

BUSINESS STUDIES AND GAMES – A WORTH TRIAL

Author: Ophelia Pamukchieva

Abstract: Gamification is not a new term or approach to enhance our students' willingness to learn. Koster (2004) says that fun is just another word for learning. This paper discusses both the characteristics of the generation we teach and what could be done in order to make our students interested in learning. It also gives an example of an easily accessible platform (Moodle), which not only gives immediate feedback but also makes them engages and motivated. The students who underwent through this way of teaching showed much better results at the end of the course than the ones using traditional textbook. Furthermore, some practical games and a simulation are offered for classroom implementation.

Keywords: gamification, Moodle, simulation games

JEL: A22, C72

1. BACKGROUND

*Tell me and I forget,
teach me and I remember,
involve me and I learn.
Confucius¹*

Technology started making its way in education long ago. Unfortunately, there are more writings about it than real implementations. The good news is that many new digital platforms and tools have been offered lately.

However, there are still people who doubt whether technology is as useful as textbooks, which have been used for centuries and have proved they are a good way of making people literate. Skeptics even think that computers and mobiles only distract learners from actual leaning. Now we can dispel doubts by pointing out that students are attuned to information technologies.

We started with the characteristics of our students and found out that whenever they need information they look on the Internet, but at the same

¹ See: <https://quoteinvestigator.com/2019/02/27/tell/>

time they protect their anonymity. Students are impatient and looking for brand new ideas and experiences is not a demerit. Competitions are welcome. Their working motto is “We are the ‘always on’ generation” (available or operating at all times).

These young people are flexible, collaborative, interactive, and engaging. They are team-oriented and incorporate technology. That has led us to the conclusion that they prefer a variety of teaching methods and learning environments.

We know what our students expect from us, the educators. Still, another question is rising and it is whether involving technology in education will make educator’s job more difficult. The answer is Yes and No. Yes, if we are not acquainted with modern technologies. Yes, if we consider it waste of time to look for new ways to attract our students’ attention. No, if we want to prepare real professionals.

2. INTRODUCTION TO GAMIFICATION

Gamification is defined as “the use of game design elements in non-game contexts” (Deterding et al., 2011), i.e. applying game rules to a task or lesson. It can incentivize learning with competition and fun.

Undoubtedly, studying for long periods of time, students get a sort of “learner’s fatigue.” In order to break up conventional studying while still being on the tracks, we could offer material in a new way, which makes it more memorable.

The main game elements included in gamification are as follows:

- Immediate feedback on performance through the use of badges and icons,
- leaderboards,
- awards,
- interaction with other players.

In order to be successful we can use the steps of the model presented by Huang and Soman (2013). It includes the following:

Step 1: Understanding the Target Audience and the context. In this step we have to know who our students are. If we understand what their focus, motivation and skills are, we will be ready to determine the Gamification elements to implement.

Step 2: Defining the Learning Objectives. If we, the educators, want to succeed we have to be able to combine general instructional goals, specific learning goals, and behavioral goals and implement them.

Step 3: Structuring the Experience. If we want the students to stay engaged and motivated, we have to structure it from simple to complex.

Step 4: Identifying Resources. This is the step to decide which parts can or cannot be gamified.

Step 5: Applying Gamification Elements. This final step is when we decide which Gamification elements should be applied. There are two types of elements: self-elements which use badges, levels and time restrictions and social elements which include interactive competitions along with cooperation

When we are aware of the steps, it is vital to consider the educational objectives in order to properly gamify instruction. Our students will envisage them as challenges and will be motivated to move from one level to another or from one stage to another. The key of Gamification is motivation. If it is achieved, the lecture room will be filled with plenty of creativity and healthy competition. This could include the integration of badges, leader boards, and progress charts, similar to the ones they have in console games.

3. PRACTICAL IMPLEMENTATION

3.1. A questionnaire

Understanding the target audience can be achieved by giving students a questionnaire to determine their expectations and knowledge. The questionnaire we prepared includes 15 questions in a multiple choice format. In order to make it easier for summarizing c.-answers show a serious advantage of gamifying the learning process with these students. Moreover, it is easy to check the answers.

3.2. Platforms to use

There are many platforms and applications like Moodle, Edmodo, Puzzgrid, Socrative, Kahoot, etc. How to choose the best one? It is easy – the one you know. This is the reason we have chosen Moodle. Another reason for the choice is the fact that Moodle has a special plugin², called Level up!, which provides gamification of learning with the following features:

- Automatically captures and attributes experience points to students' actions;
- A block that displays current level and progress towards next level;
- Report for teachers to get an overview of their students' levels;

² See: https://moodle.org/plugins/block_xp

- Notifications to congratulate students as they level up;
- A ladder to display the rankings of the students;
- Ability to set the number of levels and the experience required to get to them;
- Images can be uploaded to customize the appearance of the levels, etc.

It is worth mentioning that Moodle is not a platform designed for game-based learning. However, it is uncomplicated to design game elements and activities in it. According to Henrick (2013) applying gamification in Moodle could be called “gamooification”.

