

Research Paper

## Exploring Post-Secondary Students' Perspectives: Ludic Pedagogy in the Classroom and Enhancing Engagement

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### ABSTRACT

There has been a plethora of changes in the field of education in the last few years, owing to the pandemic, the constant technological advances and the ever-changing world scenario. It has become extremely important that teachers come up with methods to keep students actively engaged in the classroom. Teachers have to put in great efforts to move towards newer modes of teaching and break away from the traditional teaching methods. Ludic pedagogy refers to the use of fun, play and humor to teach in the classroom. It forms the basis for teaching little kids (through rhymes, songs, toys, etc.), but it also has recently gained attention in the post-secondary education domain. The present paper aims to explore the perspective of post-secondary students towards the use of ludic pedagogy in the classroom. The paper discusses whether or not the three elements of Ludic pedagogy- play, playfulness and positivity are used in the post-secondary classroom, and how the college students respond to them. The results show that the use of the Play element is almost negligible in the Indian post-secondary classrooms, but Playfulness and Positivity are used by the teachers, and students have a positive attitude towards them.

**Keywords:** Education, Pedagogy, Ludic, Teaching-learning

Play serves as a fun learning avenue for children, but it doesn't receive much attention in college and university classrooms. The teaching-learning process needs to be more engaging if teachers want to catch and sustain the adult student's attention in the classroom. Attention spans in college students and adults tend to align more closely with those of adults in general, ranging from about 10 to 20 minutes on average. However, this can change depending on factors such as the complexity of the material, the level of interest, and the learning environment. In today's world, students have access to online material and their attention span has also been reduced. Staying in a classroom for an hour, paying attention to the teacher, and retaining whatever is being taught is somewhat of a challenge for the students. The easy availability of online courses and online study material makes the students even less interested in the offline classroom. This is exactly why teachers need to be more creative and proactive when it comes to their content delivery in the classroom so that the students listen to and retain. Many pedagogies have been tried by teachers in the classroom to help their case. One such pedagogy that could help teachers is the Ludic

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pedagogy (Lauricella and Edmunds 2023). The word “ludic” is derived from the Latin word “ludere” which means play. The term became popular in the 1960s in the US and Europe where it meant happy, playful behaviour as a part and parcel of modern culture (Frissen et al. 2015). In 2021, Leather, Harper, and Obee posited that ludic- a pedagogy of play, can help university teaching and make students more creative.

Teachers must create a safe space in the classroom where the students feel appreciated and listened to. If the student feels comfortable, she would be in the headspace to attend to whatever is being taught and would participate in the classroom. Heidari-Shahreza (2024) define "playful learning" as both a philosophy and a versatile set of teaching methods in adult education. Critiquing the serious tone often prevalent in adult learning, it advocates for playful learning as a means to rediscover the joy and essence of learning. Emphasizing the importance of incorporating play into educational practices, the paper explores various approaches such as game-based learning and gamification. It also addresses concerns surrounding implementation, including the development of playful learning materials and classroom management. The ludic approach advocates for embracing playful methods in adult education, acknowledging their capacity to humanize and enhance the learning journey.

Yahanpath (2017) posits that for teachers to be successful educators they will have to be mentors to the students, use activities in the classroom to increase the involvement of students, challenge students with ideas, quizzes, examples, and solutions beyond online material, inspire with knowledge, empathy and understanding, nurture happiness within the teacher-student relationship, and encourage students to express their views freely. He says that the happiness of students is one of the factors that determine their academic performance in colleges and universities. Teachers need to become positive student mentors, providing understanding, empathy, and encouragement. The focus today should be on “rehumanizing” the learning process.

When we talk about little children, they are usually taught using the play way method. However, as they grow up, the focus on playfulness and fun decreases in the school. It was Lauricella and Edmunds (2022) who outlined a new model for post-secondary education called the Ludic Pedagogy. They believe that this pedagogy is based on having fun in the classroom, and consists of three elements- Play (action), Playfulness (attitude), and Positivity (affect). The researchers try to use fun and joy as the basis for learning. The faculty according to the researchers doesn't have to become an entertainer but needs to facilitate learning by ensuring that the whole teaching-learning process is fun. Lauricella and Edmunds (2022) say that Ludic pedagogy promotes enjoyment and experimentation in undergraduate students. Lauricella discusses how teachers need to understand that they have a major role in affecting the happiness levels of their students. Re-humanization is basically about re-using some of the traditional aspects of teaching, such as more face-to-face interaction with lecturers. Teachers need to bring about the re-humanizing process and they can have various roles in adding onto student happiness.

