



Designing game-based L2 courses for university-level learners

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KEY POINTS

Background: Games and play are natural to human beings and have been enjoyed by many throughout the world. Their use in education has a long history. They have also been reported to have enhanced learning outcomes in language education in general and second/foreign language (L2) education in particular. Despite substantial research on the effects of games in L2 education, there is limited literature available on how L2 courses can be designed with and around games.

Aim: Therefore, this research explores how experienced L2 teachers use games to teach an L2 (English) in a university setting.

Methods: For this research, qualitative data was collected from four experienced teachers through one-to-one semi-structured interviews. The data was analysed using reflexive thematic analysis.

Results: The results show how game-based L2 courses can be designed for university-level students.

Conclusion: Those who want to design their L2 courses around games, can gain a bird's eye view on how experienced L2 teachers design their game-based courses.

TWEET

Do you want to learn how to design game-based L2 courses for your students? We have interviewed four experienced university teachers to learn how they design and deliver their game-based L2 courses.

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1. Introduction

In contemporary language education, the incorporation of technology and interdisciplinary methods has gained prominence, with games serving as an important method for engagement and language development (see for e.g., Reinhardt, 2019; Sykes, 2018; York, 2019; York, deHaan & Hourdequin, 2019; York, Poole & deHaan, 2021). Games encompass a wide range of activities, from informal outdoor pursuits with peers to the immersive world of online video gaming. They are defined as “a rule-structured, narrativizable form of play.” (Reinhardt, 2019, p. 98). In other words, any type of activity or medium that is governed by rules and/or can be framed within a narrative or story falls in the category of games. Many people enjoy playing games, and teaching and learning with games have shown positive results (deHaan, 2019; Jabbari & Eslami, 2019; Peterson, 2023; York, deHaan & Hourdequin, 2019). Therefore, it is essential to investigate how games are used in classrooms. Although many studies report the use of games in language classrooms, very few attempts to make explicit connections with the overall design of L2 courses using games, particularly in university contexts. Hence, this study aims to explore the integration of games into the course design developed by L2 (second/foreign language) educators. The following sections overview research around games in L2 teaching, and L2 course design procedures against the backdrop of which findings of this study will be shared.

1.1 Games in Language Education

Games have long held a compelling attraction for individuals (Gee et al., 2013). People worldwide engage in games because of their immersive nature (Cheng & Cairns, 2005) and their ability to meet psychological needs (Ballou et al., 2022). Games satisfy the desire to undertake actions in exchange for intrinsic or extrinsic rewards. The intense absorption experienced during gameplay is known as psychological flow, defined as “the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter.” (Csikszentmihalyi, M., 2008, p. 4). Contemporary learners are well-acquainted with this state, primarily through the widespread culture of gaming around the world (Read, 2022).

Due to the captivating potential of games, they have been integrated into language education for a long period (e.g. Lee, 1979). Nonetheless, opinions on their utility are mixed. As outlined by Aguilera and Mendiz (2003), some educators perceive games as valuable tools for enhancing engagement and educational outcomes, while others argue that games are entertaining and learning should be a serious endeavor, suggesting that games might divert learners from their educational pursuits. These contrasting perspectives on using games for educational purposes can be categorized into two approaches. The first entails learners playing games and learning through the act of playing, referred to as “learning to play,” which is often contrasted with “playing to learn,” where serious games are designed with specific learning goals in mind (Arnseth, 2006). Both of these approaches have been used broadly in education and specifically in language education to improve students’ L2 learning experience and outcomes (Reinhardt, 2019).

A comprehensive framework for understanding research on the use of games in second language education divides the field into three distinct categories: game-enhanced, game-based, and game-informed L2 teaching and learning (Reinhardt & Sykes, 2014). In game-enhanced learning, commercial games (games not designed for educational purposes) are employed to support L2 learning. These games offer several advantages, including authenticity and the establishment of a learning community where learners form interest groups on game-related chat rooms, typically known as guilds (Peterson, 2012). Game-based learning, on the other hand, utilizes serious games, designed specifically for learning, to instruct an L2. Learners can readily identify these games because they intentionally incorporate pedagogical structures for explicit and sometimes implicit learning (Reinhardt, 2019). Lastly, in game-informed learning, language teaching pedagogy is influenced by game mechanics and play principles, a pedagogical approach known as “gamification,” which is defined as “the use of game design elements in non-game contexts” (Deterding et al., 2011, p.9). Overall, these three approaches to using games in language education have been termed as “gameful” language learning (Reinhardt, 2019). However, York, Poole and deHaan (2021) find this term problematic and propose “Ludic Language Pedagogy (LLP)” to encompass all kinds of playful learning experiences in language education, with games being one of them. For this research study, “game-based” will be used for all types of uses of games in L2 teaching and learning to emphasize

that this paper includes ludic approaches specific to the inclusion of games in L2 teaching and learning.

1.2 Course design in L2 education

The terms “curriculum” and “course design” are often used interchangeably to mean “the overall plan or design for a course and how the content for a course is transformed into a blueprint for teaching and learning which enables the desired learning outcomes to be achieved” (Richards, 2013, p. 6). The process of designing a course of instruction for L2 learners is a skilful task. This is a complex process which is approached differently by different designers and educators depending on their focus. Richards (2013) discusses the evolution of the field and identifies three approaches to course design: forward design, central design, and backward design. Forward design primarily focuses on the course content, central design emphasizes the teaching process, and backward design starts off with the desired outcomes. Course design normally includes a step-by-step procedure to plan an L2 learning journey. Some of the most agreed upon course design elements, are environment/situation analysis, needs analysis, formulation of aims and outcomes, selection and sequencing of materials, designing formative and summative assessments, evaluation of learners, and the delivered L2 course (Brown, 1995; Kostka & Bunning, 2018; Macalister & Nation, 2020; North et al., 2018; Nunan, 1988; Richards, 2017).

These are general elements of an L2 course design, but the research making direct links with how to create game-based L2 courses is limited. Nevertheless, different practitioners and researchers have reported results from their own game-based L2 courses. deHaan (2020), for example, reported how he used his “Game Terakoya” in a typical university-setting L2 course. In his paper, he reported various elements of course design including environment analysis, course goals, teaching methods, content and sequencing, monitoring and assessment, and evaluation. Similarly, Spano et al. (2021) mention how one game can be used in L2 courses using different teaching methodologies. They suggest that games are not limited to a particular L2 teaching method, but they can fit well with major L2 teaching approaches. deHaan (2023) mentions three main elements of an L2 course design: methods, materials and mediation, and how they can be used in combination to facilitate L2 learning with and around games. He describes his course goals, teaching situation, materials (games and supplemental activities), sequencing, assessment and evaluation. Even though these practitioners have described their courses in detail, there is a need to research more about how different teachers design and deliver game-based L2 courses to make an explicit link between the research on L2 course design and game-based L2 teaching. Therefore, this research paper aims to contribute to filling this research gap.

1.3 Research Question: How do experienced teachers design and deliver game-based L2 courses?

2. Methodology

The research methodology used for conducting this research is qualitative. The purpose of this study is to explore in depth how experienced teachers design game-based L2 courses, and therefore a qualitative approach was appropriate as it allows for an in-depth understanding of a multifaceted phenomenon such as a course designing process. The following sections outline the specific methods to recruit participants, data collection and data analysis.

2.1 Participants

Participants for this study were selected based on criterion sampling (Dörnyei, 2007). In total, four participants were selected based on their experience of using games (digital or analog) in their L2 courses. All the participants are male, work in a university context and teach English as an L2 to university students. They all belong to different universities in Japan and actively use games in their lessons and design courses based on or around games. All the participants are also researchers and have researched in the field of games and L2 teaching and learning.

