Gamified learning: the next frontier of EdTech?

Gamification is a buzzword that most people in the education sector have likely heard thrown around at some point or another, especially as online and distance learning have become popular ways of achieving education continuity throughout the COVID-19 crisis.

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Historically, education has always been centred around the classroom, with in-person teaching the preferred means of delivering lessons and corporate learning courses alike, outside the context of COVID-19. Many educators appear to have been keen to leave digital learning behind and return to the classroom as soon as social distancing measures and government guidance permit. The rationale behind this is typically that learners find it easier to understand materials and stay engaged when they are surrounded by their peers, as well as being able to maintain the important social bonds that the classroom provides.

Obviously, there are some challenges that come with remote learning. However, I would argue that many of these difficulties are outweighed by new opportunities – namely, the potential for fully flexible, self-directed and supplementary learning. So, where should educators start?

Gamification: a short history

Gamification, which can be defined as the use of game design and principles outside of traditional gaming contexts, first started to take

flight around 2010 – largely due to a number of _conferences_ and summits that really got people thinking across a variety of different sectors.

Just two years later, the research company Gartner predicted that by 2014, 70% of global organisations would be employing at least one gamified application. However, today, this technology has exceeded all expectations. According to some _figures_, the market for such software and applications was valued at $10.19M in 2020 and forecasted to reach $38M by 2026, showing that the sky really is the limit for gamification technologies. But what do these numbers mean in practice?

> _Game mechanics and experience design are a great way to keep learners motivated to achieve their goals._

Gamification techniques employ practices from behavioural science to 'nudge' learners to reach their targets, while some studies have even linked video games to dopamine production – a 'feel good' chemical released in the brain. Not only does this mean that individuals will connect the learning process with feeling happy when gamification is put to good use, but also that they may be more inclined to stay consistent with their goals.

How can educators implement gamification?

Looking at how educators can use these technologies in the classroom – whether this is in the corporate sphere or a public college – institutions have a number of options available to them, depending on their preferred goals. For some, this will simply be a case of utilising educational games at the end of a lesson to consolidate learning, just as students are flagging towards the end of their 60-minute lesson, or stretching learners'

knowledge further at the end of a corporate training course. For example, if a high-school student is struggling to remember complex mathematical operations, a teacher might think about setting some extension work using an _app-based game_.

For those having trouble with their comprehension skills, employing virtual flashcards or quizzes can also be beneficial as these platforms take much of the chore out of revising. In fact, some researchers have suggested that these can be vital to the knowledge retrieval process and help students to reinforce their learning.

A summative analysis of over 200 experiments conducted across 70 years indicates that students are more likely to recall and learn new content after using these than if they were to rely on traditional note taking. The result is that when these techniques are used consistently, learners are more likely to attain and even exceed their targets and stay proactive about learning, which can also be a real bonus in the workplace. too.

> _Gamification can also have a positive effect when it comes to peer-learning._

Broadly defined as 'students learning from one another in both formal and informal ways', students may be able to collaborate on games via some platforms, while others will have a competitive element that encourages learners to top leaderboards and reach goals set by their peers. Apps like Duolingo, for example, have their own virtual currencies and league tables, which add some much-needed fun to the learning process.

Ultimately, it is easy to see why teachers and learners have become frustrated with online learning technologies, given the vast benefits that

an in-person education can have. That said, it is vital that educators do not dismiss the great potential that _gamification_ technologies hold for the future. When used effectively, learners will benefit from greater autonomy and motivation in the long run.

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