by the participants. This definition is significant as it presents play as being associated with learning; in our case, the freedom of action (the task) promotes the autonomy of learners, which allows for the achievement of educational objectives.

In the context of FLE (French as a Foreign Language), for example, a role-playing game simulating a daily life situation (such as a conversation) falls under "mimicry," encouraging students to imitate authentic linguistic and cultural behaviors (Caillois, 1958). Ludopedagogy is situated within a constructivist perspective of learning, influenced by thinkers (Piaget and Vygotsky) who view play as an essential mechanism for cognitive development. Vygotsky (1978) emphasizes the importance of social interaction in learning (the ZPD), where, through playful activity, the learner responds with the help of peers or the teacher.

## **2. Serious games or serious gaming:**

Applied to teaching French as a foreign language (FLE), games, or better known today as simulation games, promote verbal exchanges and collaboration in a motivating context (Vygotsky, 1978). Recently, the concept of serious gaming has enriched the reflection on ludopedagogy. Serious games, defined by Alvarez and Djaouti (2011) as tools that combine a pedagogical intention with a playful dimension, have been widely studied for their ability to engage learners in active learning processes. These games do not just entertain; they simulate real environments or situations to develop specific skills. In the context of language teaching, serious games allow for the recreation of authentic communicative contexts, such as travel scenarios or professional interactions, which immerse learners in the target language. A study by Cornillie et al. (2012) shows that serious games, by integrating digital technologies, increase student engagement by transforming learning into an interactive and meaningful experience, an aspect that is particularly crucial for middle school adolescents (Cornillie et al., 2012).

Unlike traditional methods where the student receives repetitive exercises, play encourages curiosity, involvement, and the active engagement of often passive learners. Play places the learner at the heart of the learning process. According to Deci and Ryan's (2000) self-determination theory, engagement is enhanced when three fundamental psychological needs are met: autonomy, competence, and social belonging.

Serious games, for example, meet these needs by offering students the freedom to make choices (autonomy), opportunities to succeed in linguistic tasks (competence), and a collaborative framework to interact with their peers (belonging). An activity like a role-play where students act as customers and servers in a restaurant allows them to practice idiomatic ex-

pressions while feeling engaged in a concrete and social task (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

### **3. Serious games promote the reduction of anxiety.**

Another significant advantage of ludopedagogy is the reduction of anxiety, a major obstacle in learning foreign languages, particularly in speaking. Krashen (1982), in his affective filter hypothesis, posits that anxiety, stress, or lack of self-confidence create a barrier that prevents language acquisition. Games, by transforming learning into a pleasant and non-threatening activity, lower this affective filter. For example, when a middle school student participates in a simulation where they have to ask for directions in French, the playful aspect of the activity alleviates the fear of making grammatical mistakes or mispronouncing a word. Recent research, such as that by Reinders and Wattana (2015), confirms that playful environments, particularly digital role-playing games, reduce language anxiety, which is especially beneficial for adolescent learners, who are often sensitive to the judgment of their peers (Reinders & Wattana, 2015).

Ludopedagogy promotes a learner-centered approach, a key principle of modern language teaching methodologies. By moving away from a transmissive model where the teacher is the exclusive holder of knowledge, games allow students to build their understanding through experience. This approach aligns with the recommendations of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR, 2001), which emphasizes the development of communicative competence through authentic and interactive tasks. Recent studies, such as Peterson's (2021), highlight that serious games, by simulating real communication situations, fully fit into this framework, trans-

forming the French as a Foreign Language (FLE) classroom into a space for linguistic and cultural interaction (Peterson, 2021).

The principles of ludopedagogy, supported by classical theories and contemporary research, are based on the idea that play is much more than just entertainment: it is a powerful educational tool capable of transforming the learning of French as a Foreign Language (FLE). By promoting active engagement, reducing anxiety, and placing the learner at the center of the process, games offer a promising alternative to traditional methods, particularly suited to the needs of learners.

#### **4. The mechanisms of serious games in the learning of French as a foreign language**

Serious games, as ludopedagogical tools, play a central role in the teaching of French as a Foreign Language (FLE), particularly at the intermediate level, where students are at a crucial stage of their cognitive and social development. These games, designed with an explicit educational intention, integrate a playful dimension and offer a dynamic and interactive learning environment. Their effectiveness relies on several key mechanisms: immersion and contextualization, interaction and collaboration, motivation and engagement, as well as feedback and adaptive learning. These dimensions highlight how serious games transform the learning experience of FLE.