2.2 Data Collection

For data collection, a semi-structured interview was used as a data collection tool. The questions were formulated around participants' experiences and practices of using games in their lessons. The interview was designed into three segments using the guidelines of Galletta (2013). The first section establishes a level of comfort and moves into asking broad questions to allow participants to share their experiences. The middle section tries to capture the nuances of the narrative by asking specific questions related to different aspects of their use of games in L2 courses. The final section poses reflective questions and wraps up by asking for any details that participants would like to add to their experiences. The interview protocol was tried and tested on a fellow teacher, and some questions were rewritten for clarity. The questions were also slightly modified by splitting, rewriting and rearranging after each interview to improve their clarity based on the previous interview experiences. However, the overall meaning of the questions remained the same. The final version is attached as Appendix 1.

The data was collected in English through a one-to-one 45–60-minute interview with each participant. The participants were located in different locations, so 3 interviews were conducted online using a videoconferencing tool, and one interview was conducted face-to-face. All the interviews were recorded and transcribed and transcribed automatically through a voice-to-text tool. The transcriptions were manually checked for accuracy. After that, the written transcriptions were used for data analysis.

2.3 Data Analysis

As mentioned above, the data was qualitative and collected through interviews and then transcribed into a Word document. Afterwards, NVivo software was used to treat the data, which was analysed using a six-phase reflexive thematic approach as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2022). Reflexive thematic analysis is a flexible and interpretive approach to analysing qualitative data to identify themes in a data set (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The following steps highlight the process of data analysis.

Phase 1

Phase 1 was to familiarize ourselves with the data. This phase began with the transcription of data as we were transcribing it manually, so we were able to read and reread it in order to establish a thorough understanding of the data. At this stage, when we were reviewing the recording of interviews, we took notes of our feelings and thoughts which helped us in later formation of themes. We performed this familiarization activity to understand the primary areas that were covered by different participants.

Phase 2

Phase 2 was to generate codes, which is an important building block for making themes in the following phases. Coding was done to produce interpretive labels for pieces of information that may be of relevance to the overall research aim which was to identify how games can be used for teaching an L2. Brief labels were used as codes that include relevant data within them that could be helpful for answering research questions (Braun et al., 2016). Latent coding was used to uncover deeper meanings from the interviews. This type of coding creates an opportunity to go beyond what participants have said to capture ideas that are not apparent at the surface level (Byrne, 2022).

Phase 3

Phase 3 was to generate themes using the codes generated in Phase 2. At this stage, the focus moves from the interpretation of individual data items to holistic meaningfulness across the dataset. The coded data was reviewed and critically viewed to see how different codes can be combined to make meaningful themes and sub-themes. At this stage, some codes collapsed into each other if they represented similar concepts or information. It was at this stage that some codes were turned into themes or sub-themes because of their representation of the overarching narrative related to the research aim (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Between Phases 3 and 4, the research questions were also framed because at this stage the data was clear in regard to what it represents. Therefore, it was relatively easier to finalize the research question at this stage. Although the research question was not

framed until this stage, the study began with a broad goal of exploring the use of games in classrooms for teaching an L2.

Phase 4

Phase 4 was to review the themes recursively in relation to the coded dataset and the complete dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2020). In other words, to check whether themes contained sufficient data to tell something useful about the research question and if there was sufficient data to support the themes (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The review involved two levels. At level one, the relationship among different data codes that make up a theme was reviewed to see if they form a logical argument to contribute to the overall research questions. At level two, the themes were assessed to identify how they provide an interpretation of the data in relation to the research questions. It is at this stage that some codes were integrated into others and some codes were relabelled.

Phase 5

Phase 5 was to define and give names to themes. Each individual theme is to be expressed in relation to the dataset and the research questions. According to Patton (1990), each theme should tell a distinctive and consistent account of data that cannot be told by other themes. At the same time, all themes should create a coherent narrative reflecting the dataset and is useful in answering the research question. It is at this stage that the final names of the themes were finally revised. Furthermore, the final mind map of themes and sub-themes were made (Figure 1).

Phase 6

Phase 6 was to write up the results based on the above phases. As Braun and Clarke (2012) mention, unlike quantitative research, qualitative research write-up is interwoven into the entire process of the analysis. From the beginning of Phase 1, the notes were taken about data and how it helps in achieving the overall research purpose. However, at this final stage, everything came together to produce coherent answers to the research question. At this stage, the order of the themes was identified in relation to their significance and thickness of the dataset to establish a logical order to answer the research question.

3. Findings

This section presents the findings interpreted from the dataset to address the main research question: how do experienced teachers design and deliver game-based L2 courses? This section will address the research question with the help of themes (see Figure 1) that have been formed through the reflexive thematic analysis process described above. Themes will be described, explained, supported with evidence from the dataset, and concluded to address different aspects of the research question. In order to address the various aspects of game-based courses, one theme at a time will be described in detail to give an overview of how experienced teachers use games to develop their L2 courses.

