

RESEARCH REPORTS

Gamification Strategies to Enhance Student Engagement in Entrepreneurship Courses at IIUM

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ABSTRACT Gamification has emerged as a powerful educational tool that leverages game elements to enhance motivation, engagement, and learning outcomes. In the context of higher education, particularly in entrepreneurship courses, it fosters active participation, critical thinking, and real-world problem-solving skills. Traditional lecture-based approaches often fall short in sustaining student interest and promoting hands-on learning. Implementing gamification addresses these gaps by creating an interactive and stimulating learning environment that mirrors real entrepreneurial challenges. This study explores the use of gamification to enhance learning experience in entrepreneurship course at the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). Hence, the objective of this research is to identify the strategies needed to incorporate gamification into the entrepreneurship course. This study employed the qualitative method, particularly using in-depth interviews to collect data. Nineteen entrepreneurship educators were recruited using purposive sampling to participate in this study. Thematic analysis reveals that gamification creates an interactive experience that turns the class from passive to active learning environment. Next, gamification improves students' engagement and skills development by giving them more agency over their learning, which in turn improves their capacity for critical analysis, creative problem-solving and nurturing their growth mindset. Therefore, implementing gamification transforms traditional teaching methods by promoting active participation and real-world problem-solving.

Keywords: Gamification, Students' Engagement, Entrepreneurship Course

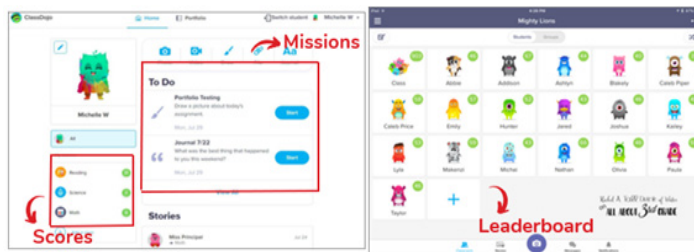
Introduction

Over the past few years, the use of gamification in education was given a lot of consideration as a potent tool to potentially interest and attract students to take part in the learning process. According to Manzano-Leon et al. (2021), gamification refers to the instructional approach that introduces the ideas of a game design elements to the traditional lecture. Among the greatest advantages of gamification of the educational process, is its ability to motivate and engage students in the learning process. Learning, gamification has the possibilities to make the learning process more engaging, to increase the desire of the students to learn, and to make the classroom a comfortable place where students could enjoy themselves during the process of learning, as found by Alzahrani and Alhalafawy (2023).

Entrepreneurship education aims to develop critical thinking, creativity and invention. Traditional modes of teaching might be ineffective in reaching out to the students or in enhancing active learning. According to Marinov and Spasova

(2023), gamification of entrepreneurship education implies the introduction of game aspects to promote the value of learning, as well as, skills acquisition. This approach also addresses the need for developing new pedagogical approaches that are in align with the technological advancements and the new educational needs of younger generations. In addition, entrepreneurship education approach may be implemented through competitions, practical application situations, and consultancy programs, including badges, points, and prizes as the means of increasing student engagement and encouraging collaboration as well as developing critical thinking and problem-solving (Kara and Russell, 2024).

Figure 1. Gamification Elements are Demonstrated in an Entrepreneurship Game, ClassDojo



Points, missions, badges, awards, and leaderboards are considered to be core aspects of gamification that have been particularly applicable to entrepreneurship and business (Hamari et al., 2016; Torlaković et al., 2022; Sharma et al., 2024). For an example measurable rewards such as points or scores promote performance through providing learners with concrete signals of success that like salespeople earning points to reach a quota. Similarly, students also experience sense of achievement and motivated to do better (Plangger et al., 2022). Missions also facilitate entrepreneurial learning as they break down complex projects into manageable tasks that support collaboration, match individual goals with group overarching goals and promote commitment (Vegt et al., 2014). On the other hand, leaderboards encourage healthy competition as they rank people according to their achievements and therefore encourage them to improve their skills and enhance their performance (Kolachina et al., 2025).