##### **4.1. Immersion and contextualization:**

One of the main advantages of serious games in learning French as a foreign language is their ability to create an immersive environment that contextualizes the use of the language. Serious games place students in realistic scenarios where the language becomes a functional tool. For example, a digital serious game like an application simulating an order in a restaurant requires students to use specific vocabulary (dishes, polite

expressions) and to adopt appropriate cultural behaviors (saying "hello" before addressing the virtual server), how to stand in front of the customer, and to have an audible voice.

This immersion in an authentic context enhances the relevance of learning, as learners immediately perceive the usefulness of what they are studying.

The immersion offered by serious games is based on Krashen's principle of "comprehensible input," which states that language acquisition is facilitated when learners are exposed to language that is slightly beyond their current level, but in a context where the meaning is clear through visual or situational cues. In a serious game representing a market, for example, students can understand expressions like "how much does it cost?" or "I would like two kilos of apples," thanks to animations, images of objects, and the interactive scenario, even if they do not yet master all the grammatical structures. This contextualization makes learning more natural and memorable, as words and expressions are associated with concrete experiences rather than abstract definitions (Krashen, 1982).

According to Byram, serious games provide a safe space to experiment with sociolinguistic and cultural dimensions. For example, a serious game simulating a train journey abroad may include interactions where students learn to use specific polite expressions ("excuse me, is this seat free?") while discovering cultural aspects such as the punctuality of transportation in Europe through dialogues and narrative scenarios. Thus, serious games not only develop language skills; they also promote a deeper understanding of the cultural context, making the learning of French as a foreign language more authentic and meaningful (Byram, 1997).

## **4.2. Interaction and collaboration:**

Serious games are also distinguished by their ability to promote interaction and collaboration among students, two fundamental elements for the development of communicative skills in French as a Foreign Language (FLE). According to the communicative approach, which is central to modern language teaching methodologies, learning is more effective when it is based on real, direct, or simulated exchanges, where language is used as a tool for communication rather than as an object of study. Serious games, by their interactive nature, perfectly meet this requirement. Richards & Rodgers (2001), in an online serious game, show a group of students playing the role of tourists trying to find their way and another group as Parisian passers-by through avatars. Participants must negotiate meaning, ask questions, and respond spontaneously, reflecting authentic communication situations. This interaction promotes the spontaneous use of language, an aspect often overlooked in traditional methods that prioritize grammatical accuracy at the expense of fluency.

Serious games create a space where mistakes are seen as natural steps in the learning process rather than failures; a mispronunciation or an incorrect structure in a serious game can still progress in the scenario thanks to response options or hints, which boosts the learner's confidence in their communicative abilities. Recent research shows that these spontaneous interactions in playful environments enhance interactive fluency and the ability to handle unexpected conversations (Shehadeh, 2011).

Furthermore, serious games encourage peer collaboration, which contributes to the development of sociolinguistic skills, such as turn-taking, active listening, and adapting to the language register. According to Vygotsky, learning is a social process, and interactions among peers allow learners to co-

construct their knowledge within their zone of proximal development.

### **4.3. Motivation and commitment:**

The motivation and engagement of students are determining factors in the success of learning French as a foreign language, and serious games play a key role in this regard. According to Deci and Ryan's theory of self-determination, intrinsic motivation is enhanced when three fundamental psychological needs are met: autonomy, competence, and social belonging.

Serious games address these needs by offering students the freedom to make choices within the game (autonomy), opportunities to successfully complete language tasks and receive positive feedback in the form of points or progress (competence), and a collaborative framework to interact with their peers, often through multiplayer features (belonging). For example, in a serious game where students play the roles of customers and sellers, they can choose how to approach a virtual conversation, which enhances their sense of control and involvement (Deci & Ryan, 2000). We previously explained that serious games reduce the fear of making mistakes, a major obstacle to language learning, especially among adolescents who are sensitive to peer judgment. These games lower the affective filter, a concept introduced by Krashen, which hinders language acquisition when anxiety is high.