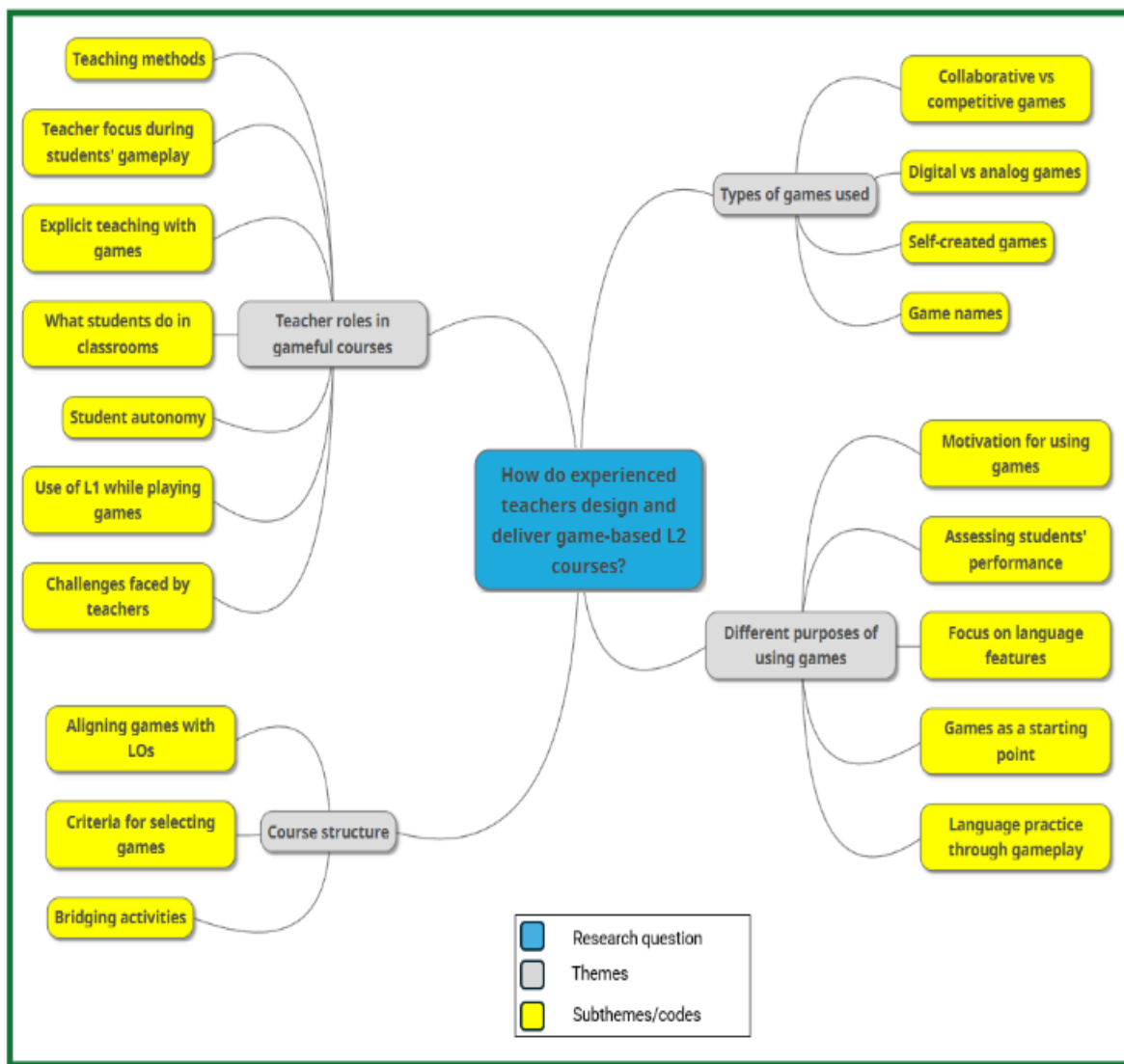


Figure 1 Themes and sub-themes identified from the dataset

3.1 Theme 1: Types of games used

There are various genres and formats of games that participants have reported using in their L2 courses, ranging from simple flashcard games to complex board games to digital games. Notably, one participant engages in crafting custom games, exemplified by the creation of “Lebo-Lebo Game” (Pool, 2018).

In the context of language learning, teachers have reported making crucial decisions, with a primary consideration being the selection between competitive and collaborative games. Participants unanimously acknowledged the use of both types, emphasizing that their choices are informed by student characteristics and preferences. One of the participants mentioned that he uses *Forbidden Island* (Leacock, 2010), a collaborative game, because

Especially in Japan, I think there's more of a culture of working together (P1).

Another participant mentioned that he uses both types of games to familiarize students with the format of games and then later in the course, students have autonomy to choose which games they would like to play. Sometimes students do not like to play certain games, and that can also influence the choice of game. As one of the teachers mentioned,

This year one student mentioned that they were not comfortable playing this competitive game. They felt awkward and anxious playing this game so I changed the game for that particular group (P3).

Instances where students express discomfort or reluctance with certain games prompt flexible adaptations by teachers, highlighting the pivotal role of students' preferences in game selection.

In addition to the competitive-collaborative spectrum, teachers also consider incorporating digital versus analog games. All participants reported integrating both formats, with some expressing a preference for analog games due to their tangible, kinesthetic appeal. The belief that physical games foster deeper connections and cognitive engagement underscores the value attributed to analog options. As mentioned by a participant,

I have students played this game Resistance Avalon, which is a kind of social deduction game, and they can play online, but there's something slightly missing still. So I prefer the analog version of that game if it exists in analog and the students are colocated in the classroom to have them moving the pieces around and looking at what everybody's doing. It brings an extra level of kind of cognitive engagement, I think.... so if the analog version is readily available and easy to use I'd go with that one personally, but I think digital is also pretty good (P3).

Moreover, the efficiency of analog games, as noted by P2, is tied to their "lower barrier to entry" that also facilitates post-play projects. P2 also engages students in redesigning games as a learning activity to fully immerse his students into games. Despite acknowledging challenges in redesigning digital games, he has explored this avenue with computer science students to a limited degree. The overall sentiment is that the choice between digital and analog hinges on the purpose of the game and its alignment with language teaching goals. Nevertheless, digital games are not overlooked and their merit lies in their accessibility and portability, a point emphasized by another participant, especially evident in the case of smartphone games that "they can just take it home with them" (P4).

In summary, all four participants use a range of games from digital and analog to competitive and cooperative games and even self-created games. The decision to make a choice between digital or analog and competitive and cooperative games is informed by the purpose of using a particular type of game and the dynamics of L2 learners being taught. The following is a list of all types of games (digital, analog, competitive, cooperative, single/multi player and self-created) that different participants referenced during their interviews.

Table 1 Names of games referred to during data collection

Among Us	Genshin Impact	Resistance Avalon
Animal Crossing	Kahoot	Scattergories
Baba is You	Lebo-Lebo game (Pool, 2018)	Smash Brothers
Balderdash	Life is Strange	Snakes and Ladders
Blood on the Clock Tower	Metal Gear	Splatoon
Diplomacy	Minecraft	Street Fighter
Don't Get Fired	One Night Ultimate Werewolf	Tears of the Kingdom
Everyday the Same Dream	Persona 5	The Game of Life
Forbidden Island	Recycling Battle (Japanese version)	Welcome To Werewolf

3.2 Theme 2: Different Purposes of Using Games

The dataset highlights various purposes for which participants utilize games in designing their L2 courses. Primarily, the impetus for incorporating games in L2 courses is to infuse a sense of "fun and interest" into lessons, as expressed by P1. The unanimous love for games among participants serves as the foundational motivation, with the overarching objective of infusing enjoyment into the language learning experience.

One of the most crucial points regarding the purpose of using games is the comparison between games and other forms of media, highlighting distinctive features of games. According to P2, "Games

model reality in a different way” compared to other media like movies or comic books. Games offer a unique embodied experience, especially evident in role-playing games, where students actively participate in a game. In contrast, in movies, as noted by P3, students “are not a character in what’s happening in the movie.” Games also hold an advantage over other media by providing a structured environment, requiring students to position themselves according to the game’s dynamics, embrace their roles as players, and adhere to game rules to achieve the objectives. P4 highlights that “commercial games take a lot of the guesswork out of and a lot of the work out of creating that kind of structure yourself” because they are “well-designed” and “tested”. Despite these advantages, the use of games for L2 teaching may pose challenges to authenticity, as games are typically designed for recreational purposes. P4 expresses reluctance in a classroom setting, stating, “If I were in a class and the teacher were using a game, even if I like games, I just don’t want to play games in class and that kind of context.” Additionally, when gameplay is tied to evaluation, P1 notes that

it takes away some of the fun of the game, and it gets them focusing on what do I need to do to get a good score rather than completely focusing on using English [an L2] in the game (P1).

Nevertheless, P1 suggests that “you can’t ever get a completely 100% authentic experience inside the classroom. So, I do think games are about as close as you can get.”

Another purpose reported by participants is the use of games for assessments. For instance, P1 employs *Forbidden Island* for final speaking evaluations, leveraging the immersive English-speaking environment created during the game. Similarly, *Kahoot*, a gamified digital quiz, is used as an assessment tool for group quizzes, encouraging students to complete assigned readings beforehand. Despite the effectiveness, some participants acknowledge the challenges associated with conducting assessments through games, as noted by P3, “It’s a bit harder, I guess, to do an assessment [with games compared to other materials].”

Besides enjoyment and assessment, participants also employ games to focus on language features, fostering students’ awareness and usage of the target language. P3, for instance, encourages students to record their gameplay, transcribe it followed by peer feedback and language improvement exercises. P1 pre-teaches essential vocabulary, ensuring its application during gameplay, and incorporates games like *Scattergories* (Milton Bradley, 1988) and *Balderdash* (Robinson & Toyne, 1984) to enhance students’ range of vocabulary. Furthermore, exposure to YouTube videos featuring English speakers playing the same game aids students in noticing language patterns. P4 notes that he has played *Mario Party* with his students because “there’s really interesting vocabulary and grammar in *Mario Party*.” Similarly, he has played *Two Truths and a Lie* to practice grammatical structures in a repetitive manner. In addition to focusing on language, they also use games for the overall language practice, especially for listening and speaking. While mentioning how he uses games for overall speaking fluency development, P1 notes

I just want them to increase their fluency, their motivation, use of different aspects of the game, like discussing with other people, arguing with other people to decide, you know, what is the best move.

