



## THE IMPACT OF A RELAXED AND FUN LEARNING ENVIRONMENT ON THE SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING

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### ABSTRACT

*The overall objective of this study is to examine and analyze the impact of a relaxed and fun atmosphere on the second language learning. This is a mixed method research. It combines some parameters from qualitative and some from quantitative type of research. The children were divided into two groups: experimental and control group with 16 children each. The experimental group were taught through games and the control group through books and worksheets. After the experiment, the children from the two groups were diagnosed again with the same didactic assessment test and their results were registered and analysed. As for the qualitative data, observation was used and thus the data collection methods were observation and experiment. Additional data collection methods were didactic assessment test and statistic tests. The experiment was used a research method and all the data were statistically analysed. The preschool age is also concerned because it is an essential part of the educational process. Games and psychological factors like motivation, anxiety and self-esteem were discussed as the instruments of the affective filter that maintain fun and relaxed atmosphere in the teaching-learning process. A short theoretical and literary research was made first and then a psycho-pedagogical experiment was implemented. The results of the experiment, with two groups of children, were analysed and compared. One group had lessons through games and one group taught through books and worksheets and a comparison was made in the input and output results. According to the findings, the game playing environment is the basic component to keep a fun and relaxed learning atmosphere. Playing games leads to higher and fruitful educational and learning outcomes.*

**Keywords:** Games, learning environment, second language, motivation, anxiety, self-esteem, preschool education.

### INTRODUCTION

European policy cooperation (ET2020 framework) provides opportunities to build best practices in education policy, gather and disseminate knowledge, and advance educational policy reforms at the national and regional levels (Education and Training, 2020). Therefore, the role and contribution of the teachers is important in such an approach. In other words, teachers have many and different roles, considering that they act like helpers or facilitators in the knowledge society. Furthermore, both Lobb (2012) and Pasiás (2006) state that teachers have an important role as far as the fostering of modern values and ideological norms are concerned. In addition, teachers are not independent of values, like political, ethical, cultural and ideological ones. These values, possibly, affect their socialization process, while such values stay for a long time (Saint-Hilaire, 2014; Kohli, 2013).

It is a fact that, nowadays, teachers face a rapidly increased need to work, fostering a critical way of thinking and getting rid of many types of prejudices. Teachers have as a goal to determine and to configure an education environment that is productive and equal to all the students, regardless of their background (Matthaiou, 2009; Baltatzis & Ntavelos, 2014; Papavasiliou, 2015). Chatziosotiriou and Xenofontos (2014) claim that intercultural education is actually a way in order to reconstruct the society through a dynamic cultural identity. What is interesting is the ascertainment that teachers are interculturally competent only when they gain experience in the classroom and they are able to have a lifelong education (Palaologiou & Evaggelou, 2003).

Besides, many studies have been conducted that highlight how important it is for the students to be a part of a school environment, improving, in this way, their mental well-being and their learning outcomes. Ferreira, Cardoso and Abrantes (2011), Raufelder, Sahabandu, Martínez and Escobar (2015) and Wormington et al. (2014) think that, in suitable settings, the danger for drop-out and bullying is highly eliminated. According to what Gummadam, Pittman and Ioffe (2015) claim, students who come from several cultural backgrounds have possibly a low sense of belonging and their self-esteem is at low levels. Apart from these difficulties, which have a psychological aspect, students have difficulties especially in their



communicational skills when language is needed (Geraris, 2011). This type of difficulties affects important areas for the children, like their social development or the procedure they follow towards learning (Chiu, Chow, McBride, & Mol, 2015).

### **The significance of the study**

Education and culture are two terms or domains that are highly connected to each other. This can be justified by the fact that students and teachers affect the educations procedures that are followed in an intercultural classroom. Perso (2012) supports the idea that all the ideas, concepts and perceptions that culture consists of distinguishes the one culture from the other. Such characteristics can be: language, literature, values, religion, beliefs, clothing, food and others (Perso, 2012). Barndt (2007) refers to important theories and practices that are crucial for academic achievement, equal opportunities and academic achievement.

Many issues referring to learning and teaching are present when several cultures co-exist in the classroom. Witsel (2003) highlights the association between education and multiculturalism, concerning procedures and methods about learning and teaching. However, the autonomy of a child implies child's social and individual competence. Therefore, the play pedagogy requires adult guidance. Therefore, this study deals with the child autonomy during the play supported by guidance. At the same time, guidance refers also to preservation of play autonomy from choice, participation, playing to reflexion. Exploration of functional features of adult and behaviour of a child (co-player) offers insight in the quality of social interaction, which influences child and play autonomy. The research results imply the possible conclusion about specific forms of parent and teacher behaviour present during the constructive play with a child. Parents are directed to functional and social suitability of a play, giving it the frame, content and course. Their consistent "supervision" speaks in favour of the tendency of continuity in relation to conformity. On the other hand, pre-school teachers are at the same time focus on both context of a play, and teaching. However, their focus on the end-result of a play and their insisting on their intentions speak in favour of the tendency to use the play as a means of social regulation. Variability in the behaviour of pre-school teachers indicates their "balancing" between autonomy and social conformity.

The *Guilds* are a gathering of players around one game or a type of this game. These communities are actually related to "tribes", producing their own ethic, their own hierarchy. They also produce signs of recognition both between members of a same guild and between guilds. We have been able to observe "community logic", linked to the game practiced inside the guild, between "role playing games" and "fighting games". The original aspect of these communities can be found in the very narrow link between the games and the organization of the guild. Then we can wonder about the link between the individual who is no longer physically present and his player's identity (Gyurova, V. 2016).

The study also mentions some of the greatest roles of the teachers that contribute to the success of the school and children. The teacher has the responsibility to provide the important resources, to help not only his own teaching but also his colleagues'. Such resources include readings, instructional material, web sites, as well as other resources that have to be used during the learning procedure. Furthermore, information that is included in books, articles, lesson plans, assessment plans and others.