A case study by Kolb and Kolb (2010) proposes an experiential learning framework, highlighting how play fosters deep learning in a ludic learning space. Drawing from multidisciplinary play theories and a case study on a softball league, it unveils the principles underlying deep learning through play. The case study demonstrates that play promotes authentic learning, values both process and outcome and engages learners in a recursive

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experiential cycle. These principles are foundational to creating a conducive environment for deep learning. The study suggests that organizations can replicate this higher-order learning by fostering a culture that balances productivity with creativity, emphasizing intrinsic motivation and self-organization to promote deep learning within formal settings.

Recreational activities play an important role in children's overall development, encompassing physical, cognitive, motor, and social aspects. Souza (2022) conducted a study to explore the historical perspectives on play and underscored its profound impact on childhood development. Tailored activities for young children highlight the universality of play-based learning. Games and play are powerful pedagogical tools, fostering critical thinking and societal awareness. By integrating ludic activities into daily curricula, one can foster holistic growth, guided by teachers who mediate and enrich the play experience, nurturing creativity and resilience in children.

Serious Games, is a field of study, that traces its roots to a term given by Clark C. Abt back in 1970. It was later used a lot by Ben Sawyer in 2002. Wilkinson (2016) reveals that these evolved from the purposeful use of non-digital games. According to him, Serious Games are increasingly interdisciplinary, and are shaping education, healthcare, and bringing about social change. Despite its advancements, the field grapples with defining its boundaries and navigating its origins. Yet, the optimism surrounding Serious Games persists, echoing sentiments from historical discussions on the potential of games as a medium of the future.

Botte et al (2015) examined the interplay between ludic and narrative elements in game-based classroom training and their impact on satisfaction and learning outcomes. Through workshops utilizing the Lego Serious Play method enriched with narrative structures, the study investigates their roles empirically, contributing to the Ludology-Narratology debate. Findings indicate satisfaction as the primary predictor of learning, with both ludic and narrative elements influencing player experience, but there is a slight dominance of the ludic aspect. The results also show that even though engagement and enjoyment are high, effective learning outcomes may not always follow.

Oades et al. (2011) have emphasized the need for a positive university environment, and believe that it is important that teachers utilize fun and positive relationships in the higher education experience. Previous research has shown that if students are having a lot of fun in their postsecondary learning, their motivation levels and well-being will be higher, leading to enhanced learning. Since universities and colleges focus on preparing students for life, it is important that students experience learning as fun, and can also make the universities a more engaging and enjoyable space.

Gavranović and Veljković Michos (2022) underscore the significance of integrating ludic activities in foreign language teaching at the tertiary level. They tried describing ludic language pedagogy and its various characteristics. They further focused on exploring how assessment that is based on games, can be used in the language classroom as a beneficial instrument for better learning. It was found that students who had actively participated in assessments that were based on play, had better content knowledge of languages.

Games, like board and card games, are interactive and can take place in safe settings where mistakes can be made and learning can take place. Whitton (2022) conducted a study to examine the transformation of traditional classroom teaching strategies into a “gamified”

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version by using popular gaming approaches. The study focused on finding out how an introductory college course can be designed to better utilize ludic pedagogy. The study also explores the possible influences of this fun pedagogy on student performance in better understanding of the course content and assessments.

Broussard (2011) conducted a study aimed at exploring the design of a college course to reflect ludic pedagogy and its impact on student performance regarding course content and assessments. The researcher took the role of a participant observer and implemented a ludic-based teaching approach, which involved students taking on instructional roles, the instructor acting as a "game master," and examining how achievements influenced student performance in an introductory education survey course. The results indicated that pre-service teachers may do better in a gamified setting and should utilize innovative pedagogical styles like ludic pedagogy to prepare for teaching their future students.

King (2018) examined the relatively limited consideration of playfulness in higher education compared to its application in primary education. He assessed the teaching of a research course to postgraduate students through activities that were both playful and non-playful. The evaluation revealed that students initially struggled to connect playful tasks to research concepts, unlike with non-playful tasks. However, upon completion of the playful activities, students were able to relate them to the research process. Additionally, there was a notable difference in student enjoyment levels between playful and non-playful tasks, which may be influenced by whether the tasks were conducted individually or in groups. The evaluation also highlighted the difference in the perceived helpfulness of playful versus non-playful tasks in completing assignments, further suggesting implications for the use of playfulness in teaching various subjects in higher education.