Another noteworthy purpose is using games as a springboard for discussing broader ideas. P4 exemplifies this by integrating games into discussions about abstract concepts like happiness or incorporating business-related themes into lessons. Games such as *Forbidden Island* are utilized to explain complex concepts like ‘Shapley Value’, linking game scenarios to broader topics relevant to students’ majors. P4 notes ‘I teach in the Department of Business Administration and so a lot of my lessons have a business spin on them’. Similarly, P2 uses games to enable students to perform participatory projects such as curiosity research about current wars. He wants students to link school and society, so he uses games that can bring in topics related to life, jobs, society, challenges, etc. For example, he mentioned he uses the game called *Every Day the Same Dream* to “springboard a discussion about what kind of job do you want? How do you balance work and work in life and family.” Therefore, one of the purposes that games can be used is as a starting point that leads to broader concepts or projects that are developed on them.

Finally, games serve a crucial role in establishing a social and physical environment, particularly advantageous in managing large classes. P4 elucidates this by stating

[Games] keeps people engaged because it's like a little design structure that people can understand the flow of it and what's going to happen next and what they should do next, and so kind of provides them with a simplified microcosm of social interaction.

This underscores the utility of games in aiding teachers in classroom management, offering a structured framework that engages everyone in their respective roles. The inherent design of games facilitates a streamlined flow of activities, enhancing overall classroom coordination and participation.

3.3 Theme 3: Course Structure

In terms of course structure, L2 courses designed around games can exhibit a considerable range, varying from 20% to nearly 80% gameplay during lessons. The proportion of gameplay within a course is dependent on the intended purpose(s) of incorporating games. P3 adopts a distinctive approach by structuring a significant portion of his L2 courses entirely around gameplay. He notes, "[in] a 15-week semester, probably a good 10 weeks of that is mostly just gameplay." Additionally, across the span of a year, encompassing two semesters totalling 28 weeks, P3 employs a total of four games for the same cohort of students. Each game is allocated six to seven weeks, allowing students to experience the same structural framework four times. The initial two games are characterized by heavy scaffolding and structure, with substantial input from the teacher. In contrast, the latter two games entail greater student autonomy for gameplay, decision-making, analysis, and other related activities. This intentional progression aims to provide students with a developmental learning experience.

It is noteworthy that, in some instances, the duration of gameplay might be relatively shorter, but more time is dedicated to activities developed around the games. P2, for example, expresses a preference for employing short and simple games. Despite the brevity of gameplay, he extends the overall experience by involving students in related participatory projects, such as the redesign of a game. Furthermore, participants also engage students in pre- and post-play presentations, writing proposals and reports, conducting surveys, redesigning games, discussing/brainstorming ideas, thinking critically and doing research projects. These extension activities are developed around the games that students play in L2 courses. This approach enhances the students' engagement and understanding, allowing them to apply and extend their learning beyond the gaming context.

The alignment of games with learning outcomes (LOs) is another pivotal aspect in the L2 course structure. A prevalent theme across the dataset is the adoption of a backward design to course design by all participants. This approach entails first deciding the ultimate goals of their L2 courses and subsequently selecting games that best facilitate the achievement of these goals. P1 articulates this perspective, stating, "Each class that we have has a set of objectives and basically, I'd look at those objectives and I try to think what fits in there the best." Participants frequently underscored the significance of framing broad learning outcomes, as it facilitates the smooth incorporation of games into the course structure. P2 illustrates this point, stating

So I want my students to participate in society. I want my students to be curious and answer a question that they themselves come up with. That's where I start, that's the backwards design. Those are the end goals and so for me any game will get there.

On the contrary, courses with specific objectives targeting particular subsets of language skills, such as paragraphing or essay writing, often make it difficult to integrate games. P3 elaborates on this saying

So the goal is kind of fixed, and I teach them about the structure of an essay, and then I give them the choice to write an essay on a topic of their choosing, and up until now, none of them have been specifically about games. So yeah. I don't use games in that class.

In essence, L2 courses adopting a holistic approach to developing L2 skills are found to be more conducive to the integration of games, aligning smoothly with the broader learning outcomes of the course.

In addition to the amount of time dedicated to gameplay during lessons and alignment of LOs and games, another interrelated theme in the dataset is the criteria for selecting games for L2 courses.

There is a list of criteria, identified through the dataset, which teachers use to determine the appropriateness of games for their L2 courses as represented in Table 2.

Table 2 *Criteria for selecting games*

Selection Criteria	Description
Player roles	In multi-player games, experienced teachers consider that each player has a role that has similar cognitive, interactive and language demands. For example, in the game <i>Among Us</i> (Innersloth, 2018), the imposter and crewmates' roles are different in terms of interaction and cognition. Therefore, either there should be multiple gameplay iterations or a game with similar roles in demand should be selected.
Game complexity	The ease of explaining and playing simple games surpasses that of complex games, with the complexity gauged through students' familiarity with specific game mechanics, the time needed for gameplay, and whether students are already acquainted with a particular game.
Pedagogical worth	While selecting games for L2 courses, experienced teachers evaluate games for the language that is involved in playing them. The language functions and vocabulary required to play games in L2 courses should be transferable to other situations beyond gameplay.
Themes	Game themes are matched with L2 course themes.
Immersive game experience	While selecting games, experienced teachers consider that games offer immersive experiences leading to individual and collective engagement that paves the way for abundant discussion about gameplay experiences.
Teacher mediation	While selecting games, experienced teachers also consider how they can mediate before, during and after gameplay to extend language learning experiences.
Accessibility	While selecting games, experienced teachers consider accessibility, including factors such as price, hardware requirements, and space. Print-and-play games are often more affordable compared to digital games that require specialized hardware. Similarly, freely available online games are more accessible compared to paid ones.
Student choice	Students are at the centre of learning and therefore their preference is always considered while selecting games. Some participants mentioned that after playing teacher-selected games, students are given autonomy to select games of their own choice.
Activity type	Experienced teachers select games according to the type of activity: individual, pair or group work. Furthermore, classroom games can be multiplayer but if students are expected to play (part of) a game outside the classroom, then they are usually single player games.
Class size	They also consider the number of students in the class. Many games have limitations as per the number of players that can play at a given time, so class size is taken into consideration.
Gameplay time	Games are of various duration and therefore they are selected according to the lesson time. However, some teachers also play

lengthy games like *Diplomacy* (Calhamer, 1959) which they break down into multiple sessions.

Game design	Well-designed games are reported to have a good structure and work well. However, some experienced teachers use less structured, simple games
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Not only games, but bridging activities play a pivotal role in complementing the L2 learning opportunities inherent in gameplay within L2 course structure as identified through the dataset. These are the supplementary activities that are designed around games to make a direct connection between an L2 and games. Games do not exist in isolation and these bridging activities are purposefully designed to support L2 teaching through games. Participants have reported a diverse array of bridging activities crafted around games, ranging from traditional worksheets to more extensive endeavours like research projects and reading blogs dedicated to gaming. P4, for instance, underscores the multifaceted engagement beyond gameplay, stating,

they're probably going to be involved with other things outside of the game like reading articles about the game, watching maybe YouTube videos or [Nintendo] Switch streams.

Similarly, P3 integrates YouTube videos into the learning process. He mentioned that "We are watching YouTube videos of English [L2] speakers playing the game so that they can compare their language use with English speakers' language use." Moreover, P2 elaborates on the depth of student involvement, describing how students not only engage in gameplay but also allocate significant time to subsequent activities such as extensive in-depth discussions and undertaking extensive research projects, with some groups even venturing to create their own versions of the game. Nonetheless, the implementation of these bridging activities is affected by the availability of preparation time for teachers and learning time for students. Acknowledging this constraint, P3 expresses a desire to incorporate more discourse analysis into his extension activities, stating, "[presently]I just think it would overload my students in that class." This highlights the delicate balance that course designers must strike between the ambition to enrich L2 learning through bridging activities and the practical considerations of time constraints, ensuring that the additional components do not overwhelm students within an L2 course.