For the term intercultural, it can be regarded as a procedure of interaction competencies. According to what Hill (2007) believes, interculturalism is about a European tendency of individuals to face it as a non-dynamic idea, which contains characteristics of diverse cultures, showing the interactive relationship of groups, which belong to such cultural groups. Furthermore, Gundara (2000) suggests that the meaning of intercultural is relevant to those of negotiations, interactions and processes. In addition, the same researcher points out that intercultural processes are about the reflection of the society's characteristics, with a descriptive way. The European Council and the policies of the European Commission amplified this conception. There is, also, a clear definition of the terms, offered by UNESCO (2006) that is the following: multiculturalism is about the nature the society has and corresponds to national or ethnic culture and characteristics of religious, linguistic, economic and social differentiation. Moreover, there is no inclusion of points, like the race or the gender, by UNESCO. Trying to differentiate multicultural from intercultural, the second one can have a description of a concept, through which relationship of cultural groups has been developed. Multiculturalism is a prerequisite of interculturalism, which is an outcome of intercultural dialogue and exchange on many levels and aspects, like a national one, a regional one or an international one. The two terms have been separated as approaches, suggesting that multicultural education can use what is learned about cultures, to conclude to tolerance and acceptance of such cultures. Central goal of intercultural education is also to overcome the problems of co-existence, in order to succeed to the development and the sustainability of living with groups and individuals who come from many societies, adopting dialogue and respect from many cultures.

In Europe, the field of intercultural education is configured by many traditions and histories, socio- economical and educational systems (Spiridonova, L., 2016). It is also important to make clear that there is a great spectrum of the term intercultural education, even when there are certain different to one another policies in every country. These may lead to a



differentiation of education and teaching. In the European context, many variations about the development and the context of intercultural education exist. Every country has a different history of migration. For examples, countries like France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Great Britain and Portugal can be characterized as colonial powers, which were previously prevalent. In addition, countries like Austria, Germany, Luxembourg and Switzerland depend a lot on guest workers. Furthermore, in Scandinavian countries, there is a historical homogeneity, while now they show up like diverse society, with different cultures. Gaine and Gewirtz (2008) support that Eastern Europe, Balkan countries and member states of the European Union assure that there are new identities, while their perspectives about the minorities, as well as the intercultural education are specific.

For the past decades, too many migrants have come into surface in Europe. There are many differences between the countries. For instance, in Finland, before multiculturalism, the idea of internationalization was adopted (Rasanen, 1998). In the decades of 1960s and the 1970s, the curriculum that prevails in the Finnish educational system, concerns issues, like equality and justice. Some decades later, in the 1990s, the curriculum focused on the relationships among individuals in the community and the classroom, having knowledge of what each ethnic group supports. Rasanen (1998) found out that the fact that gender, identity religious issues and class are complex and have many dimensions was neglected. Moreover, Talib (2006) underlines that there was progress when dealing with the multicultural competence of teachers and the multicultural education, in general. An additional example that has to be pointed out is the one that exists in the educational system of Sweden. Early in the 1970s, there was, at a slow pace, development of the intercultural curriculum, giving emphasis on the idea of internationalization. When referring to internationalization, we can focus on themes concerning global survival, human rights and the way that global resources are distributed. According to what Norberg (2000) underlines, the approach in this curriculum was a mono-cultural one. Lahdenpera (2004) thinks that, in the half of the 1980s, an intercultural aspect is part of the teaching process. This was the era when intercultural education was generally used. Nordberg (2000) supports that, almost at the end of 1990s, the teachers were very interested in issues about interculturalism, even in cases that there is a variation in the skills needed about intercultural education and the interpretation of this. This results to the fact that there are many differences from the one school to another. In this country, in Sweden, most of the teachers face the immigrant students, or the students who have a different ethnic background as a lack for work at school, something that is necessary for all the school levels, starting from preschool education up to university studies (Lahdenpera, 2004; Nordberg, 2000).

Education is a right which can stimulate and make possible the transition to postmodern society and our adaptation to and towards the European educational Priorities. And, the basic education is necessary not only for the child's normal development but for their psychological and social well-being as well. The basic elements in the strategy of the Bulgarian education are: flexible structures of the educational institutions and the educational models, innovatory forms and methods of socialization of children.(Koleva, I., 2009). The framework is based on the lifelong learning approach. It therefore addresses outcomes from early childhood to adult vocational and higher education, and is designed to cover learning in all contexts: formal, non-formal and informal.

ET 2020 pursues the following four common EU objectives:

- Make lifelong learning and mobility a reality
- Improve the quality and efficiency of education and training
- Promote equity, social cohesion, and active citizenship
- Enhance creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training.

Multilingual competence is at the heart of the vision of a European Education Area. With increasing mobility for education, training and work inside the Union, increasing migration from third countries into the Union, and the overall global cooperation, education and training systems need to reconsider the challenges in teaching and learning of languages and the opportunities provided by Europe's linguistic diversity. People have been learning, teaching, and assessing language for centuries. In this long history, there have been as many different ways of teaching as there have been ways of describing levels of language learning and assessment. Even today, schools, universities, and language academies use many different methodologies and many ways to describe proficiency levels.

The result of over twenty years of research (during the 1980's and 90's), the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment is exactly what its title says: a framework of reference. It was designed to provide a transparent, coherent and comprehensive basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses and curriculum guidelines, the design of teaching and learning materials, and the assessment of foreign language proficiency. It is used in Europe but also in other continents and is available in 40 languages.

As a common framework of reference, the CEFR was primarily intended as a tool for reflection, communication and empowerment. Its main aim is to facilitate transparency and comparability in the provision of language education and qualifications. The CEFR does not deal with any language in particular. It does not offer ready-made solutions but always



has to be adapted to the needs of specific contexts. It has been applied to a wide range of contexts in addition to foreign languages, including sign language, the teaching and learning of Romani, and the language needs of adult migrants. In 2018, the *Companion Volume* with new descriptors has been published as a complement to the existing CEFR.

Early childhood education and care refers to any regulated arrangement that provides education and care for children from birth to compulsory primary school age, which may vary across the EU. It includes centre and family-day care, privately and publicly funded provision, pre-school and pre-primary provision. Quality early childhood education and care can lay the foundations for later success in life in terms of education, well-being, employability, and social integration, and is especially important for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. High quality early childhood education and care is therefore an efficient and effective investment in education and training.