Kloepper (2017) emphasized that students tend to find the traditional lectures quite dull, and such information is supported by research that confirmed that the inappropriateness of this method is also linked to higher failure rates in compared to active learning process. Conversely, Satria et al. (2024) found that gamification is a highly effective learning experience with an 88 percent of the students were interested and engaged in the learning process in comparison to traditional teaching methods. The engagement and understanding of most students were significantly enhanced and many of them expressed their preference towards this style of teaching. In addition, Alkaabi (2022) notes that the students learning experience were significantly enhanced with the gamification, particularly through business games such as Monsoon Sim, being incorporated into entrepreneurship course. This approach creates online flipped classroom setting while also enhancing the critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills of the students.

Regardless of the rising awareness of the promise of gamification, the adoption of the method in higher education in the field of entrepreneurship education, is still unbalanced and untested (Casau et al., 2023; Yousefi et al., 2025; Zhang et al., 2024). Research studies indicate that additional studies are required to examine the actual effects of gamification on the instruction-learning process in higher education as it is a comparatively modern phenomenon that has had little-to-no application in any other spheres of knowledge (Montenegro-Rueda et al., 2023). Gamified environments emphasise on practical learning rather than traditional lecture-based mode, which will help the student to develop essential critical thinking and creative mindset while helping them to face the dynamic realities of the world of entrepreneurship (Zhang et al., 2024). Therefore, this study focuses on investigation of gamification application in the entrepreneurship courses in tertiary education.

The adoption of gamification in Malaysian tertiary education remains very limited due to several barriers. Previous studies have proved that the use of gamification in learning institutions can enhance the quality of the learning experience (Jun & Lucas, 2025; Ukgoda, 2025). However, due to technological infrastructure challenges or limitations in Malaysia, have created many problem laden scenarios (Yie et al., 2022). A digital gap or digital divide has affected the quality of education in Malaysia (Ayob et al., 2022). Lack of infrastructure and resources also hindered many institutions from implementing innovative instructional technology.

Furthermore, according to Lubis et al. (2009), the implementation of gamification in Malaysia will only be actualized once the education sector shifts from traditional paradigm of rote learning and adopts information technology to ensure active, creative, and autonomous learning. More professional development programmes are also necessary to provide educators with a chance to master the successful use of gamified learning tools (Arifin et al., 2025; Wei et al., 2024). The principles and benefits of gamification are not well understood among educators in Malaysia, due to which most of them are resistant and lack of readiness to implement the strategies (Manining et al., 2022). Hence, the objective of the study is to gain an insight into the strategies that will be required to implement gamification in the entrepreneurship education. The aim of this study through an analysis of the experiences and views of the certified entrepreneurship educators is to identify the best practices and tactics that can be effective toward the successful implementation of gamification in university-level entrepreneurship course.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Pierre Bourdieu's Theory of Practice (1990), particularly his conceptually interconnected terms of habitus, field and capital which broadens the theoretical perspective to offer a significant analytical tool in explaining the use of gamification in transforming the teaching and learning process. The field refers to the structured societal context where teaching and learning processes occur and are constrained according to the existing norms and expectations (Massi et al., 2021). Gamification changes this aspect by modifying these areas of passive teacher-centred model to active participatory and interactive space. Elements like rewards, challenges, and collaboration among other aspects encourage the students

to participate directly in the learning process, thus shifting the conventional power dynamic and transforming a classroom to a more welcoming and inspiring learning environment (Zuhri et al., 2025).

Besides changing the field, gamification also affects the habitus of students, which is defined as the system of internalized attitudes, mindsets, and dispositions formed as a result of taking previous educational and social experiences (Hisyam et al., 2024). Savitska et al. (2025) has gone further to tell that, the students, as they engage in an interactive practice, compete and engage in working together solving problems gradually embrace new learning dispositions which are aligned to the aspects of active participation and self-directed learning developments. In the long run, this mentality leads to growth mindset, which would make the students ready to face challenges, not as a hinderance, but as an outlet to intellectual and personal growth.

Besides, Bourdieu concept of capital that involves cultural, social and symbolic have also helped shed new light on how gamification can enhance the learning experiences of students. Through gamified activities, the learners develop cultural capital by developing cognitive and creative products, social capital as a result of a team, communication, and peer collaboration, and symbolical capital by means of recognition and success in the gamified system (Mishra, 2012). Therefore, gamification does not only increase academic interest, but also develops social and cultural capital that allow the learner to survive in complex settings and play a significant role in society. By doing so, the Theory of Practice by Bourdieu gives a detailed structure of the way in which gamification changes the form and content of the learning process.