Recent studies confirm that the playful environments of serious games increase student engagement by making learning more meaningful and enjoyable. For example, Peterson emphasizes that serious games, by incorporating elements of storytelling, challenges, and rewards, capture learners' attention and maintain their motivation over the long term, a particularly

important aspect for middle school students who are often distracted or demotivated by traditional methods (Peterson, 2021).

#### **4.4. Feedback and adaptive learning:**

Serious games offer unique opportunities for immediate feedback and adaptive learning, two essential elements for the development of language skills. The teacher's role in managing these games is crucial: they act as a facilitator, observing interactions and providing personalized feedback in real time. For example, during a serious game involving a phone conversation in French, the teacher can intervene to correct a pronunciation error or suggest a more idiomatic expression in class, allowing the student to immediately integrate the correction into the context of the game. This immediate feedback is more effective than delayed corrections, as it is directly linked to the learner's action (Hyland, 2006). Adaptive learning is also facilitated by the flexibility of serious games, which are often designed with algorithms that adjust the difficulty based on students' performance. According to Vygotsky's theory of the zone of proximal development, the teacher or the game itself can adapt the complexity of tasks or the support provided to keep students within an optimal learning zone, allowing each student to progress at their own pace while remaining engaged in the activity (Vygotsky, 1978).

Feedback in serious games is not solely the responsibility of the teacher, but also of the game itself and peers. Serious game systems often incorporate automatic feedback (corrections, hints), and during multiplayer activities, students can correct each other or learn by observing the communication strategies of others, which enhances collaborative learning. Research shows that this type of peer-to-peer and automated feedback is particularly effective in developing self-confidence and the

ability to self-assess, essential skills for autonomous learning (Falchikov, 2005).

Immersion and contextualization make the language lively and relevant, interaction and collaboration develop communicative skills, motivation and engagement overcome emotional barriers, and feedback and adaptive learning ensure personalized progress. These mechanisms, rooted in solid pedagogical theories, make serious games an essential tool for promoting active engagement among middle school students.

## **5- Methodological framework**

### **5.1. Presentation of the corpus: Interaction in the serious game "At the Oriental Restaurant"**

The integration of serious games in FLE (French as a Foreign Language) classes offers a unique opportunity for an active and engaging experience. We will concretely illustrate how these games can be implemented, analyze their observed impacts, and compare them to traditional teaching methods. Through a scenario we have chosen (At the Oriental Restaurant) and reflections on the results, we highlight the potential of serious games to promote student engagement and improve their language skills. The main linguistic objective is to practice communicative skills related to ordering dishes, expressing preferences, and using appropriate polite expressions.

Our corpus is a transcription of an interaction between four first-year students participating in a serious game titled "At the Oriental Restaurant." This game, designed for a 1AM class (11-12 years old) as part of French as a Foreign Language (FLE) teaching, aims to develop learners' linguistic and cultural skills through an immersive simulation of an experience in an Algerian restaurant. The students live in an upscale neighborhood and attend a school (CEM) in partnership with UNICEF. They

are accustomed to participating in cultural outings outside their city, engaging in cultural visits, and enjoying nature.

The corpus highlights the linguistic, social, and cultural dynamics that emerge during this ludopedagogical activity, while illustrating the key role of the teacher as a facilitator and the observable improvements in the participants.

## **5.2. Implementation of serious games in French as a Foreign Language (FLE) classes.**

In this serious game, the "customers" must complete specific tasks, such as greeting the server ("Hello, a table for two, please"), looking at the menu and ordering a dish ("I would like a fish soup and a steak with fries"), or asking questions about the ingredients ("Are there any nuts in this dessert?"). The "servers," for their part, must respond clearly and naturally, using idiomatic expressions and recommendations ("I recommend the dish of the day; it's excellent"). To make the activity more immersive, the teacher can use simple props (printed menus, plastic plates) or a serious game application that simulates a virtual environment with avatars, interactive dialogues, and restaurant animations. Each task is associated with clear evaluation criteria, such as the ability to formulate an order correctly, to understand a response, or to use appropriate polite expressions. The implementation of this serious game can also incorporate cultural elements, such as respecting Algerian "regional" eating habits and codes of conduct (waiting for the server to come take the order rather than calling them out loudly). This type of game can be conducted in class with physical materials or through a digital platform that offers interactive scenarios with automatic feedback on grammatical or lexical errors. These activities, by recreating real contexts, allow students to use the language functionally. The teacher intervenes beforehand to define the roles, educational objectives, and nec-

essary resources. They can also rely on educational technologies, such as applications or online platforms, which provide immersive environments and pre-designed scenarios. Studies show that the use of such digital tools in playful contexts enhances the authenticity of simulated situations and facilitates student engagement (Peterson, 2021).