The Commission adopted a proposal for a Council Recommendation on high quality early childhood education and care systems, which aims to support Member States in their efforts to improve access to and quality of their early childhood education and care systems. This proposal includes a Quality framework, which identified 5 key components of a qualitative system:

- access to early childhood education and care,
- training and working conditions of staff in charge of early childhood education and care,
- definition of appropriate curricula and governance,
- funding,
- monitoring and evaluation of systems.

The Quality Framework already supported reforms in many countries and helped improving the offer of early childhood education and care. The EU benchmark of 95% of children above 4 years old attending early childhood education and care has globally been reached, but there are still wide differences across countries, regions and areas. The European Commission supports Member States in identifying challenges in this field and ways to address them.

The pre-primary education of Bulgaria includes children from three to seven years old. According to the “Law on pre-school and school education” (2015) the main objectives of pre-school education are:

- Intellectual, emotional, social, spiritual, moral and physical development, and support of each child,
- Acquiring competences for personal, social realization,
- Stable development and environmental awareness,
- Detection abilities - inclusive education,
- Early detection of talents and abilities of each child and their support.
- Respect for children's rights and a manifestation of tolerance and cooperation. (Giurov, 2009.)

Pre-primary age is a sensitive period in a child's development. A wide range of socio-economic factors can have a significantly negative impact on children's psychological development and chances of success at school. These include: poverty; belonging to disadvantaged social classes; functional illiteracy and low levels of educational attainment of parents; and religious traditions associated with a cultural life where literacy is not highly regarded. Although low income or ethnic minority status alone may not be a decisive factor in the development, it is the combination of factors that leads to serious consequences for child development (COM, 2008).

Pre-primary education can contribute importantly to combating educational disadvantages, if certain conditions are met. The most effective intervention programmes involve intensive, early starting, child-focused, centre-based education together with strong parent involvement, parent education, programmed educational home activities and measures of family support. Most researchers also agree that the training of staff responsible for educational activities in ECEC should be at the bachelor level of higher education and should be specialised.

Different types of skills and competences may be relevant in successive phases. Basic skills in the area of literacy, for instance, letter knowledge, phonological and print awareness, basic counting strategies, number and quantity concepts, and basic school language vocabulary, may help children benefit from initial reading, writing and math instructions in the first two grades of primary school. Social-emotional competence, including self-regulation, intrinsic learning motivation and the ability to cooperate with other students, may help children to benefit from instructions especially for the demands on self-regulated learning, problem-solving, independent work and cooperative work increase. One of the major challenges of pre-primary education is to develop and implement curricula that serve all these domains of skills and competences equally well.

The Commission also facilitates cooperation among Member States in the field of early childhood education and care, providing data and analysis on current developments in Europe. Teaching foreign languages in this period is a real adventure. Children are energetic, curious, smart and loveable. They want to know everything, to touch, smell and taste



everything. Do they want to stay on the desk and follow some lines on the paper or colour some pictures? No, they want to play.

According to the dictionaries "the atmosphere of a place" is the general impression that you get of it. If a place or situation is relaxed, it is calm and peaceful. Using games and gamification is the way to create a relaxed and fun atmosphere for the preschool children. Game activity and game culture are two aspects of defining preschool education. They are defined by contributions from both classic and modern studies of educators, psychologists, linguists, art scientists, and philosophers, non-governmental organizations for the humane treatment of children and their rights of quality education. Data is adduced from gamification as a European priority, from a study of culture competences in the phenomenon of game culture achieved in game activity, game communication, game conduct and game management and service technology, which constitute game interaction. The significance of the affective filter for improving foreign language learning in early childhood education is taken into account.

F. Schiller, in his "On the Aesthetic Education of Man" wrote: "Man (which means both an adult and a child) only plays when in the full meaning of the word he is a man, and he is only completely a man when he plays." (Gurova, V., 2009). On the one hand, game-playing culture is an act of existence, i.e. an experienced phenomenon and on the other, a subject of study, a problem of a theory, a part of an idea. Schaller defines game as a child recreational activity replete with spirit and relaxation; in game, children are independent for the first time and devise it for themselves. According to M. Lazarus, the purpose of the game is in replenishing energy lost in other activities.

It is a fact that a game is a free, non-utilitarian (serving no purpose), independent, self-sufficient activity; a motion redirected back to the subject and which does not strive to achieve anything. Freud also views it as a mean to react to unfulfilled desires and unpleasant experiences. It should be part of the "child's great cultural achievement". Johan Huizinga sees the game as a displayed greatness of culture, existing before culture itself: "Play is a free activity that proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to freely acknowledged, but fixed rules, with a purpose directed at it and accompanied by feelings of tension and joy, being consciously outside of "ordinary" life. Thus, game can be summarized as world exploration in a freely initiated and independent expression of experience without a desired outcome. Instead of a needless rationalization of valuable time, it is a new form of expression in its sense and significance. The objectivisation and operationalization of play behaviour play communication, which do not merge with the activity, but specify it in notional and operational sense is another aspect of the presented study (Gurova, V., 2018).

The Affective Filter hypothesis states how affective factors relate the second language acquisition process. The concept of an Affective Filter was proposed by Dulay and Burt (1977), and is consistent with theoretical work done in the area of affective variables and second language acquisition, as well as the hypotheses previously covered. In educational psychology, an affective filter is an emotional blockage to new learning. If a learner is suffering from discomfort from embarrassment, shame, or fear of punishment around learning then one would say that the learner has an affective filter preventing learning from taking place. Affective filters are common and instructors need to be aware of the causes of affective filters while dealing with learners who may be more susceptible to emotional impulses or pressures.

Research over the last decade has confirmed that a variety of affective variables relate to success in second language acquisition. Most of those studied can be placed into one of these three categories:

**Motivation:** Performers with high motivation generally do better in second language acquisition (usually, but not always, "integrative").