Hashem (1994) discussed how teachers can use play and humor to establish an environment that is good for learning and for mastering effective skills in interpersonal communication classes. According to the researcher, through fun role-playing and working together in certain learning activities, students and teachers can learn a lot about interpersonal communication. It also helps their interpersonal relationships. It also reduces tension and boredom, further improving class attendance. The use of play and the application of a good sense of humor, along with some factors like listening, acceptance, and respect, teachers and students understand that it is safe to make mistakes and learn from mistakes.

In a study on humor in Finance and Accounting classrooms in Qatar, Benjelloun (2009) found that humor had a positive effect on learning and creativity. Most students support using humor in class but feel that many professors don't use it effectively. The students prefer a balanced approach where professors are both formal and approachable, without using extreme humor.

Norgard and Moseley (2021) discussed how a playful approach to teaching, using the idea of a 'magic circle,' can boost motivation and learning in higher education. This method encourages safe academic experimentation, creativity, and participation, while also allowing students to take risks and learn from failure. Their model of playful learning is based on studies of what makes students enjoy learning or disengage. They emphasize that this approach fosters a different mindset and environment for learning.

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Leather, Harper, and Obee (2021) discuss the challenges of experiential learning in higher education and support the benefits of incorporating play into teaching. Playfulness, they say, enhances creativity, wellness, and job readiness. They encourage educators to adopt a playful teaching approach and challenge traditional methods. The researchers found that the idea of play resonates with faculty and supports the shift towards more experiential learning.

Desai (2020) studied how using drama to teach English in tribal classrooms made learning easier and nurtured creative thinking. He found a significant improvement in the creativity and learning outcomes of students taught through drama. The results suggest that using drama in teaching can be an effective way to foster creativity and improve language learning, especially in tribal and rural areas.

Sannathimmappa et al (2018) conducted a cross-sectional study which was conducted in the Department of Biochemistry, Gujarat Adani Institute of Medical Sciences on 150 first-year MBBS students. Suitable topics were picked from the syllabus. A crossword puzzle was given to the students during a lecture on biochemistry. The performance of students was assessed by Multiple Choice Questions for both teaching-learning methods using the traditional method and the crossword method. The average percentage score of students in the crossword puzzle group was 97.1% in the Diabetes Mellitus (DM) topic and 96.95% in the Gout topic. This was significantly more than the average percentage scored by students of the traditional method group. More than 80% of students said that crossword puzzles helped in better understanding of the topics as well as in remembering the new terms.

The focus of the present study was to explore post-secondary students' perspectives on the usage of fun, playfulness and games in the classroom.

### *Aim of the study*

The present research aimed at studying post-secondary students' perception of using ludic pedagogy in the classroom and discusses the implications of ludic pedagogy in post-secondary education.

### *Research objectives*

- To find out post-secondary students' perception of the application of ludic pedagogy in the classroom
- To study post-secondary students' perception of how a teacher should make the classroom more fun and engaging

## **METHODOLOGY**

111 post-secondary students were included in the sample.

A questionnaire was prepared to take the feedback of students on the use of ludic pedagogy in the classroom. It was divided into three main sections (play, playfulness, and positivity), based on the theory of Ludic pedagogy given by Lauricella and Edmunds (2022). Play (22 items) refers to the action (activities conducted in the classroom); Playfulness (9 items) refers to the attitude of the teacher, and Positivity (7 items) refers to the emotions experienced by the student in the classroom. A Likert five-point scale was used for recording the responses of the students, and it ranged from 'Strongly Agree' to 'Strongly Disagree' having 'Agree', 'Neutral' and 'Disagree' options in between.

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Apart from the Likert scale items, there were three questions (one closed-ended and two open-ended) included in the questionnaire to help the researcher understand what the students expect from teachers as far as ludic pedagogy is concerned.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

If educators want to foster effective learning environments, they need to be creative enough to make classrooms more engaging. The educators are now recognizing the significance of integrating playfulness into college classrooms. The incorporation of playful elements such as role play, educational games, storytelling, and humor has proven to be instrumental in engaging students and enhancing their classroom experience.