3.4 Theme 4: Teacher Roles in Game-based Courses

In game-based L2 courses, an integral theme revolves around the roles assumed by teachers and the activities they facilitated for students. The dataset reveals a unanimous preference for communicative approaches, emphasizing abundant communication during lessons. P4 and P3 also mention specific teaching methodologies employed in their approach to incorporating games. P4 adheres to the Pedagogy of Multiliteracies, which emphasizes the inclusion of multimodality and multicultural meaning of texts (Cope and Kalantzis, 2015), while P3 follows a Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) format centred around games. This flexibility underscores the compatibility of games with diverse language teaching methodologies, allowing instructors to integrate them into their preferred language teaching frameworks.

During gameplay, participants adopt various roles to mediate student experiences. Their interventions range from fostering active participation, ensuring the use of appropriate English, supporting struggling students, and providing encouragement. At times, instructors take a more observational stance, allowing students to enjoy games independently. In addition, participants actively promote student discussions on ideas emerging from gameplay, record online sessions for mutual feedback, devise quizzes related to games, engage students in transcribing gameplay sessions and language analysis work.

Beyond the gameplay, participants explicitly teach language features and vocabulary both before and after gaming sessions. They also explain game rules using playbooks and visual aids and involve students in practice playing sessions. Some instructors also utilize students' first language (L1) to elucidate game intricacies, ensuring a clear understanding before playing. Additionally, teachers grant autonomy to students, allowing them "to choose something that they want to play so that they're

invested in it" (P3). This multifaceted approach to teacher roles underscores the dynamic and interactive nature of teacher presence in game-based L2 courses, ensuring a comprehensive integration of L2 learning practice within game-based courses.

Teachers in game-based L2 courses often play the role of mitigators, addressing a range of challenges that arise from negotiating stakeholder expectations, actualizing identified learning outcomes, balancing time, use, and level appropriateness, and procuring resources. One major hurdle identified through the dataset is the difficulty in persuading various stakeholders of the effectiveness of utilizing games for L2 learning. P3 shared an example wherein his university mandated the use of a textbook alongside games and set a condition that if games are to be used, they have to be supported by a textbook where students' learning could be recorded. To meet university's expectation, P3 ended up making an L2 practice booklet based around gameplay. Similarly, P2 discussed his role in addressing the resistance from students who perceived game-based learning as less serious than traditional methods. In response, P2 addressed this by presenting the end goals of the course, the sequential nature of lessons leading to those goals, and examples of previous students who had successfully developed L2 skills through his game-based L2 courses. Furthermore, teachers had to cater to a group of students responding negatively to a particular game, either due to a dislike for that specific type of game or a reluctance to learn through gaming. To address this, P3 allows students alternative projects, such as listening to music and conducting related research, followed by presenting their findings. P4 shared a similar experience where two students in his class refused to participate in a game, prompting him to employ a traditional incentive approach by reminding students that their grades depended on engagement in gameplay and related activities in the L2.

Another essential challenging role that has been identified in the context of game-based L2 courses is the attainment of specific LOs through gameplay. P1 expresses the view that, "with games, it is often a little bit... it's less focused learning." As highlighted earlier, the LOs in game-based L2 courses are generally broad, posing a difficulty in aligning the gameplay experience with precise language outcomes. Participants often address this challenge by designing bridging activities around games. However, P4 pointed out that these activities can become dull for students, leading to disengagement, as he notes, "that's when they like fall asleep in class."

Participants also reported to have navigated the challenge of L1 overuse in game-based L2 courses, especially in homogenous classes. Because of the student-centred nature of gameplay, there is always a risk that students may become so engrossed in the game that they lose sight of the primary purpose—to learn an L2. P1 notes the potential snowball effect where students start using their L1, and this tendency can spread throughout the class. However, he emphasized the importance of reminding students about the L2 learning objective and their evaluation based on it to encourage the use of L2 during gameplay.

Similar to other forms of media, a significant challenge that teachers need to navigate is the allocation of preparation time for teachers and learning time for students. Some participants believed that substantial time is necessary for game preparation, while others mentioned the need for more time for gameplay sessions. P1 underscored the centrality of time, stating that "the most important factor is time", whereas P2 mentioned that gameplay demands a "considerable amount of time during lessons", noting that preparation is not a significant concern for him as he "enjoys the process."

A closely related challenge pertains to actively addressing the diverse proficiency levels of learners. In line with typical L2 courses, participants need to accommodate a range of proficiency levels in game-based L2 courses. They note that certain students may require additional support, necessitating mindfulness before, during, and after gameplay. P3 mentioned difficulties in scaffolding for all students, especially when they have autonomy in selecting different games. To address varying proficiency levels, P2 formulates open-ended questions for post-game activities, allowing students to respond based on their individual proficiency. Furthermore, P1 explains the game content at a level accessible even to the lowest proficiency learners. Participants also employ the students' L1 to explain game nuances for better understanding of every learner.

Finally, they also faced challenges related to cost issues associated with procuring multiple copies of games for students and concerns about access to hardware, particularly for digital games. However, some of them mentioned that they use their research budget for purchasing games for their courses, while others make decisions of selecting appropriate games based on the available resources.

4. Discussion

This section makes an attempt to give an overview on how to design game-based L2 courses in the light of findings from this study and connect them with broader issues around games, L2 teaching and learning, and course design. The primary purpose of this research project was to find out how experienced L2 teachers design and implement their courses around games. It is important to note that games are of different types, and all the games that the experienced teachers used have a utility in teaching second languages. They can be classified in various ways based on the features available in them (Elverdam & Aarseth, 2007). However, for practical purposes of this research project, they are classified mostly by three ways – digital/analog, competitive/collaborative and single player/multi-player games. In this study, teachers have reported using all these kinds of games to facilitate L2 learning in their courses. Having explored how experienced teachers design game-based L2 courses, we can now discuss how these findings can be incorporated into an existing course design framework, along with recommendations from other research.

Macalister and Nation (2020) provides an L2 course design model (Figure 2) that can be utilized to design a game-based L2 course. It consists of three outside circles (principles, environment and needs) and a subdivided inner circle consisting of goals, format and presentation, monitoring and assessing, and content and sequencing. The three outer circles are based on practical and theoretical considerations, such as available resources, learners' L2 needs and inclusion of learning principles, that will guide the actual process of an L2 course design. The inner circle has goals in the centre, emphasizing the central role that L2 course goals play in a course design process. The content and sequence represents the language features and skills such as vocabulary and group discussion to be learned in an L2 course, and the sequence in which learners will encounter them. Format and presentation represents teaching methods and activities that will be used. In a game-based L2 course, this would mean different types of games and bridging activities designed around games. Monitoring and assessing represents teacher roles for observing learning and giving feedback on students' progress. Lastly, the large circle drawn around the whole model emphasizes the importance of continuous evaluation of the course based on learners' interaction with it so that it can continuously be improved.