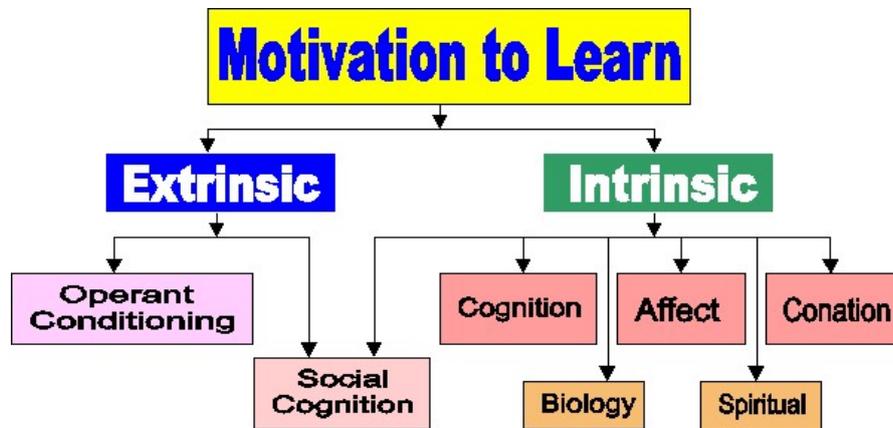
**Self-confidence:** Performers with self-confidence and a good self-image tend to do better in second language acquisition.

**Anxiety:** Low anxiety appears to be conducive to second language acquisition, whether measured as personal or classroom anxiety.

Why children have better learning results though games? Because they do not need to know that they study. They need to do it unconsciously, to do the things they like without seeing the hidden teaching purpose, to acquire the language in their daily life and daily routines. The gamification hand in hand with maintaining low affective filter can do it. Most motivation theorists assume that motivation is involved in the performance of all learned responses; that is, a learned behaviour will not occur unless it is energized. The major question among psychologists, in general, is whether motivation is a primary or secondary influence on behaviour. That is, are changes in behaviour better explained by principles of environmental/ecological influences, perception, memory, cognitive development, emotion, explanatory style, or personality or are concepts unique to motivation more pertinent.

Explanations of influences/causes of arousal and direction may be different from explanations of persistence. In general, explanations regarding the source(s) of motivation can be categorized as either extrinsic (outside the person) or intrinsic (internal to the person). Intrinsic sources and corresponding theories can be further subcategorized as either body/physical, mind/mental (i.e., cognitive, affective, conative) or transpersonal/spiritual.

Fig.1



The use of toys while children of preschool age play can be considered as an external motivating factor. According to their functional capabilities and children's experience, toys contribute to varying degrees to diversify and enrich the transformed roles in a game. The use of toys in the educational process stimulates the process of assimilation of information by activating the cognitive processes of the child and stimulating play activities.

In preschool, to some extent, toys determine the nature of contacts. When children play with figurative toys and toy sets, for example "Doctor" they not only act but also talk to each other. Thus, in the natural for this age game playing environment, which provides calm and fun atmosphere, children develop and improve their communicative competence in a foreign language. The use of toys by children leads to the creation and observance of rules in the respective play activity. These rules make children feel calmer and more confident, both in their actions and in their communication skills when they play. The fun they experience from the game makes them forget that they communicate in a foreign language and they do not worry about making mistakes. Children are calm and happy when they feel they have succeeded. Thus, we can say that in the process of playing we maintain a low affective factor in children, high motivation, low endurance and high self-esteem. Stipek (1988) suggests there are a variety of reasons why individuals may be lacking in motivation and provides a list of specific behaviors associated with high academic achievement. This is an excellent checklist to help students develop the conative component of their lives. According to J. Doncheva (2014), it is successfully proved that through game playing activities, it is possible to regulate both personal and intra-group interactions and relationships, to provoke the interest of children, to create a stable sustainable motivational environment for successful mastering of new knowledge and consolidation of old one, to ensure the acquisition of motor skills, habits, abilities and competencies related to the full formation of their personality. Motivation is an important factor for formation of positive self-esteem, cooperation, control and self-control in game playing situations, it is a prerequisite for the striving to seek physical self-improvement, for motor and personal activity, for applying of personal ideas and experience in various settings and situations. The reasons for lack of motivation are given as follows:

- Not having a written list of important goals that define success for you personally.
- Believing that present goals or activities are wrong for you.
- Feelings/emotions about present activities are generally negative.
- Not having (or believing you do not have) the ability to do present activities or obtain future goals.
- Satisfaction of achieving goals seems in distant future.
- Presenting activities not seen as related to important goals.
- Important goals conflicting with present activities.
- Low extrinsic incentives.
- Personal problems interfering with present activities.

There is a correlation between motivation and emotions. Emotion (an indefinite subjective sensation experienced as a state of arousal) is different from motivation in that there is not necessarily a goal orientation affiliated with it. Emotions occur because of an interaction between perception of environmental stimuli, neural/hormonal responses to these perceptions (often labelled feelings), and subjective cognitive labelling of these feelings (Kleinginna and Kleinginna, 1981b). Evidence suggests that there is a small core of core emotions (perhaps 6 or 8) that are uniquely associated with a specific facial expression (Izard, 1990). This implies that there are a small number of unique biological responses that are genetically hard-



wired to specific facial expressions. A further implication is that the process works in reverse: if you want to change your feelings (i.e., your physiological functioning), you can do so by changing your facial expression. That is, if you are motivated to change how you feel and your feeling is associated with a specific facial expression, you can change that feeling by purposively changing your facial expression. Since most of us would rather feel happy than otherwise, the most appropriate facial expression would be a smile.

Anxiety, the third factor mentioned by Krashen, is also multiple in its forms and in its origins. Psychologists distinguish between Trait anxiety, State anxiety and Situational anxiety. Trait anxiety is a permanent disposition to be anxious. Once again, it appears to be related to upbringing, and indeed may be closely linked to self-image. State anxiety is the anxiety that is linked to a specific moment in time, within a specific situation. It may be relational, being linked to specific persons - a particular teacher, for example. Situational anxiety is aroused by a specific type of situation or event - examinations, public speaking, or classroom participation.

Examinations of learner diaries suggest that anxiety does accompany language learning in several of its aspects. Bailey, after examining 11 such diaries, found that the learners tended to become anxious when they compared themselves with other learners in the class and found themselves wanting. Their anxiety decreased as they became more proficient. Ellis & Rathbone, in their examination of learner diaries, discovered that some of the learners found teachers' questions threatening, and claimed to freeze up when interrogated. The greatest anxiety was found to be associated with the oral skills. Oxford found that some learners were anxious about losing their identities in the target culture. This led to emotional regression, panic, alienation and a 'reduced personality'. Albert and Haber distinguish between facilitating and debilitating anxiety. The former is positive in its effects, pushing students on to make greater efforts, while the latter frightens the student off task. It may, of course, be more a matter of the intensity of the feeling, than of its quality.