*Table 1 Post-secondary Students' Responses to Scale Items in Percentage*

Dimension	SNo.	Item	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently	Always
Play  How frequently do your teachers use the following techniques/methods in the classroom?	1	Role Play	22	25	35	8	10
	2	Educational Games	10	37	29	15	9
	3	Story-telling	9	19	33	25	14
	4	Art and Craft	19.8	31.5	18.9	13.5	10.8
	5	Field Trips	27	36.9	22.5	3.6	4.5
	6	Drama	24.3	33.3	25.2	9	4.5
	7	Music	36.9	27.9	21.6	7.2	3.6
	8	Dance	48.6	19.8	16.2	5.4	5.4
	9	Augmented Reality	17.7	32.4	28.8	8.1	7.2
	10	Social-Media	19	28.8	26	18	5.4
	11	Memes	34.2	26.1	17.1	13.5	5.4
	12	Group work	3	11.7	27.9	39.6	16.2
	13	Sports	23.4	22.5	31.5	12.6	7
	14	Cultural Activities	10.8	23.4	37.8	16.2	37.8
	15	Anecdotes	10.8	21.6	32.4	19.8	12.6
	16	Jokes and Humor	9	19.8	37.8	22.5	10
	17	Experiments	9	26.1	28.8	25.2	8
	18	Hands-on activities	9	19.8	39.6	19.8	10
	19	Quests	26.1	28.8	23.4	12.6	6.3
	20	Painting	35.1	21.6	19.8	14.4	6.3
	21	Puzzles	36	21.6	19.8	11.7	8.1
Playfulness  How frequently do your teachers engage in the	1	Enthusiastic behaviour	2.7	5.4	22.5	41.4	26.1
	2	Welcoming behaviour	2.7	6.3	23.4	40.5	35
	3	Engaging behaviour	0	4.5	20.7	36	37
	4	Warm	4.2	7	23	30.6	35

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Dimension	SNo.	Item	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently	Always
following behaviour in the classroom?		behaviour					
	5	Positive Outlook toward life	0.9	6.3	13.5	32.5	45
	6	Positive Facial Expressions	2	8	16.2	33.3	40
	7	Good body language	2	6.3	10.8	35.1	45
	8	Smiling	2.7	4.5	10.8	35	46
<b>Positivity</b> How frequently do your teachers encourage the following behaviour in the classroom?	1	Playfulness	4.5	14.4	40.5	21.6	18
	2	Humor	4.5	10.8	36.9	31.5	15.3
	3	Fun	2.7	9.9	36	26	24.3
	4	Laughter	3.6	9.9	37	28.8	20.7
	5	Smiles	2.7	3.6	26	33.3	34.2
	6	Acceptance	3.6	7.2	22.5	29.7	36.9

Table 1 shows the post-secondary students' responses to scale items in percentage. The results are a bit disheartening as it shows that hardly any fun methods are being used in the classroom. This could be due to the fact that most teachers have the pressure on them to finish off the syllabus within a stipulated time, and they don't really put in much time and effort into making classroom teaching a bit more fun and playful to sustain the students' attention. It could also be due to the inherent thought-process and beliefs of the teachers, as they may feel that the classroom atmosphere should be a bit more strict than playful.

The results show that as far as the use of playful and fun teaching techniques in the classroom is concerned, the post-secondary students believe that music, dance, memes, painting and puzzles are never used by teachers; games, art & craft, field trips, drama and augmented reality are rarely used by the teacher; role plays, story-telling, sports, cultural activities, anecdotes, jokes and hands-on activities are used sometimes; group work is used frequently, and cultural activities are used always. It must be noted that one of the fundamental dimensions of playfulness in the classroom is the incorporation of all these techniques and methods into the classroom teaching. Methods like role play, educational games, and storytelling not only encourage active participation but also stimulate critical thinking and problem-solving skills among students. They help the students better understand theoretical concepts and then apply them to real-world scenarios. This helps foster a deeper understanding of the subject matter. The integration of artistic expression, field trips, and drama/role plays adds a creative dimension to the learning process. This further enables students to explore diverse perspectives and modes of expression. By engaging in hands-on activities and experiential learning opportunities, students are able to tap into their innate creativity and experience a deeper appreciation for the arts and humanities. Additionally, field trips provide students with firsthand experiences that add on to the classroom instruction, fostering a holistic understanding of the subject matter.