Methods

The research study used a qualitative research design to gain an in-depth understating of the certified entrepreneurship educators about the application of gamification in entrepreneurship courses in International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). Apers and Corter (2021) define qualitative research as an iterative process, in the course of which researchers can gain a better understanding of a topic by being in close contact with it and revealing new, significant differences. The arriving at purposive sampling, which is referred to by Douglas (2022) as the intentional choice of the participants because of how they are related to the topic of the research. The researcher used 19 certified IIUM educators that teach entrepreneurship as a requirement or a course as an elective at IIUM campuses and have experiences of teaching or seeing about gamified aspects. Among the most salient qualifications of the participants, one is that he or she should be certified by Google, Malaysia Digital Economy Corporation (MDEC) or Human Resource Development Corporation (HRDF), Malaysian Research Accelerator of Technology and Innovation (MRANTI) or other relevant certifications.

According to Knott et al. (2022), in-depth interviews will help to consider the most difficult aspects of experiences, reveal some complex issues, and obtain important and comprehensive results. In order to obtain the complete picture of this research problem concerning the gamification integration in entrepreneurship classes, in-depth interviews were used in the study to get an accurate understanding of the perspectives of educators.

The potential participants were first contacted courtesy of personalized email messages, which were explanatory in nature in terms of the purpose of the study, and the objectives of the interview, to allow them to make a reasoned choice on whether to participate in the study or not. As a further appreciation of their time and commitments, they were obliged to fill out a scheduling form that had an in-built option that could enable them to choose the opportune interview time that best suited their schedule and therefore strengthened the ethical contribution of the study in terms of ethical practices relating to research. After the researcher was identified with the help of their appointments, a follow-up email with a participant consent form and a demographic survey was sent by the researcher.

Subsequently, the participants were requested to fill in these forms a day or two before the interview so that they could have ample time to read in the provisions of their participation to understand where their data would be used not to mention that they had a right to pull out of the interview any time they had to, albeit, without incurring any form of penalty. The interviews were conducted only when a participant consent form was received, and this just in case the participant was fully aware of the terms of the involvement and agreed to them. Therefore, in order to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of respondents, the real names were substituted with the pseudonyms (Guenther, 2009). The adherence of ethical research practices in this study is also represented in the intensive procedures associated with it, openness, and maintenance of integrity and reverence of the autonomy of the participants as well as provision of high-quality data and ethical ends.

An audio transcription work was then undertaken where the audio records were transcribed verbatim to ensure that the responses given by the participants were correct. Thematic analysis is a process used in the analysis of the transcripts. The aim of this technique was to trace common themes, patterns similar to each other, significant ideas that were applied to the study purposes. The researchers can make analysis of transcripts, cut raw data to its fundamentals by segmenting it into its constituent parts and also create direct connections between theoretical and empirical results with the help of codes (Khokhar et al., 2020). A follow-up analysis was conducted thereafter where the codes were checked and reanalysed. This time round, this would be done to determine more deep themes that were applicable to the end of the study. The results were sorted into two major conclusions after the selective coding, and they are consistent with the research objectives.

Results

Gamifying Learning Space

Gamification has the power to transform conventional, passive learning environments into lively, interactive settings that promote active student participation. Dasoo (2024) has argued that by incorporating gaming elements into the curriculum, teachers can significantly increase student motivation, engagement, and overall learning outcomes. Encouraging students to actively participate in their education, not only increases engagement but also makes learning more engaging. This point of view is supported by Syahmi's observation that gamification encourages students to engage more actively in class, which contrasts with passive behaviors that are frequently observed during traditional lectures.

Secondly, it can complement in the way that, the students would actually engage better in class. Because we see that the students, normally, when we do normal lecture, the students do not engage that much. So, when we do some sort of gamification, the students will like it.

Incorporating electronics into gamification to deepen interactions is crucial, as pointed out by Najwa. Technology-mediated activities have the potential to turn classrooms from dull and boring settings into vibrant and active ones.

So, they interact through the device. So nowadays, the gamification, we need to have to use through a device. Then only the interaction can become more intense. Otherwise, it's very passive. It's very quiet and meticulous.

Similarly, Zulaikha emphasized that gamified sessions promote interaction by inviting students to engage in games and activities with teachers, leading to more collaborative and interesting learning. This shows that gamification enabled social interactions not only boost engagement but also establish a cooperative learning environment.