## **6. Example of interaction between the participants (students/students – teacher's intervention)**

Here is a transcription of an interaction between a group of customers (three students: Amine, Okba, and Lina) and a waiter (one student: Yassine), performed in class with props as part of the serious game "At the Restaurant." This interaction highlights the linguistic and social dynamics, the learning opportunities, as well as the teacher's interventions that support the students in developing their linguistic and cultural skills. It also demonstrates how these skills improve throughout the exchange thanks to discreet guidance and immediate feedback.

**Scene: The customers enter the restaurant and are greeted by the waiter.**

- Yassine (waiter): Hello, welcome to the Oriental restaurant. How many are you?

- Lina (customer): Hello, um... there are three of us. A table for three, please.

(The teacher intervenes to explain the usefulness of using the formal "vous" form.)

- Yassine: Very well, follow me. Here is your table. (He shows them an imaginary table and hands them menus.) I will bring you water right away. Would you like an appetizer?

- Okba (client): Uh... what is an aperitif?

- Amine: Uh... (hesitates for a moment, searching for his words) It's... a drink before the meal, I think. An orange juice or a soda, for example.

- [Teacher's intervention: Noticing Théo's hesitation, the teacher discreetly approaches and whispers, "You can add that it's a tradition to start a meal, often with a light drink." Yassine incorporates this information.]

- Yassine: Yes, it's a drink before the meal, a tradition in your culture to start. An orange juice or a soda, does that work for you?

- Lina: Ah, okay, that's interesting. I would like an orange juice, please.

- (The teacher intervenes to emphasize the use of formal address)

- Okba (customer): Me too, an orange juice. And you, Amine?

- Amine: No, I'll just have water. Thank you.

- Okba: Very well, two orange juices and a carafe of water. I'll be back to take your order. (He walks away, then returns after a minute.) So, have you decided?

- Marie: Yes, I would like a fish soup for the starter, and then... um... a steak with fries.

- [Teacher's intervention: The teacher notes the use of "I want" instead of "I would like," but does not interrupt to maintain the flow. He plans to address this point later during a break.]

- Yassine: Alright, one soup and one steak with fries. And for you?

- Amine: I'll have a Niçoise salad. What does "Niçoise" mean?

- Lina: Uh... (hesitates again, searching for a precise answer) It's a salad with tomatoes, eggs... and... I'm not really sure.

• [Teacher's intervention: The teacher discreetly approaches Yassine and whispers: "Say it's a salad with tuna, tomatoes, and hard-boiled eggs, a modern appetizer." This assistance allows Yassine to respond confidently and introduce a cultural element.]

• Yassine: It's a salad with tomatoes, hard-boiled eggs, and tuna. It's very good.

• Lina: Ah, wonderful, I'm learning something! Okay, I'll take that. And for the main dish, a roasted chicken.

• Amine: I don't want an appetizer. Just a main dish, a mushroom omelet. And... is there a dessert with chocolate?

• [Teacher's intervention: Noting that Amine is starting to participate more, the teacher gives him a small sign of encouragement with a smile and a thumbs up to boost his confidence, without interrupting the exchange.]

• Yassine: Yes, we have a chocolate mousse. It's delicious. It's homemade, do you want to try it?

• Amina: Okay, I'll take that. Thank you. Uh... what does "homemade" mean?

• Yassine: It means that we prepare it here, at the restaurant, not bought ready-made.

• [Teacher's intervention: The teacher, observing that Yassine has answered correctly, notes this exchange as a positive example to mention during the debriefing to highlight Yassine's ability to explain a cultural term.]

• Yassine: Very well, I'll note all that down. (He repeats the order carefully.) A fish soup and a steak with fries, a Niçoise salad and a roast chicken, and a mushroom omelet with a chocolate mousse. Is that correct?

• Lina: Yes, that's good. Thank you.

• Yassine: Perfect, I'll be back with your dishes. Enjoy your meal in advance! (He walks away.)