Self-confidence as a general characteristic is often linked to family variables. Families who display inconsistent discipline, or over-severe discipline and disapproval of their children produce people who have a low self-image and little confidence in themselves. On the contrary homes where parents are strongly approving of their children and of their friends, who join in many activities with them, and who have regular but not rigid routines, and where standards of behaviour are open to discussion produce children who are confident of themselves. However, once again, self-confidence can be variable. Thus, one study of American adolescents found that young males who were failing at school tended to have a low self-image, but if, in the subsequent year, they became delinquent, their self-image improved. This implies that a variety of factors may affect self-image, from family through school to peers. Once again, we will note that the relationship between success and self-image may not necessarily be all one way. Although there are reasons to believe that children who have a good self-image may do better than those who have a poor self-image, there are also grounds for believing that a child's self-image can be undermined by poor results at school. One study on the relationship between self-confidence and FL learning was carried out by Clement (1986) who investigated 293 francophone students at the University of Ottawa, who were learning English. The integrative orientation had no effect on language outcomes - the best predictor was self-confidence.

The use of the contradictions takes place at that table in the system of game books and electronic books for children, which covered four age groups from 3 to 7 years. On cognitive resources and e-books organized binary-oriented pedagogical situations (simultaneously in two directions) to provide different perspectives on the accumulation of subjective experience.

The "picture for the world" combined with the "Bulgarian language and literature" and "Math" used in pre-primary education connected with the direction "Play-game culture" (Stoyanova, M. 2016). This takes to the consideration that gamification makes children acquire the foreign language, not studying it. Gamification raises motivation, lowers children's anxiety and raises the self-esteem. Games make children feel enthusiastic.

### **The Objective of the Study**

The hypothesis of the is that keeping relaxed and fun atmosphere in the classroom with young learners using games in second language teaching with young learners keeps their affective filter low and improves their output. Thus, the aim of the present paper is to study the influence of the relaxed and fun atmosphere on second language learning.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Method and Design**

This is a mixed method research. It combines some parameters from qualitative and some from quantitative type of research. A psychological-pedagogical experiment was conducted in kindergarten in Sofia, 2019, with two groups of children at the age of 5-6. After the first stage of the experiment when children made a didactic assessment test and registering the input results, the children were divided into two groups: experimental and control group with 16 children each. The

experimental group were taught through games and the control group – through books and worksheets. After the experiment the children from the two groups were diagnosed again with the same didactic assessment test and their results were registered and analysed. The conclusions were made and the hypothesis confirmed. Data collection methods were observation and experiment. Additional data collection methods: didactic assessment test and statistic tests. Data collection and analyses were made in three stages: input control stage, forming stage, output control stage.

**Procedures**

1. Preparation for the experiment - In the experiment took part 32 kindergarten children at the age of 5-6. In the beginning, they were diagnosed in three criteria.
  - 1.1. Diagnose the English language competencies of a group of young children at the age of five in one kindergarten and compare them, regardless they learnt English up to then or not.
  - 1.2. Divide at random these children into two groups and teach them for one school year – one group using books and worksheets, the other group using only games through teaching.
  - 1.3. Prepare the environment – create a gameplayng environment.
2. Implementing the experiment.
3. Register the results.
4. Analyse the results of the two groups.
5. Make conclusions.

*The components of the didactic assessment test:*

1. Saying the name the animal – picture support.
2. Marking the object on the sheet of paper while listening a recorded material and making difference between “have got” and “haven’t got”.
3. Answering the teacher’s questions based on counting objects – picture support.

*To diagnose the results there were specified three indicators:*

1. Vocabulary stimulation and lexical skills development
2. Listening skills
3. Using vocabulary in speech

**Task 1**

All the children are given a sheet of paper having printed animals on them to be coloured. The animals are: horse, lion, snake, elephant, fox, dolphin, bear and monkey. When the child names an animal, they can colour it.

Indicator	Score	%
1. Vocabulary stimulation and lexical skills development	1 point for each correct answer – total: 8p.	100%

**Task 2**

Each child receives a sheet of paper with 12 objects, which are familiar to them. The teacher says in a full sentence what he/she ‘has’ or ‘doesn’t have’.

- |                                 |                            |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. ‘I have got a hat.’          | 7. ‘I have got a book.’    |
| 2. ‘I haven’t got an elephant.’ | 8. ‘I haven’t got a car.’  |
| 3. ‘I have got a bike.’         | 9. ‘I haven’t got a cake.’ |
| 4. ‘I have got a bed’.          | 10. ‘I have got a doll.’   |
| 5. ‘I have got a TV.’           | 11. ‘I have got a table.’  |
| 6. ‘I haven’t got a train.’     | 12. ‘I haven’t got a cat.’ |

Indicator	Score	%
Listening skills	1 point for each correct answer – total: 12p.	100%

**Task 3**

There is a picture with different objects on it. Some of them are balloons, boys, girls, presents and cakes. The teacher asks questions about the number of these objects and the student answers using a phrase or a whole sentence, containing the right number and the plural form of the noun.

Questions	Answers
1. 'How many balloons are there?'	1. '/There are/ twelve balloons.'
2. 'How many boys are there?'	2. '/There are/ five boys.'
3. 'How many girls are there?'	3. '/There are/ six girls.'
4. 'How many presents are there?'	4. '/There are/ ten presents.'
5. 'How many cakes are there?'	5. '/There are/ two cakes.'

Indicator	Score	%
Using vocabulary in speech.	1 point for each number used correctly – 5p. 1p. for each correct plural form – 5p. – total: 10p. *The usage of “there are” is not obligatory, that’s why there are no points for it.	100%

The aim of Task 1 is to give information about the number of the children who can name eight animals chosen randomly. The aim of Task 2 is to give information about the number of the children who make difference between “have” and “have got” speech in listening exercise. The aim of Task 3 is to give information about the number of the children who can use correctly ‘a number + noun’.

