From Concept to Classroom: Gamifying lesson design in Open and Distance Learning

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Abstract

The unprecedented impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has prompted research into students' attitudes, experiences, and challenges within the realm of open and distance learning (ODL). A significant body of literature has underscored the critical issues of student engagement and motivation, highlighting them as key factors influencing learning outcomes. Gamification—the application of game-like elements into non-game contexts—has emerged as an innovative pedagogical strategy aimed at enhancing student engagement, motivation, and overall learning experiences. Recent literature suggests that when gamification is thoughtfully designed and carefully incorporated into the lesson design, it has the potential to improve learning. The present study explores the integration of gamification within the lesson design, demonstrating how various game elements were strategically embedded to enhance student engagement and motivation. This research was conducted with a cohort of thirty students enrolled in a gamified Software Engineering course at the Open University of Mauritius. Upon completion of the course, fifteen students participated in a structured focus group discussion to share their perspectives and reflections on their gamified learning experience. The participants generally expressed enthusiasm and enjoyment for all the gamified activities. Furthermore, students highlighted the positive impact of gamification on fostering a strong sense of community, teamwork, and collaborative learning. Notably, the findings revealed diverse reactions to specific game elements, particularly the leaderboard, which elicited mixed responses in terms of motivation and competition. Overall, the study contributes valuable insights on gamification in ODL for educators seeking to design and implement gamified learning courses.

Keywords: gamification; motivation; attitudes; engagement; learning experience