- [Teacher's intervention: At this moment, the teacher takes advantage of a natural pause to address the group. He says: "Very well, everyone, just a little note: in French, we often say 'je voudrais' to order, it's more polite. Lina, can you try to rephrase your order using 'je voudrais'?" Lina repeats: "I would like a fish soup and a steak with fries, please." The teacher adds: "Perfect, that sounds more natural. And Yassine, I liked how you said 'enjoy your meal in advance,' it's a nice touch of politeness!"]

[This intervention acknowledges the students' efforts while discreetly correcting them.]

### **Analysis and discussion**

Serious games, such as "At the Oriental Restaurant," are distinguished by several key dimensions that promote active and contextualized learning. These dimensions clearly emerge in the corpus and contribute to transforming the classroom into a space for linguistic and cultural experimentation..

- The serious game recreates a realistic restaurant environment, allowing students to **immerse** themselves in an authentic communication situation. For example, Yassine's greeting ("Hello, welcome to the Oriental restaurant. How many of you are there?") and Lina's response ("Hello, um... there are three of us. A table for three, please") replicate a typical restaurant interaction, where language is used functionally to accomplish a task. This contextualization makes learning more meaningful, as students associate words and expressions with concrete actions, such as asking for a table or ordering a dish.

- Serious games promote dynamic exchanges among peers, encouraging collaboration and negotiation of meaning. In the corpus, we observe a natural interaction between the customers and the server, such as when Okba asks Amine ("And you, Amine?") what he would like to drink, or when Yassine repeats

the order for confirmation ("A fish soup and a steak with fries, a Niçoise salad, and a roast chicken... Is that correct?") and receives validation from Lina ("Yes, that's good. Thank you"). These exchanges demonstrate how students collaborate to successfully complete the task, thereby developing their sociolinguistic skills and their ability to interact spontaneously.

- The playful aspect of the game, where students take on roles (clients and server), reduces anxiety and stimulates their engagement. For example, Lina's enthusiasm ("Oh, wonderful, I'm learning something!") when she discovers the meaning of "niçoise" illustrates how the game transforms learning into a pleasant and motivating experience. This playful dimension, by creating a safe space to experiment with the language, encourages students to take linguistic risks without fear of judgment.

The teacher plays a crucial role as a facilitator in this serious game, observing the interactions and intervening strategically to support the students without breaking the immersion. His interventions, visible several times in the corpus, maximize learning opportunities and boost the students' confidence.

- **Immediate linguistic support:** When Okba asks, "What is an aperitif?" and Yassine hesitates in his initial response ("It's... a drink before the meal, I think"), the teacher discreetly approaches and whispers, "You can add that it's a tradition to start a meal, often with a light drink." Yassine incorporates this information and replies, "Yes, it's a drink before the meal, a tradition in your culture to start." This assistance allows Yassine to provide a more complete and cultural explanation, enriching the exchange for all participants.

- **Discreet and delayed correction:** When Lina says "I want a fish soup" instead of the more polite form "I would like," the teacher notes the mistake but does not interrupt the interaction to maintain fluency. During a natural pause, he addresses the

group: "In French, we often say 'je voudrais' to order, it's more polite. Lina, can you try to rephrase your order?" Lina then repeats: "I would like a fish soup and a steak with fries, please." This collective correction transforms an individual mistake into a shared lesson, while avoiding embarrassing the student.

- **Encouragement of participation:** Noticing that Amine participates little at the beginning, the teacher gives him a sign of encouragement (a smile and a thumbs up) when he asks a question about a dessert ("Is there a dessert with chocolate?"). This subtle gesture boosts Amine's confidence, and he continues to engage by asking an additional question ("What does 'homemade' mean?"), demonstrating increased initiative.

- **Valuing efforts:** After Yassine uses the expression "Enjoy your meal in advance!", the teacher compliments him during the debriefing: "Yassine, I liked how you said 'enjoy your meal in advance', it's a nice touch of politeness!" This recognition motivates Yassine and raises awareness among the other students about the importance of polite expressions, encouraging their use in future interactions.

- **Awareness of formal address:** From the beginning, when Lina uses "s'il te plaît," the teacher briefly intervenes to explain the usefulness of formal address in a context like a restaurant: "In a restaurant, we often use 'vous' to show respect, especially with a server we don't know." Later, he emphasizes this again when Lina says "s'il te plaît" to Yassine, whispering in Lina's ear: "Try using 's'il vous plaît' to be more polite." These interventions help the students adjust their language register to make it more appropriate for the context.