After the diagnostic experiment, the children were divided into two groups. The teacher was the same but the teaching methods – different. Group 2 – from Ch17 to Ch32, was taught through books and worksheets and Group 1– from Ch1 to Ch16 – through games. The above experiment was made again with these children after one school year.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### The analyses of the results

Assessment scale: \*-excellent /75-100%/, ?- good /50-74%/, ^ - unsatisfactory /under 50 %/

Table 1: Input – to keep the personal data, numbers are used for the children’s names

Name	Task 1	Task 2	Task 3	Name	Task 1	Task 2	Task 3
Ch1	?	?	^	Ch17	*	*	?
Ch2	?	?	^	Ch18	?	*	?
Ch3	?	?	?	Ch19	?	?	?
Ch4	*	*	*	Ch20	?	?	?
Ch5	*	?	?	Ch21	*	*	*
Ch6	*	*	*	Ch22	?	?	^
Ch7	*	*	*	Ch23	?	?	^
Ch8	*	*	*	Ch24	*	*	*
Ch9	*	*	*	Ch25	*	*	?
Ch10	*	*	?	Ch26	?	^	^
Ch11	?	^	^	Ch27	?	?	?
Ch12	?	?	?	Ch28	*	*	*
Ch13	*	*	*	Ch29	*	*	*
Ch14	*	*	?	Ch30	*	*	*
Ch15	?	*	?	Ch31	*	?	?
Ch16	?	?	?	Ch32	*	*	*

### Task 1

Eighteen children – 56% performed this task excellent, fourteen – 44% – good and noone – unsatisfactory.

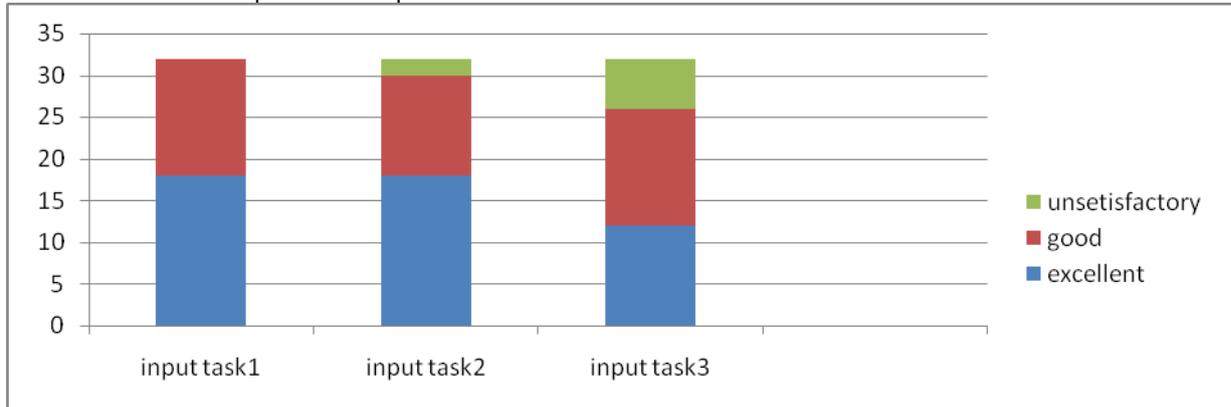
**Task 2**

Eighteen children performed this task excellent – 56%, twelve – good – 38% and two – unsatisfactory – 6%.

**Task 3**

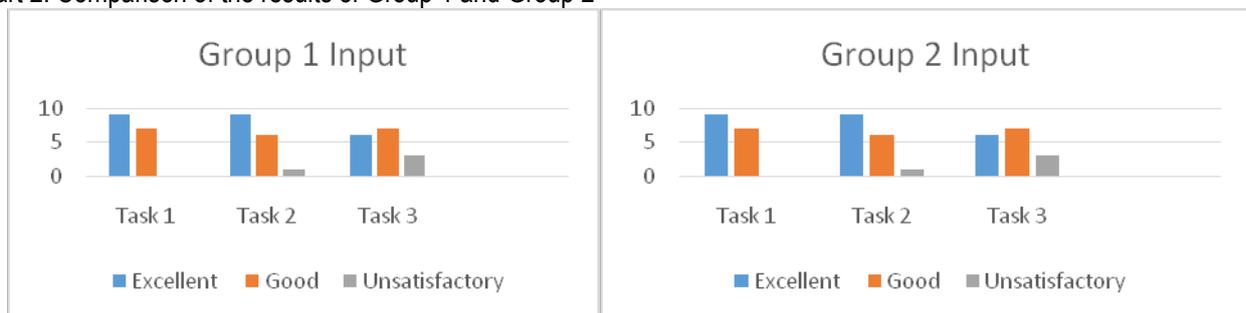
Twelve children performed this task excellent – 38%, fourteen – good – 44% and six – unsatisfactory – 18%.

Chart 1: The results of Group 1 and Group 2



These are the data for all the tested children. To have an equal start they are divided in two groups with 16 children each, with equal input. After the division the results in the groups are

Chart 2: Comparison of the results of Group 1 and Group 2



**Group 1:**

**Task 1**

Nine children – 56% performed this task excellent, seven – 44% – good and noone – unsatisfactory.

**Task 2**

Nine children performed this task excellent – 56%, six – good – 38% and one – unsatisfactory – 6%.

**Task 3**

Six children performed this task excellent – 38%, seven – good – 44% and three – unsatisfactory – 18%.

**- Group 2:**

**Task 1**

Nine children – 56% performed this task excellent, seven – 44% – good and noone – unsatisfactory.

**Task 2**

Nine children performed this task excellent – 56%, six – good – 38% and one – unsatisfactory – 6%.