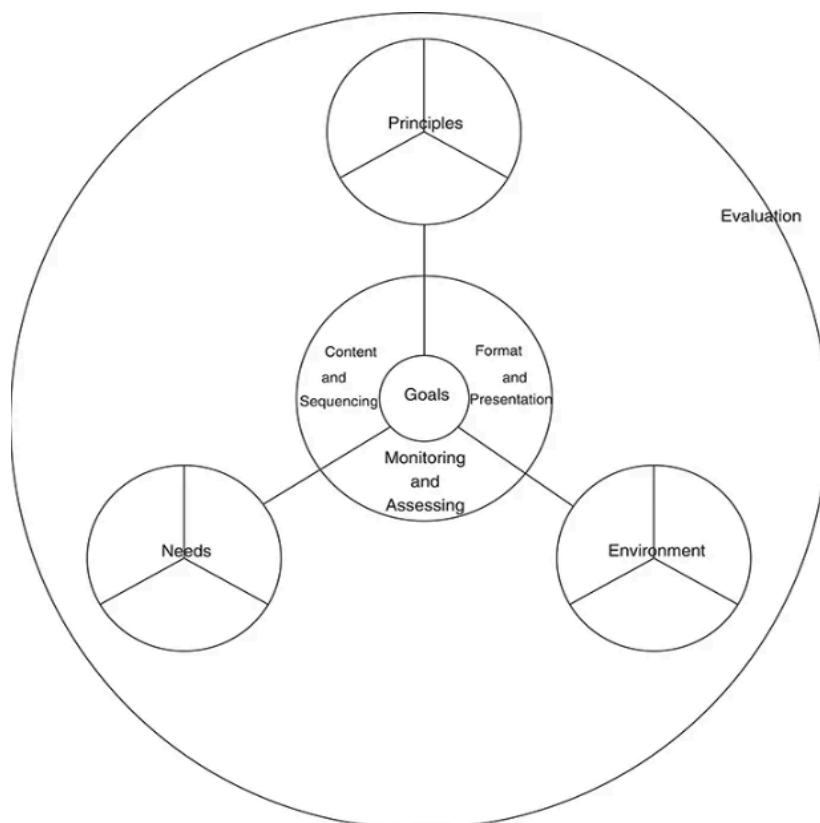


Figure 2 A course design model by Macalister and Nation (2020, p. 1)

4.1 Environment Analysis

Environment analysis is an important yet neglected stage of an L2 course design (Tessmer, 1990). Macalister and Nation (2020) suggest considering three factors in analysing the learning environment: the learners, the teacher and the teaching situation. Richards (2017) also adds means of delivery, which could also have an impact on the types of games being selected for a game-based L2 course (Dubreil, 2020). First, the data revealed that the characteristics, preferences and strengths of learners in the classroom can have a significant impact on a teacher's selection of games. A helpful way to learn about students is to explore what type of games are popular in their culture and what topics they are generally interested in. It could also be helpful to find out whether they have prior experience of playing games in L2 lessons. Whether courses are mandatory or elective could also make a difference on students' motivation and expectation levels (York, deHaan & Hourdequin, 2019). As revealed by the data, some students may resist associating games with learning. Therefore, from the very beginning, it is important to make decisions about whether a game-based L2 course would take a top-down (product approach) or a bottom-up (process approach) approach (Richards, 2017). If the course follows the former approach, then the designed course would be fixed, and if some students do not like to learn through the types of games the teacher has chosen, then the teacher will have to nudge them to participate through minor accommodations. However, if the latter approach is taken, which views L2 courses to be emergent, the teacher can change games and even replace them with other activities for some students based on their learning preferences as revealed by the findings of this research project.

The next important factor in the environment analysis is the teacher. Here, the assumption is that the course designers are the ones who will deliver them. Therefore, they can think about the time available to them for preparation. The data revealed that oftentimes it takes teachers a lot of time to prepare bridging activities and explanations for how to play the games. It is also worth considering whether the teacher should give students autonomy in game choice. Doing so may avoid the problem of learners playing games they do not like, but it may also require the teacher to do more preparation, designing more bridging activities, and providing different types of mediation across different groups.

The third important factor in environmental analysis is the teaching situation. The structure of the classroom can play an important role in limiting the use of games. If the desks are not movable, it could be difficult to play group games. Evaluation of available resources could also impact the course design. For analog games to be played in an in-person situation with large classes, there needs to be multiple copies available of a single game. Similarly, for mobile games, students need to have access to mobile phones and in some cases the internet. Also, if a course is to be delivered partially or fully online, this will impact the extent and type of games that can be included in a course. As revealed by the data, the institution may also limit the use of games. Therefore, at this stage, the institution's support needs to be taken into consideration.

4.2 Needs Analysis

The second step in the process of course design is needs analysis. Macalister and Nation (2020) suggest that this stage seeks to ascertain what learners already know and what they need to know to determine the course goals and content. Needs analysis can be conducted through different ways such as interviewing students, giving them tests or questionnaires, and referencing standardized L2 curriculums such as the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference) (North et al., 2018). The data does not reveal anything specific about how different teachers conduct learners' needs assessment except for one participant who mentioned that he administers a long questionnaire before the start of the course to learn about different aspects of his learners. Moreover, in a university context, sometimes teachers design their own L2 courses based on the broad aims of L2 courses provided by universities. Therefore, for designing a game-based L2 course, especially in universities, learners' general needs such as communication and academic skills should be taken into consideration. Furthermore, teachers often do not even have access to students before the beginning of the course. Therefore, it is important to note that the needs analysis can also be conducted during the course (North et al., 2018), and it aligns perfectly well with the process approach to course designing (Richards, 2017). As the course progresses and the teacher has more information about students' language needs and expectations, their likes and dislikes and their current language proficiency, the teacher can modify their courses to meet students' level, needs and expectations.

4.3 Learning Principles

The next step, as proposed by Macalister and Nation (2020), is to decide on the principles that can encourage learning in an L2 course. They describe 20 research-based principles, divided into three areas: content and sequencing, format and presentation, and monitoring and assessment, corresponding to the three parts of the course syllabus surrounding Goals in Figure 2. Many of these principles can easily be achieved by the inclusion of games in an L2 course. However, the mere inclusion of games will not automatically ensure that these principles are at play. Table 3 attempts to lay out examples of how game-based L2 courses might be designed in alignment with these principles.

Table 3 Learning principles and ways to include them in game-based L2 courses

	Learning Principles	Examples of inclusion in game-based L2 courses
	Content and Sequencing	
1	Inclusion of language as per frequency of use	Games generally cover a range of frequently used vocabulary (Rodgers & Heidt, 2021). However, games also have low frequency words which could be useful for learners in intermediate and advanced courses (Heidt et al., 2023; Reinhardt, 2019). Using YouTube videos of how-to-play games and bridging activities focused on vocabulary based on word frequencies can be useful techniques.
2	Training in language learning strategies	Learners can monitor their learning through gameplay recordings and reflect on their gameplay sessions (York 2020a), set their own learning goals, and be involved in the selection of games.

	Learning Principles	Examples of inclusion in game-based L2 courses
3	Spaced repeated retrieval	Task repetition is always useful in second language teaching contexts (Bygate, 2018), and spacing similar tasks, language, or concepts enhances retention (Rohrer, 2015). This principle can be implemented in various ways. For example, allowing students to repeatedly engage with a game and improve their performance each time (York, 2020a).
4	Inclusion of generalizable language features	This means that the focus of language before, during and/or after play should be on generalizable language features which students can use in other gameplay sessions in the course. One way to include this is by asking yourself, 'Will the language features focused on in this lesson be useful for following lessons?'
5	Keep moving forward	The primary aim of game-based L2 courses is not the games themselves, but the language, skills, and strategies that students acquire through gameplay. Therefore, the progression through the games used in the course should be aligned with the coverage of essential language features such as vocabulary, language structures, learning strategies, and discourse types that make up the course goals.
6	Consideration of learner readiness when selecting language items	Learners acquire an L2 at varying rates. In a university setting, L2 course participants often exhibit diverse proficiency levels, as noted by the study participants. Acknowledging and accommodating these differences is crucial for supporting each learner's L2 journey. Teacher mediation during lessons provides essential scaffolding in a game-based L2 course. Additionally, teachers can assign differentiated post-play tasks according to the proficiency levels of student groups.
7	Consideration of previous knowledge	As mentioned briefly in section 4.1, students' previous gaming and language learning experiences can be ascertained through a pre-course survey or discussion with them in the first lesson of the course.
8	Naturally occurring language items are taught together	Words and language features associated with a specific game topic and/or interaction should be taught together so that students have a repertoire of language features at their disposal for playing a game or doing bridging activities. For example, before playing a social deduction game such as <i>Spyfall</i> , students should be taught question and (deceitful) answer patterns together so that they can play the game confidently.
	Format and Presentation	
9	Learners should be motivated	Games are inherently a good source of external motivation (Reinhardt, 2019) and this should be maintained in game-based L2 courses. Because the aim of these courses is to teach an L2, teachers should ensure learners' motivation especially during bridging activities. One way to do this is through making explicit connections between gameplay sessions and other activities in the course.
10	Balancing four strands: meaning-focused input,	A game-based L2 course should include a balance between these four strands. However, depending on course goals, this balance can be modified. An example of each strand is as follows ¹ .