## 7. Linguistic and cultural improvement in students

The corpus shows significant progress in the linguistic and cultural skills of the students, facilitated by serious games and teacher interventions. These improvements are observable

through the exchanges and the gradual adjustments of the interactants.

• **Linguistic improvement - Adoption of polite forms:** Initially, Lina uses "I want" to order ("I want a fish soup"), a direct form that may seem impolite in a formal context. After the teacher's intervention, she rephrases her order to "I would like a fish soup and a steak with fries, please," incorporating a more appropriate and nuanced structure. This adjustment demonstrates a quick assimilation of the polite form, which is essential for social interactions in French.

• **Linguistic improvement - Vocabulary enrichment and fluency:** Amine, who asks questions about terms like "homemade" ("What does 'homemade' mean?"), benefits from Yassine's explanation ("It means that we prepare it here, at the restaurant, not bought ready-made"). This interaction enriches his vocabulary and helps him better understand specific concepts. Furthermore, his initiative to ask questions about dessert ("Is there a dessert with chocolate?") reflects an increasing fluency and greater confidence in the spontaneous use of the language.

• **Linguistic improvement - Correction of language register:** The teacher's intervention regarding the use of formal address has a direct impact on the students' linguistic behavior. After being corrected, Lina adjusts her language by saying "please" when reformulating her order. Although this progress is not yet visible throughout the entire corpus, the intervention lays the groundwork for better mastery of the formal register, which will likely be reinforced in future interactions.

• **Cultural improvement - Sensitivity to French norms:** Yassine, supported by the teacher, introduces cultural elements into his responses, such as the aperitif as a "tradition to start a meal" and the Niçoise salad as a "modern starter." These expla-

nations benefit the other students, who show cultural interest, like Lina, who reacts enthusiastically ("Oh, wonderful, I'm learning something!"). This cultural sensitivity is also reinforced by expressions like "bon appétit d'avance," which is valued by the teacher and becomes a politeness marker integrated by Yassine.

• **Social improvement - Trust and collaboration:** The playful environment, supported by the teacher's encouragement, enhances students' confidence and their ability to collaborate. Amine, initially reserved, gains confidence after receiving encouragement from the teacher and begins to ask more complex questions. Additionally, Yassine's repetition of the instruction and Lina's confirmation ("Yes, that's good. Thank you") demonstrate active listening and collaboration, which are essential social skills for successful interactions.

The analysis of this corpus reveals the effectiveness of serious games like "At the Oriental Restaurant" in learning French as a foreign language in middle school. The dimensions of immersion, interaction, and motivation in the game create a conducive environment for linguistic experimentation, while the teacher's interventions – linguistic support, discreet corrections, encouragement, and recognition – act as a catalyst to transform mistakes into learning opportunities. The linguistic progress (adoption of polite forms, vocabulary enrichment) and cultural awareness (sensitivity to traditions and modernity) of the students, illustrated by concrete examples, highlight the positive impact of this ludopedagogical approach. This corpus thus demonstrates that serious games, when well-structured, promote active, meaningful learning that is tailored to the needs of adolescent learners.

## Conclusion

The exploration of playful strategies in the teaching of French as a foreign language at the college level highlights an innovative path to energize knowledge acquisition. Structured game tools, by their ability to immerse learners in realistic scenarios, provide a conducive space for expression without fear and for spontaneous exchange. This approach, by valuing active involvement, meets the expectations of learners eager to improve their foreign language skills in an interactive setting.

The observations drawn from practical simulations reveal a transformative potential, both in terms of personal assurance and in mastering the linguistic nuances and societal codes specific to the culture of origin and that of the other. The role of the accompanying teacher as a subtle guide proves to be crucial in steering these activities towards specific learning objectives, while preserving the spontaneity of interactions and the motivation of learners.

This playful pedagogical method, although it benefits from being combined with solid theoretical foundations for a comprehensive training, can redefine the learning experience when adopted carefully. It transforms the process into a vibrant and relevant one, suited to today's authentic learning situations. This paves the way for new perspectives to enrich educational environments and encourage a joyful and profound discovery of the language and its cultural riches.

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