**Task 3**

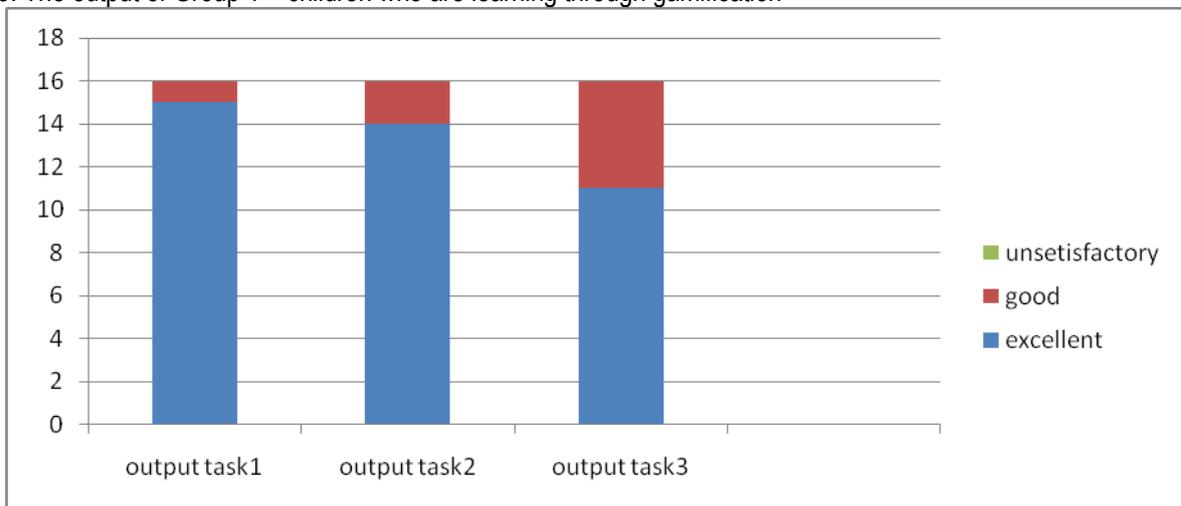
Six children performed this task excellent – 38%, seven – good – 44% and three – unsatisfactory – 18%.

Table 2: Output

Name	Task 1	Task 2	Task 3	Name	Task 1	Task 2	Task 3
Ch1	*	*	?	Ch17	*	*	?
Ch2	*	*	?	Ch18	*	*	?
Ch3	*	*	?	Ch19	*	?	?
Ch4	*	*	*	Ch20	*	?	?
Ch5	*	*	*	Ch21	*	*	*
Ch6	*	*	*	Ch22	?	?	^
Ch7	*	*	*	Ch23	?	?	?
Ch8	*	*	*	Ch24	*	*	*
Ch9	*	*	*	Ch25	*	*	?
Ch10	*	*	*	Ch26	?	^	^
Ch11	?	?	?	Ch27	?	?	?
Ch12	*	?	?	Ch28	*	*	*
Ch13	*	*	*	Ch29	*	*	*
Ch14	*	*	*	Ch30	*	*	*
Ch15	*	*	*	Ch31	*	?	?
Ch16	*	*	*	Ch32	*	*	*

The output results will be analysed for the two groups separately.

Chart 3: The output of Group 1 – children who are learning through gamification



**Task 1**

Fifteen performed this task excellent – 94%, one – good – 6% and noone – unsatisfactory – 0%.

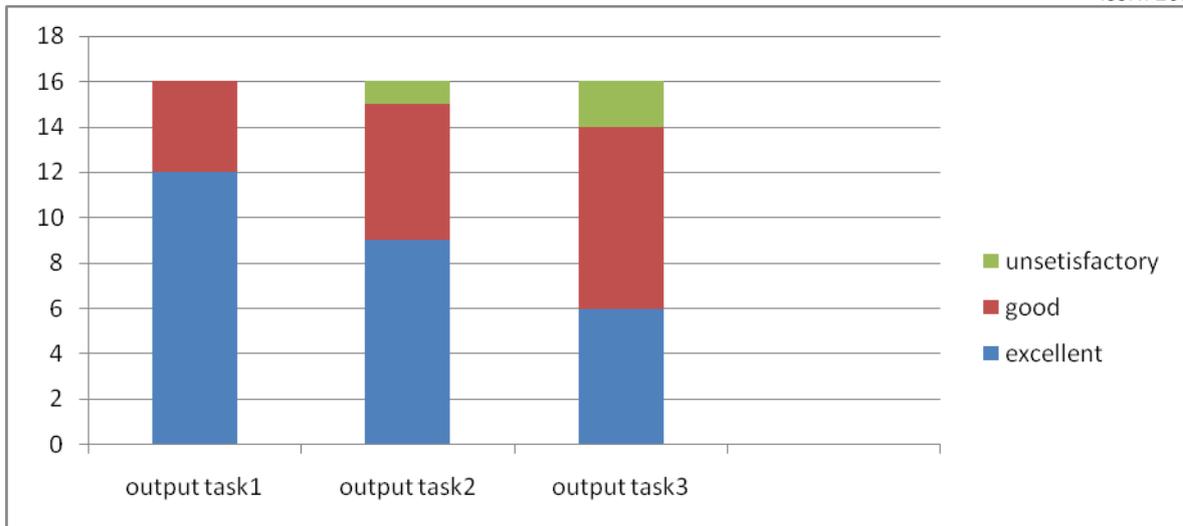
**Task 2**

Fourteen children performed this task excellent – 88%, two – good – 12% and noone – unsatisfactory – 0%.

**Task 3**

Eleven children performed this task excellent – 69%, five – good – 31% and noone – unsatisfactory – 0%.

Chart 4: The output of Group 2 - children who are learning through books and worksheets



**Task 1**

Twelve performed this task excellent – 75%, four – 25% – good and no one – unsatisfactory – 0%.

**Task 2**

Nine children performed this task excellent – 56%, six – good – 38% and one – unsatisfactory – 6%.

**Task 3**

Six children performed this task excellent – 38%, eight – good – 50% and two – unsatisfactory – 12%.

**Table: 3 Group 1**

Input Results in %	Task			Output Results in %		
	Task 1	Task 2	Task 3	Task 1	Task 2	Task 3
Excellent	56	56	38	94	88	69
Good	44	38	44	6	12	31
Unsatisfactory	0	6	18	0	0	0

Comparing the results in the input and output in Group 1 the following numbers are presented:

1. Excellent grades in Task 1 are 67.9% more in the output.
2. Good grades in Task 1 are 86.4% less in the output.
3. Unsatisfactory grades in Task 1 are without change.
4. Excellent grades in Task 2 are 67.9% more in the output.
5. Good grades in Task 2 are 68.4% less in the output.
6. Unsatisfactory grades in Task 2 are without change.
7. Excellent grades in Task 3 are 81.6% more in the output.
8. Good grades in Task 3 are 29.5% less in the output.
9. Unsatisfactory grades in Task 3 are without change.