I think gamifications is where is a method where you deliver teaching and learning in a fun way. It should be an interactive. Meaning that when we host the sessions in the class, we encourage the students to play with us so that it will be interactive and engaging session.

In addition, the results demonstrated that interactive tools are crucial for improving the gamification experience in the classroom. As an icebreaker, Najwa mentioned how easy games may be to develop group cohesion and student affection.

Everyone is very shy in the first-time meeting in their meeting in the group. But then just with that simple kind of game, we can break the ice. So, at that time, we actually developed their affection.

In order to create learning settings that are interesting and engaging for students, Nur and Nabila underlined the importance of improving teaching methods by including a variety of tools, such as board games and other specialized activities like Jenga.

So, you already have an integration of games in your course. But, now, I want to upgrade my own teaching tools.

Nabila quoted that,

With the need of technology, I've been teaching this for quite some time. Five or six years ago, I focused on board games. Sometimes, I made my own board game. Sometimes, I brought tools. Even Jenga.

Furthermore, Zaleha mentioned that the combination of teaching slides with gamified activities, such as quizzes and surveys, offers a dual benefit that not only reinforces the substance of the lesson but also provides quick feedback on the student's knowledge of the material.

We can do, directly after that, just a simple quiz, and then we can see how the understanding of the student. Survey, like, what they what do they think about the contents.

In support of this viewpoint, Syahirah pointed out that interactive technologies excite students and stimulate active engagement, which ultimately results in a more dynamic environment within the classroom.

I think, from my personal overview, when you incorporate those interactive tools in the class, student, they are really excited.

The findings also highlight how important it is to incorporate gamification into the overall design of the course. Syahmi made the observation that traditional methods of instruction frequently fail to grab the interest of students. As a result, it is vital to use gamification as a kind of entertainment that simultaneously educates.

I think, nowadays, we have to realize that traditional method is quite boring. So, if, let's say, we can include some sort, like entertainment per se, for example, to attract people to understand better the concept.

Consequently, gamification has demonstrated its efficacy in converting passive learning environments into dynamic and interactive spaces. Incorporating game elements and interactive tools can enhance student motivation, engagement, and participation in the learning process. The study revealed that educators emphasized the role of technology and simple games in promoting interaction, collaboration, and bonds among students. These approaches not only increase the enjoyment of learning but also improve understanding and foster teamwork in the learning process. The findings highlight the significance of integrating gamification into course design to maintain engagement and reinforce essential concepts. Ultimately, gamification fosters an interactive classroom environment that encourages students to actively participate and enhance their learning experience.

Leveling Up Learner's Agency

Gamification also plays a crucial role in enhancing students' engagement and fostering skill development by granting learners greater autonomy in how they approach and manage their learning journey. It improves their capacity for critical analysis, creative problem solving and nurturing their growth mindset. Gamification is a successful way for generating an engaging and dynamic learning experience, the inclusion of games into educational contexts is considered as a fruitful method (Ahmad & Khan, 2024). Nur highlights the value of educational games in helping the acquisition of knowledge, stating that these games are not only enlightening but also accessible to all students, regardless of the level of prior knowledge they possess.

If you want to embed knowledge-wise, I think the game can help a lot. It's a game that is an educational game. It will be informative. You don't need to have early knowledge to play. They will acquire knowledge through the game.

In contrast, Aqief proposed the creation of video games that closely resemble real-life circumstances, such as the layout of a café or restaurant, in order to make the learning process more relatable and simpler for students to remember, particularly in subjects such as entrepreneurship.

Why not we make a game using this kind of a set-up of café or a restaurant kind of game. They can relate more closely by look at the business. Because of this ... fun and attractive connection. Make them to memorize and understanding on the

topic of entrepreneurship much clearer.

In order to provide students with a complete and pleasant method of acquiring knowledge of difficult concepts such as money management, Zulaikha offered her experience as an example of a treasure hunt game that blended theoretical and practical learning across various stations. In addition to teaching students about how to properly handle their finances, this example demonstrates how interactive games can turn intangible concepts into experiences that they will never forget.

We try to educate children about the money, but in a simpler way. So, we have like treasure hunt. You know, when you go for treasure hunt, you go to one station, next stations, next session. So, we have five different stations throughout that the students learns theory and learn the practical.

