



## Motivating through gamification

*“Students take on the role of lawyers in a simulated legal case, so they have to take sides with a client who presents [legal] problems. We have two elements that stimulate motivation: on one hand there’s the logic of competition [...] and then there’s cooperation...” Quote from interview with Educator – [E103](#).*

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**Keywords:** [competition](#), [Formal education](#), [Gamification](#), [motivation](#)

**Who will find this scenario particularly interesting?** [Educators](#), [Policy makers](#), [Researchers](#)

### Description

In the research literature, gamification is seen as the application of game design elements in non-game contexts, where the elements do not constitute a fully-fledged game (Deterding et al., 2011). Although the term has come into general use only quite recently, basic elements of gamification like accumulating points and earning badges have been employed for years in different contexts, such as commercial loyalty programs.

In recent years, gamification has gained momentum within the business, corporate management and wellness sectors, and has raised interest in the academic and educational domains as well.

Undoubtedly, the key aspect driving researchers to analyse gamification in education is its potential for boosting motivation and engagement.

In their literature review, Hamari, Koivisto, & Sarsa (2014) report positive overall results in terms of perceived motivation, engagement and enjoyment of learning tasks, but stress that negative outcomes may also be present, for example stress due to increased competitiveness among students, or distraction from learning objectives.



The discourse around motivation informs the literature on game-based learning globally, with almost general agreement about the positive motivational power of games. That said, there is considerable debate about the different types of motivation game elements foster, be it intrinsic (internal drive to perform an action) or extrinsic (drive triggered by external influences), as well as the impact each of these may have on learning (Deci et al., 2001).

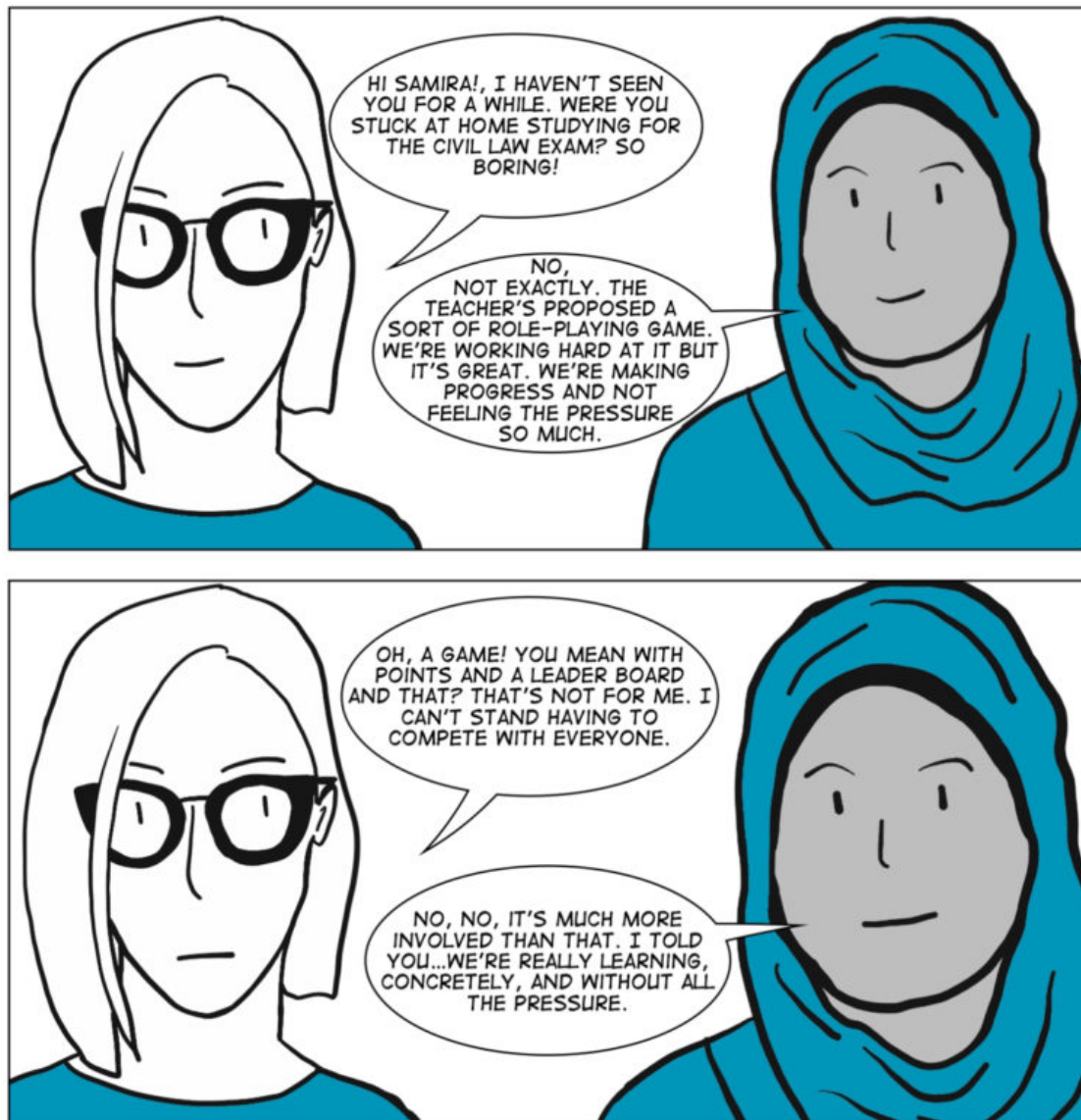
This scenario deals with the issues of motivation and competition, portraying the potential benefits of carefully designed gamification. It's inspired by an example of meaningful gamification reported in the research literature (Nicholson, 2012), in which conventional gamification elements like points are integrated with deeper game elements like narrative and challenges (Enders & Kapp, 2013). Here, extrinsic incentives trigger intrinsic motivation in some learners. It also highlights that whilst competition with peers can have a negative impact on learning, it can also stimulate motivation. Example of this include inter-team competition and the sense of achievement generated when learners complete a challenge.