In their study ‘An Attempt for Gamification of Learning in Moodle’, Somova and Gachkova (2016) point out: “Most of the game elements have full or partial realization or they can be represented with other similar elements in Moodle (without using the plugin). Levels, points, badges, rewards and avatars are stimuli for obtaining better results in e-games.”

Game levels in Moodle can be represented through the individual sections of the learning course, if it is set up in topics (learning schedule is not important) or weekly format. Using badges is a way to award achievements, skills or competencies. In Moodle you can obtain them automatically or are manually given by the teacher.

In our case, we have found out that not only badges but emojis are also a good idea. It was part of the game to recognize the better achievement. If dealing with badges, students are given preliminary information for course badges while emoticons’ importance had to be negotiated or justified.

Points are inevitable part of our work in order to assess results of learning activities. Each activity can bring different number of points and a different weight for the final mark. Student’s grade is shown in percentages. Students can see their grade as an average value of points equated to 100 (100%). They can see the average points of other students at any moment in order to get a better idea of their level of knowledge. Having grade 6 is one thing but if you have 81% and your colleague 95% for one and the same task, it is a an issue to consider carefully. This way teachers do not use any rating as it is quite obvious who is the best. What we suggest is to use rating only for the end of semester or for the whole course.

Rewards are always expected when playing and gathering a certain number of one kind guarantees a certain grade. When rewarding teachers can also be innovative by using special symbols like ✓ 👑 ☆

Fig. 1 Emoticons that can be used in games



4. ACTIVITIES

Gamification does not need to be restricted solely in digital environments so some Starter Activities for Business Lessons (2019) can be of help:

4.1. I am the question.

Students are given a word, phrase or a-whole-sentence answer. The students then have to state what the question could be.

For instance, tell the students ‘unemployment, inflation, bankruptcies, etc.’ and a student’s answer might be, ‘What are the consequences of a business crises?’ It gives you the opportunity to praise or ask some student to correct if the answer is wrong.

4.2. Consider all possibilities

At the start of the lesson, a question is written on the board, ‘Why have I decided to relocate my business?’.

If we ask students: ‘What are the advantages of relocation?, it is just a teacher’s question. If it is asked the former way, you will be amazed how much your students know and how logical they are. They think of all the possible reasons for relocation and you will be astonished by some excellent answers

4.3. Loop cards

Another activity for consolidation is Loop cards, which involve writing a number of incomplete sentences about a topic, for example ‘Government and Taxation’. The sentences are then cut out and randomly handed out to students in the class.

Students are given separate cuts and then one of the students starts off with the first sentence. The other students look at their partsof sentences and consider whether theirs’ is the other part of the sentence. If wrong, another student gives the correct one and so on and so on.

4.4. Taxlandia³ - a simulation game

You are now in Taxlandia, a tiny European state with gorgeous mountains and clear blue lakes. A popular tourist destination when the economy was booming and a country with minimal taxes, Taxlandia faces now an unprecedented crisis. A lot of companies moved their headquarters, tourism decreased. Last year the government announced that a tax increase was planned as one measure to react to this crisis. Soon, an unofficial "tax rebellion" started.

And now YOU (a student chosen by the class) have been appointed the new Prime Minister of Taxlandia! You have to start taking decisions about taxes, to care for your citizens, to build new infrastructure and to support the continuous development of the country.

Students can play online (and we recommend it) but we did not have the time to do it in class so students were given tasks in groups, e.g. 'Find the types of taxes imposed both on the citizens and the business.', 'Find which taxes will ensure most money for the Government.', 'How will taxes benefit the growth of the country economy?', etc.

Then after each group reports their findings, students are divided into new groups to summarize the results and come up with solutions. The team offering the best solution is rewarded and announced to be the new Government of the country. There may be variations of the stages depending on the professor's imagination.

4.5. MikesBikes Business Simulation

MikesBikes Introduction (2019) is an entirely unique business simulation, specifically designed to teach the principles of business to freshman and sophomore students. This is achieved by giving students the opportunity to progress from Product Manager to CEO of their own company.

Although it is difficult to use both traditional books and play a long game, our next project will be to find out how to incorporate this great simulation in the learning process.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The Internet is full of opportunities to vary the traditional learning of our students. A tedious task can be made thrilling only with the choice of a suitable gamification technique. Making students engrossed in the learning process shows serious change of motivation which in turn leads to change of attitude

³ See: https://europa.eu/taxedu/taxlandia_en

towards knowledge and skills acquisition. They are not afraid of making mistakes. They learn that it is quite natural. It is important not to make one and the same mistake twice.

Moreover, students are engaged in a pleasant competitive environment with other learners. Gamification is a practical approach, which changes positively students; attitude toward learning. The process of teaching is also more satisfying seeing the better results of our students

To sum up, although gamification is an approach which does not teach, it makes students curious and encourages them to learn.

Games are inborn in us. We play games, we apply games in different areas, and we invent games. Let's remind it to our students.

6. REFERENCES

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