¹ Thanks to the reviewer Paul Johnson for these examples.

Learning Principles	Examples of inclusion in game-based L2 courses
language-focused learning, meaning-focused output, and fluency activities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Meaning-focused input – A digital role playing game (RPG) of an appropriate level. - Language-focused learning –A pre-task character creation for tabletop RPG describing a character's role. - Meaning-focused output – A grammar puzzle hinting to open a locked door. - Fluency activities – Introducing one's own character for a tabletop RPG session.
11 Inclusion of substantial comprehensible input	This can be achieved through RPG video games (Compton, in press) or through bridging activities such as viewing how-to videos, reading game reviews and instructional manuals, and having students join guilds. In essence, the more learners receive comprehensible L2 input, the greater their chances of L2 acquisition (Krashen, 2017).
12 Inclusion of fluency activities	Fluency activities can be included during pre-, while and post-gameplay sessions. These activities should be both receptive and productive. The former can be included using RPG video games for extensive reading (Compton, in press), and the latter can be included by letting students talk about the game in the post-gameplay discussion (deHaan, 2020b).
13 Inclusion of productive activities across various genres	It is important that students are practicing language production across various genres to gain confidence in using an L2 for different communicative purposes. The selection of games could be of different genres and post-play activities can focus on varied genres such as report writing and oral presentations, as per the course aims.
14 Inclusion of language-focused activities for sound system, vocabulary, grammar and discourse	Bridging activities can be designed in a way that learners' attention can be focused on learning pronunciation, lexical variations and different discourse features. For example, a pre-play activity where students watch a how-to video can direct students' attention towards different ways of giving suggestions.
15 Significant time should be spent focusing on the second language	Logically, the learning of an L2 depends on the time spent doing learning activities in an L2. Especially with monolingual learners, they may switch back to L1 during game-play sessions, so it is important to remind them that the aim of playing games is to practice an L2.
16 Deep processing should be encouraged	This can be encouraged through bridging activities such as designing a print advertisement for their own game followed by presenting it in a mock game release event (deHaan, 2022). Through such production activities, students will be processing the language deeply and thereby likely to retain it longer (Nation, 2020).
17 Presentation should promote favorable language learning attitudes	Recent research has given more attention to positive psychology in SLA (MacIntyre, 2016; 2021; MacIntyre & Mercer, 2014; Mercer & Gregersen, 2023). Such research suggests that teachers should ensure learners' enjoyment, provide necessary teacher support and also have alternatives available for students who do not want to play games.
18 Learning preferences should be taken into account	Adult learners like to approach learning according to their preferences. Therefore, learners should be given choices in game selection – single-player/multiplayer, cooperative/competitive, etc. However, it is also important that learners have the opportunity and

Learning Principles		Examples of inclusion in game-based L2 courses
Monitoring and Assessment		training to explore other ways of learning that are different from their own learning preference (Nation, 2020).
19	Ongoing needs and environment analysis	This refers back to the process approach to developing an L2 course (Richards, 2017). This principle can be achieved by keeping the course flexible as a work in progress based on learners' interaction with and feedback on course materials and lessons.
20	Learners should receive useful feedback	Feedback is an essential component of L2 acquisition (Nassaji, 2020). Learners should be provided feedback during gameplay sessions and bridging activities. Although teacher feedback is crucial, peer-feedback should also be encouraged (Yu & Lee, 2016).

As mentioned above, many of these principles are achieved by using games for language learning (Peterson & Jabbari, 2022; Peterson et al., 2021; Reinhardt, 2019; York, deHaan & Hourdequin, 2019). For instance, games are good at helping learners to practice frequently used language in a repetitive format (Macedonia, 2005). Similarly, games have been found to motivate learners in language classrooms. Moreover, games are good at providing comprehensible input, fluency practice, depth of processing and eliciting pushed output (York, 2020a) which are all included in the list of pedagogical principles to be used for course designing. Nevertheless, these principles do not include emotional constructs, except for motivation and attitude, which are deemed helpful in second language acquisition (Dörnyei, 2009; Oxford, 2016). As shown by the findings of this research project and also other research on games and language learning, games are also good at eliciting psychological processes such as enjoyment and positive attitude towards language learning (Barcomb & Cardoso, 2020; Raza & Matthews, in press; Siek-Piskozub, 2016; York, deHaan & Hourdequin, 2019). This further strengthens the argument of using games for teaching L2s. This ability of games to arouse positive psychological processes might help in catering for the needs of reluctant learners, who have been reported to shy away from learning through games. Although this requires further research and evidence, such learners may become motivated in the long term if they are pushed to play games within game-based L2 courses due to games' ability to elicit positive psychological constructs such as enjoyment, motivation and positive learning attitudes. Alternatively, differentiation in terms of tasks can be done to accommodate such learners, as identified from the data in this study.

4.4 Formulating Course Goals

The next step is the formulation of course goals based on the above three steps: environment analysis, needs analysis and the selection of learning principles. Putting goals at the center of the process helps in making clear what students will achieve from a course (North et al., 2018). As found in the data, game-based L2 courses usually have broad learning goals, and as a result, different games can fit into them. As suggested by Macalister and Nation (2020, p. 7), "Goals can be expressed in general terms and be given more detail when considering the content of the course." Findings from this study show that learning through gameplay is usually good for courses aimed at developing communication skills. However, pre and post gameplay activities can also help in developing reading and writing skills (deHaan, 2020a). Furthermore, lexis, syntax, semantics, phonology and discourse can also be developed through game-based L2 courses (Cardoso, et al., 2021; Grimshaw & Cardoso, 2018). Therefore, course goals need to be written as per the context and students' language learning requirements.

4.5 Content and Sequencing

The findings show that experienced L2 teachers use a backward design for game-based L2 course designing (see Section 3.3 above). In a backward design approach, content and sequencing is followed by the formulation of language learning goals (Richards, 2013). After formulation of course goals, the types of games which can help in achieving those goals need to be selected. At this stage, bridging activities need to be prepared as well. These bridging activities, along with the games, can help in identifying how different aspects of course goals can be achieved. Findings from this study suggest that instructors design different types of bridging activities ranging from preplay discussions to postplay language analysis work. Finally, all the course content needs to be sequenced coherently. For developing course coherence, Macalister and Nation (2020, p. 87), suggest organizing lessons into important language features (vocabulary and grammar), to discourse (different genres), or to tasks (giving presentations, etc.). The course goals can have a huge impact on the type of progression that is chosen. For example, if the goal is to enhance students' academic vocabulary for discussions in academic settings, then the lesson progression can be based on an academic word list (Coxhead, 2000), where each lesson helps students to progressively learn and practice a set of vocabulary through gameplay and/or bridging activities. Similarly a communication course can be sequenced around different tasks, such as giving presentations about games and asking for feedback, where students can progressively engage in performing various tasks. One important point that emerged from the study is the use of simple, less complex, teacher-centered games in the beginning before using complex and independent games so that learners are aware of what is expected of them during gameplay sessions.