**Table: 4 Group 2**

Input Results in %	Task			Output Results in %		
	Task 1	Task 2	Task 3	Task 1	Task 2	Task 3
Excellent	56	56	38	75	56	38
Good	44	38	44	25	38	50
Unsatisfactory	0	6	18	0	6	12

Comparing the results in the input and output in Group 2 the following numbers are presented:

1. Excellent grades in Task 1 are 33.9% more in the output.
2. Good grades in Task 1 are 43.2% less in the output.
3. Unsatisfactory grades in Task 1 are without change.
4. Excellent grades in Task 2 are without change.
5. Good grades in Task 2 are without change.
6. Unsatisfactory grades in Task 2 are without change.
7. Excellent grades in Task 3 are without change.
8. Good grades in Task 3 are 13.6% more in the output.
9. Unsatisfactory grades in Task 3 are 33.3% less in the output.

Table: 5 Comparing the output of the two groups: Group 1 and Group 2

Output Results in % Group 1				Output Results in % Group 2		
	Task 1	Task 2	Task 3	Task 1	Task 2	Task 3
Excellent	94	88	69	75	56	38
Good	6	12	31	25	38	50
Unsatisfactory	0	0	0	0	6	12

Comparing the output of the two groups the numbers are:

1. 19% more children from Group 1 have excellent grades in Task 1.
2. 32% more children from Group 1 have excellent grades in Task 2.
3. 31% more children from Group 1 have excellent grades in Task 3.
4. 19% more children from Group 2 have good grades in Task 1.
5. 26% more children from Group 2 have good grades in Task 2.
6. 19% more children from Group 2 have good grades in Task 3.
7. There are no unsatisfactory grades neither in Group 1 nor in Group 2.
8. There are no children in Group 1 who have unsatisfactory grades in Task 2, but in Group 2 6% of the children have unsatisfactory grades.
9. There are no children in Group 1 who have unsatisfactory grades in Task 3, but in Group 2 12% of the children have unsatisfactory grades.

Chart 5: Comparing the output of the two groups: Group 1 and Group 2





## CONCLUSION

As a part of a dynamically evolving world, it requires thinking and acting in both individual and team capacity, stimulating the acquisition of competencies for foreign language communication in early childhood is of great importance to the overall education process. This study explores the importance of environment in early-childhood foreign language education and proposes “game” and “gamification” as primary means for sustaining a calm and fun atmosphere. This atmosphere guarantees high motivation, low anxiety and high self-esteem in children’s foreign language education. The importance of the aforementioned results as well as their interpretation can be used to form answers to the questions. The provided research parameters, which are the basis of the project, are expected to result in improved foreign-language competencies of the children provided with a calm and fun language-acquisition environment.

The experiment proved the hypothesis that keeping relaxed and fun atmosphere in the classroom with young learners using games in second language teaching with young learners keeps their affective filter low and improves their output. It also proved that motivation, anxiety and self-esteem, which in turn define the educational environment as calm and fun. On the other hand, anxious and boring, are of utmost importance for language acquisition. Based on this, we can also posit that children in preschool age do not “study”, but “acquire” a language, usually through a game, when a fun and calm educational environment is supplied to them.

Based on the experiment, we can formulate the following conclusions:

- The gameplaying environment is the basic component to keep a fun and relaxed learning atmosphere. Playing games leads to higher educational results. In our roles as educational researchers and teachers, recognition of early childhood play communities as valuable contexts for social learning cannot be underestimated. If we underestimate the learning value of play, we will under educate the children.
- This paper, through the presentation of selected research study, provides examples of the complexity of young children's play, supporting the fact that children learn best through interaction within play communities. Gamification provides low affective filter in children while learning – high motivation, low anxiety and high self-esteem. Keeping this affective filter low in the classroom children acquire more from the target language.
- Play is certainly a purposeful and preferred child cultural activity of young children which provides an avenue for social and cooperative learning and many varied modes of communication. We need to be aware that play is a mean of teaching and learning, but we must not forget that the children engaged in play, not with the aim of teaching or learning, but with the aim of playing. Playing process belongs to the players. The children from Group 1 (taught through games) have 67.9% higher excellent results in task 1, 67.9% higher results in task 2 and 81.6% - in task 3. The decrease in ‘good’ and ‘unsatisfactory’ results is a normal consequence of the higher results in ‘excellent’ results. In Group 2 ‘excellent’ results in task 1 are 33.9% higher, as a comparison and in task 2 and task 3 there is no change in the output results. The ‘good’ results in task 1 are with 43.2% lower, in task 2 – there is no change and in task 3 they are 13.6% higher. There are no ‘unsatisfactory results’ in task 1 and task 2 and in task 3 – they are 33.3% lower.
- Most of scientists consider folk art as the most accessible kind of art to pre-school children. Favorable to stimulating of children's playing qualities of folk art are as follows: unique stylized and real artistic forms, unique variants of decoration, courageous color and line solutions, abundance of pattern elements, a free play on patterns and images, expressiveness of images, alternation, adaptation and re-creation of patterns, forms and colors. However, scientists often emphasize the importance of folk art to appropriation of artistic abilities, aesthetic experience and ethnic values but not to stimulating of children's play through folk art. In order to identify the influence of folk art on children's play, the general natural elements, forms and combinations of visual expression as well as ones, which appeared in the ethnical context, were singled out.
- Motivation is a psychological state, and though we may be able to affect it in the short term by involving our students in engaging activities, that will not be enough to create real and deep motivation. Nor is it possible to sustain motivation only through a series of teacher-provoked tasks. We need to address more fundamental issues than these.
- We cannot do much about the anti-motivational influences from outside the classroom, we can alter perceptions within it directly as a result of how we promote and organize learning.
- These are what I have called ‘the flying ‘A’s’, since they all play a part in helping to provoke and sustain a student's motivation. The Flying ‘A’s’ are: *activity* (because engaging activities are more effective than the reverse ones!),



*affect* (because, as one secondary student once told me, 'a good teacher is someone who knows our names'), *attitude* (of the teacher, because the way we manage our classes and present ourselves to our students has a critical effect on their feeling about learning in our classrooms), *agency* (because students are more motivated when they are given a say - when they have agency - in classroom decision-making), and *adaptation* (because good teachers are responsive to the atmosphere in a lesson and how things are going, and can adapt what they are doing accordingly).

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