## Meet Carla and Samira, law students



Carla and Samira are two friends studying law at university. They've just met up in the law faculty corridor and they're having a chat about university life. Carla knows that Samira has taken civil law and she's curious to know how her course is going. Carla herself took civil law the previous year and found it really hard going: it's a demanding subject calling for hours and hours of study. In the end she had to repeat the final exam several times before she managed to pass. It was particularly tough because she found

civil law boring and had no feeling for the concrete application of what she was studying. This year, though, Samira is attending the course with a new teacher who's restructured the course. After the first month, the teacher introduced a sort of a game that simulates an entire legal case. The students are playing the role of lawyers and have to complete some tasks in the effort to win the case.



Now Carla wants to know more about the approach. When she was at high school, a teacher tried to introduce something similar but it was all about earning points to boost your position in the final ranking. This made her feel frustrated and stressed because she really doesn't like being compared with her classmates. No way did earning points motivate her to study.

Samira tells Carla how different her experience is from that. The teacher set up a complete legal case, with a client who comes to a law firm for help. In this way, the students are fully immersed in a legal battle. They all work together in teams so that no one is left out. An assistant lecturer represents the opposition, and a real judge plays the role of the judge. So there's no competition among the students themselves. The teams work on tasks that reflect the actual steps taken in legal cases and the students

behave like real lawyers, studying the law and drafting all the necessary documents. In this way, they gain a real working knowledge of the civil law code. At the end of each task, each group presents its work in the form of a document, or is involved in a simulated judicial hearing. All the team outputs are assigned a grade and feedback is given. So each of the teams proceeds in the case but the final outcome depends on how they perform. The positive aspect is that all the groups can, in principle, win the case if they complete the tasks satisfactorily. Carla sees how completely different Samira's experience is from her own, and appreciates the way the professor is approaching the subject. Nevertheless, she points out that, at the end, there's still an exam on the civil law code to pass, and it won't be all fun and games like the playful experience Samira is engaged in now. Samira agrees, but explains that the game gave her the opportunity to experience a concrete application of the code and so now she's more motivated to study it, however daunting it may be. In the end, she reveals that actually she's quite a competitive person and so the approach suits her well.

## In a nutshell

The application of gamification in education is a fairly new approach that needs to be analysed further. Benefit would be gained from more rigorous studies investigating aspects like the mapping of the game elements in relation to individual learners and also to specific contexts, as well as short and long term outcomes. Researchers and policy makers should invest along these lines.

**Gamification should be carefully designed so to make the most of gaming motivational power.**

Gamification is a way to design a playful learning environment that can host a comprehensive learning path. Designing and implementing a gamified experience, possibly entailing blended (online and face-to-face) interactions, is a **feasible undertaking for individual teachers**, whereas digital game development requires a range of professional skills. Gamification also lends itself to progressive and manageable cycles of design, deployment and validation.

**Competition can create stress and harm collaboration, therefore its integration in learning environments should be preceded by careful consideration of the specific application context. Ideally, it should also take different forms.**

Competition can be a suitable game element to include in gamification, preferably in the form of personal challenge to achieve a goal, or as part of a mixed collaborative/competitive strategy.

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# Resources

## Research

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## Blogs

- Gamasutra: Rewards and Learning
- Karl Kapp: Competition and cooperation in gamification
- Medium: Intrinsic vs Extrinsic Motivation in Games



## Funding



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under Grant Agreement No 732332.

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