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Music, dance and augmented reality also offer innovative and fun ways for enhancing student engagement and participation in the classroom. Whether it is through music or dance routines, these mediums captivate students' attention and they also create dynamic learning environments. By leveraging technology such as augmented reality, teachers can bridge the gap between abstract concepts and tangible experiences. The aim here is to make learning more fun and interactive for students. In today's digital era, social media and memes are powerful tools of communication among students. Through group work and collaborative projects, students are able to use their knowledge and skills to solve complex problems and achieve goals. Moreover, the use of social media and memes adds a contemporary and fun touch to the learning process, utilizing the students' interests. The incorporation of sports, cultural activities and stories not only promotes physical well-being but also helps enrich students' cultural awareness and understanding. By celebrating diversity and embracing multicultural perspectives, educators help create inclusive learning environments. This helps the students feel more comfortable in the classroom. Furthermore, the sharing of anecdotes and personal experiences fosters a sense of connection and empathy among students, strengthening the sense of community within the classroom. Humor and happy behavior play a crucial role in creating a positive and supportive learning atmosphere. By using jokes, humor and positive energy, educators can capture students' attention and it helps making learning enjoyable and memorable. This not only enhances students' motivation and engagement but also helps cultivate a growth mindset and resilience in them.

When the students were asked if they think they will learn better if the teacher was more fun and created a playful, positive atmosphere in the classroom, all the students agreed to it and responded positively. They gave some suggestions. Most of them said that when the teacher creates a positive atmosphere in the classroom, students participate actively in class and it improves their learning. Some also said that it reduces fear in the students, and makes them learn better by participating more. Some students said that it helps them remember content better when they learn in a playful classroom environment. Some students also believe that such a positive environment in the classroom motivates them to learn better, and they end up being more productive.

When asked to think of their favourite teachers, and how do they make the classroom atmosphere more playful and positive, the post-secondary students responded by saying things like- “..by making humor-based jokes, interacting with everyone, giving group based activities to do on spot or by playing games.”, “...create a playful and positive atmosphere in the classroom, it makes learning so much more enjoyable. They might use fun activities, interactive lessons, or even jokes to keep things light and engaging. It helps students feel more comfortable and excited about learning”, “...they infused sense of humour into their teaching, used interactive and creative methods, and showed genuine interest in students' opinions. This approach not only made learning enjoyable but also encouraged active participation, making the classroom a vibrant and enriching environment”, “by telling us fun facts regarding the topic and creating an inclusive environment of learning for all students”, “They often did this by incorporating humor into their lessons, encouraging student interaction and collaboration, and fostering a supportive and non-judgmental environment where students felt comfortable expressing themselves and taking risks in their learning”, “They keep the room open for any guidance required even if it is very simple and they are pretty open about the teaching method sharing anecdotes and different cases, our aviation teacher has a good sense of humour, encourage students to do better in overall life.”, “Yes by doing simple actions such as learning students' names, sharing information about

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yourself, and asking students about their background or experiences can make the classroom atmosphere more playful and positive”, “..makes the most possible positive environment by spreading joyfulness and knowledge parallelly.”

It is safe to say that the importance of fun in the classroom cannot be overstated, as highlighted by post-secondary students reflecting on their favorite teachers. These educators are good at creating playful and positive atmospheres through various means, including humor-based jokes, interactive lessons, and group activities. By infusing humor into teaching, fostering student interaction, and showing genuine interest in students' opinions, these teachers make learning enjoyable and encourage active participation. Additionally, they create inclusive environments by learning students' names, sharing personal information, and valuing students' backgrounds and experiences. Ultimately, these approaches not only make the classroom vibrant and enriching but also inspire students to excel both academically and personally.

### CONCLUSION

The higher education sector is facing some major changes and developments, and various new education techniques are being incorporated. Since the teachers play an important role in providing quality education, it is imperative that they use creative methods to teach and assess. The present study showcases how integration of playfulness in college classrooms transcends traditional teaching paradigms, offering innovative approaches to student engagement and learning. By utilizing various dimensions such as role play, educational games, storytelling, and humor, teachers can create a fun, dynamic and inclusive learning environment that caters to the needs and interests of diverse students. Through the transformative power of playfulness, colleges can foster a culture of creativity, curiosity, and lifelong learning among their students, preparing them for success in an ever-evolving global society.

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