Besides, gamification was acknowledged as a potent instrument for the development of abilities that are applicable in the real world by imitating realistic obstacles and fostering experiential learning. Nur brought to light the fact that player acceptance of failure is frequently required in video games, which is reflective of the unpredictability and resiliency that are required in real-world situations.

In a real game, a real business, there are times when you have to accept that you have failed. That means, no matter what, you have to have a live experience. You can't play it alone.

The “live experience” component of games is extremely important for the development of skills because it immerses students in scenarios that are similar to those they might encounter in their professional lives. Through the use of gamified exercises, Aqief highlighted the importance of integrating classroom information with real-world entrepreneurial practices. This not only helps students gain a more profound comprehension of the subject matter, but it also prepares them for the practical applications they will encounter in their future endeavors.

When you go to actual practical you can combine the actual practical real-life situation of entrepreneurship versus in class entrepreneurship knowledge. This game can kind of amplify this to others together.

Furthermore, the gamified entrepreneurship course emphasizes the dynamic and relevant conversation that took place throughout the course of the learning process. For the purpose of enhancing mutual comprehension, students and educators would take part in lively conversations, during which they would share their thoughts and offer comments. Thus, it was pointed out by Intan that gamification facilitated improved interactions between students as they worked toward accomplishing specific goals, such as obtaining an award.

It would get them to interact better so that they can meet the target, right, so that they can win an award.

This demonstrates that gamification has the potential to build a platform that allows for the effective exchange of ideas among the members of the team. Additionally, Hanis mentioned that conversations frequently resulted in the development of fresh perspectives, particularly when students participated in debates and offered contrasting points of view that encouraged innovative solutions.

Sometimes, you will get new insight. Sometimes, half of the people will say yes. They don't argue. When they argue, new insights come in.

On the other side, Syahmi pointed out that gamification involves two-way communication, which means that both students and educators contribute to the flow of ideas. This results in increased social connections that contrast to the traditional ways of education.

Because sometimes gamification will definitely involve 2 ways of communication. The instructor who initiates the game. And the students who need to participate in the game. But social interaction definitely will be in the class even better compared to traditional way of learning.

Furthermore, Aniq made a good point about how the reward system prompted students to share success strategies as well as information, which would motivate them to do well so they could receive prizes.

It's as a reward. So it can be, picturize into present. So, at the end, student know that they will get something. So, I was looking for this extra kind of, what they can gain when they win. Even at the end of the entrepreneurship course, we have the best group, best group award, which we give a token of money, for them from our IHK unit. So that, they feel that they need to do to the best in order to get the award.

In conclusion, gamification empowers students by giving them greater agency in their learning journey, fostering deeper engagement, critical thinking, and the development of practical skills. Through the use of educational games, students can absorb complex concepts in a more accessible and enjoyable manner, regardless of their prior knowledge. Real-life simulations, such as business-themed games and treasure hunts, make learning more relatable and memorable, especially in entrepreneurship education. Moreover, gamified learning environment develops students' skill as they face real-world challenges, learn from failure, and apply classroom knowledge in meaningful ways. Overall, gamification transforms the educational experience into a dynamic and interactive process that nurtures both skills and academic growth.

Discussion

The concept of gamification in the educational sector has proved to be a revolutionary pedagogical approach that turns classrooms into the passive and traditional classroom environments to an interactive and alive learning environment. This has only increased with the use of digital tools and gamified platforms particularly in hybrid and online learning environments, which have increased during and after the pandemic. Meanwhile, gamification goes a long way in terms of reinforcing learner agency since gamification motivates students to feel like they are in charge of their own learning process, as opposed to receiving information, they utilize critical thinking and problem-solving acuity. Taken together, the above outcomes illustrate that gamification is the new breath of life in education as it creates participation and learners who are more independent and able-minded, thus more prepared to embrace the future.

Thus, the introduction of elements such as quizzes, board games, simulations, and team challenges makes the classroom an active environment in which students

are able to participate in their learning actively. This shift is consistent with Bourdieu definition of the field, which is a social system that has its structure in which individuals relate in accordance with ideals of rules and anticipations. In this scenario, the learning domain becomes not on a one-way communication of the teacher-to-student knowledge but as a different, two-way category whereby both parties mutually interact in a meaningful way. Gamification assists in reinventing this sphere of learning, integrating entertainment, education, and interaction so that students could engage in it more easily and cheerfully.