4.6 Format and Presentation

The next step in Macalister and Nation's (2020) list is oriented more towards the delivery of a language course. At this stage of the game-based L2 course design process, teaching pedagogy needs to be decided. The findings suggest that game-based L2 courses can be delivered through different methodologies, and this has also been illustrated by Spano et al., (2021). Format and presentation bring together all the background work on course design, making it visible through classroom activities and interactions between teachers and learners, as well as among learners. Macalister and Nation (2020) suggest that learners should be aware about the goals of each activity and what successful learning looks like in that activity. Findings from this study (Section 3.4) show that experienced teachers show the overall sequence of the course to students to give them a broad overview of how the course looks like, what they are expected to do in each lesson, and how each lesson will contribute to their overall L2 learning. Furthermore, as mentioned in principle 10 (Table 3), a course should balance different strands (meaning-focused input, language-focused learning, meaning-focused output, and fluency activities). However, findings from this study suggest that two out of four teachers put more emphasis on language-focused learning in writing-heavy courses than in communication courses, so depending on the course goals some strands can be given more weightage than others.

4.7 Monitoring and Assessment

This is an important aspect of a language course design because it helps a teacher to track students' learning and provide useful feedback. Findings from the data suggest that students' language can be assessed through gameplay and/or through bridging activities (See Section 3.2 above). However, assessments can be of different types and are broadly divided into three categories: assessment of learning, assessment for learning and assessment as learning (Chong & Reinders, 2023). At this stage, a teacher needs to decide what kinds of assessments they need to use in their game-based L2 course. For example, a teacher can ask students to play a game (e.g. *Forbidden Island*) for their final course evaluation (assessment of learning), assess their language while observing the gameplay as they move around the class taking notes on students' language (assessment for learning) and/or give them a quiz after playing a game (assessment as learning). Another example from the dataset is where a participant asks students to show their fingers from 1 to 5 where 1 means that they are lost and 5 means that they are enjoying the course (assessment for learning). This quick and easy assessment helps the teacher to capture an overall understanding of students' understanding. Typically, there is a combination of assessments used in L2 courses to monitor students' progress and give them useful feedback that they can use to improve their L2 skills.

4.8 Course Evaluation

The last step of the course design process is to evaluate if the course is successful and find areas for improvement. The course designer should decide what they need to evaluate and then ask questions accordingly. The questions can relate to different aspects of a course such as the amount and/or quality of teaching and learning, and also about the overall quality of the course to evaluate the usefulness of the course in relation to learners' needs and wants to be gauged through needs analysis (see sample questions that a course evaluation can help to answer on pg. 156 in Macalister & Nation, 2020). A usual course evaluation process in the university context, as derived from the findings, is to seek students' feedback through online questionnaires at the end of a course. For example, three of the four participants mentioned that they give an online survey at the end of the course. Another participant shared that he regularly elicits feedback from learners about the choice of games and bridging activities to ensure that learners are finding the activities useful. Another useful strategy for an ongoing course evaluation is the use of 'exit tickets' to ensure that the course is adjusted timely, rather than waiting until a course is finished (Sedaghat, 2025). In essence, it is important to evaluate and improve the course every time it is delivered to a new cohort of students because this can affect the language learning process (Norris, 2016; Raza, 2023).

5. Conclusion

In summary, this article reports how game-based L2 courses can be designed and delivered in a university setting. The data for this report was collected qualitatively through one-to-one interviews from four teachers at different universities in Japan who use games in their lessons to deliver L2 courses. The results are drawn from the data, which was analysed using a six-phase reflexive thematic analysis and compared with broader research on using games and L2 course design. The findings were then discussed using an eight-step framework of language course design by Macalister and Nation (2020) to give an overview of how a game-based L2 course can be designed and delivered successfully to L2 learners.

Games have been found useful to support language teaching in many ways: improvement in language skills, fluency development, providing comprehensible input, eliciting pushed output and negotiation of meaning, eliciting cognitive processes such as identification of a gap in knowledge and positive psychological processes such as enjoyment and learner engagement. Different participants from this study reported how they use games in their L2 courses to capitalize on these benefits. They reported the details of how they select games, design bridging activities around games and evaluate language learning in their game-based L2 courses. It was interesting to note from the data how L2 instructors use a backward design approach to formulating their courses and selecting games to be included in their courses. Another interesting point that the findings reveal is how games involve learners as active participants more than other media such as texts and visuals. On the contrary, the findings also highlight how some learners showed reluctance to playing games in a classroom setting and how different instructors deal with such situations either by allowing them to work on other projects or by motivating them through incentives. Although the study did not specifically explore how to cater for such reluctance, future research can explore the value of games in eliciting positive learning behaviours that might in turn help such learners change their attitudes toward games in the long run.

Designing game-based L2 courses is a context-specific process. The study shows how different L2 instructors design and use games differently to support their students' language learning. The instructors also developed their courses based on their teaching philosophies and their experience of what works in the classroom. Some used games within a specific teaching framework such as TBLT or Pedagogy of Multiliteracies, while others used games in a general communicative approach considering the limitations in their contexts.

To end this article, we think games have stood the test of the time and are becoming more and more mainstream in L2 education. However, just by introducing games in an L2 course does not mean language learning would happen. L2 course instructors will have to consider the principles of L2 learning/acquisition and align their use of games with them in order to bring about improvement in learners' L2 skills.

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Appendix 1: Interview Questions

Introduction and Icebreaker:

1. Begin the interview by introducing yourself and expressing gratitude for the interviewee's time.
2. A casual icebreaker question to create a comfortable atmosphere.

Professional Background:

3. Which students do you currently teach? And what type of courses do you teach?
4. Generally, what levels are your students on a CEFR scale?

Experiences with Game-Based Instruction:

5. Can you share some of your experiences in using games to teach English to your students?

Motivation for Using Games:

6. What inspired or motivated you to incorporate games into your foreign language teaching methodology?

Personal Connection to Games:

7. Did you play a lot of games during your childhood?
8. How has your personal history with games influenced your teaching approach?

Current Engagement with Games:

9. Do you still play games as a hobby?
10. How does your current engagement with games inform your teaching practices?

Game Selection and Integration:

11. Can you discuss the types of games you typically use for language teaching?
12. What criteria do you consider when selecting these games?

Physical vs. Digital Games:

13. In your experience, do you find physical or digital games more effective for foreign language learning? Why?

Competitive vs. Collaborative Games:

14. Do you prefer using competitive or collaborative games for language teaching?
15. What factors influence your choice?

Single Player vs. Multiplayer Games:

16. From your perspective, are single-player or multiplayer games more suitable for second language learning?

Targeted Language Skills:

17. Which language skills or systems (syntax, vocabulary, etc.) do you usually target using games?

Alignment with Learning Outcomes:

18. How do you align the use of games with the learning outcomes of your courses?
19. Are there specific strategies you use to do so?

Percentage of Course Constituted by Games:

20. What percentage of your course content is constituted by game-based learning activities?

Student Preferences and Cultural Considerations:

21. What types of games do your students usually enjoy in the classroom?

Cultural Influences:

22. How does the cultural background of your students affect your choice of using games for them?

Challenges and Benefits:

23. What challenges, if any, do you face in using games with your students?
24. How do you address these challenges?

Impact of Games on Learning:

25. In your experience, how have you observed games impacting the learning outcomes of your students?

Educational Benefits:

26. In your opinion, what are the key educational benefits of incorporating games into foreign language teaching?

Closing

27. Is there anything else you would like to add or share regarding your experiences with game-based language teaching?
28. Thank the interviewee for their valuable insights and time.