The other important finding is that gamification transforms students thought patterns and attitude towards learning among the students. Initially, many the student were not in favour of raising their voices or trying new things since they were conditioned by the past schooling and education to be obedient and right and not to explore but to be right. Low stakes game based activities like business simulations, competitions as a team, etc. made students begin to take more risks and treated failure as a part of the learning experience, and not something negative. This transformation reflects Bourdieu's concept of habitus. When students participate in gamified activities, they start to experience a change in their habitus and start adopting a growth mindset where students build persistence, creativity and are open to challenges. They feel more confident and start perceiving learning as an individual and pleasant experience that leads to a better comprehension and greater problem-solving skills.

Moreover, gamification was also discovered to facilitate the development of various forms of capitals which is one of the main concepts in the Bourdieu theory. Participating in the games and simulations, which involved realistic approach, the students acquired cultural capital of transforming the abstract ideas into the real-life skills that they can utilize in the real life. The teams also enabled them to build social capital due to communication, trust, and collaboration because they shared ideas and learned through various perspectives of the other team members. Rewards, praise or points earned them symbolic capital, which contributed to increased motivation and achievement. All of these variations of capital combined in order to make students more confident, connected and capable learners. Simply put, not only did gamification turn the process of learning more pleasant, but it also served to shape the dispositions of the students, their capabilities and their relationships with each other; these and many other social and psychological transformations that happen once education begins engaging the students and making it more interactive may be explained using the Theory of Practice as outlined by Bourdieu.

Overall, the Theory of Practice developed by Bourdieu gives a valuable opportunity to comprehend the reasons why gamification can be very attractive to students and how this educational concept can be used to change the education practice. Gamification itself is not an attention-grabbing technique but transforms the conventional learning realm where students are passive receivers of knowledge to the active learners who venture, enquire, cooperate, and invent. This changes gradually the habitus of students as it moves them past the sphere of memorisation into the arena of curiosity, critical thinking, and more of owning their learning. Meanwhile, gamification leads to the creation of several types of capital: the cultural capital based on the use of entrepreneurial knowledge, social capital

based on collaboration and interaction with peers, and symbolic capital based on recognition and reward systems. Hence, these dynamics are critical to this study in that it aims at determining the kind of strategies that are necessary to successfully integrate gamification in entrepreneurship classes, such that students can be not only more involved in the academic process, but also be more prepared to succeed in a learning culture, that values creativity, teamwork, and adaptability.

Conclusion

To sum up, the concept of gamification has demonstrated a significant potential in respect to its impact on an educational environment and enhancement of agency in learners. Unfortunately, I can still say that its implementation in schools has not been taken seriously. It is typically associated with thoughtless use as there is generally insufficient knowledge, training, infrastructure and the misidentification of gamification as a means of entertainment and not an effective pedagogical device. To address this problem, professional development of teachers should be the priority in educational institutions. This would facilitate them to learn new knowledge and resources required to design and add gamified elements adequately. Therefore, to promote the further guidance that gamification is employed in its persistent and consistent usage, developers of curricula must also take it into account as an implemented aspect of the courses they will design.

Besides these institutional and pedagogical initiatives, there should be a multi-stakeholder approach to ensure the sustainable integration of gamification in education. Policymakers can strive to develop favourable guidelines and national systems that will officially endorse gamification as a viable instructional strategy, in addition availing funding opportunities to schools to accommodate applicate technologies. In the same breath, the industry players especially those operating in educational technology can also play a role by co-creating the accessible gamification tools based on research findings which should be relevant to the curriculum other than focusing on commercial gains. Meanwhile, academia must endeavour to further deepen the theoretical and empirical underpinnings of gamification through the provision of specialised training programmes, longitudinal research studies and interdisciplinary cooperation and integration amongst fields, including education, psychology and design. Through coordinating the actions of these important stakeholders, a more autonomous and responsive ecosystem may resurface to help in meaningful gamification practices.

In addition, another aspect, which is highly relevant for future research, is to examine the impact of gamification on motivation, academic success and skill growth of learners in various in different subjects. Furthermore, research studies could explore how gamification can be implemented is implemented for diverse groups of learners, including learners with different abilities, with different learning styles, learners with different socio-economic backgrounds, to make sure that gamified means allow inclusiveness and equitability. By addressing such gaps and challenges, the future of education will be better positioned to make the most of gamification that can improve the learning process in a meaningful and sustainable way.

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