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BEYOND LECTURES: INSIGHTS FROM BUSINESS DISCIPLINES (REFLECTIONS, TRANSFORMATIONS, AND THE HUMAN SIDE OF TEACHING)

FACULTY OF BUSINESS AND MANAGEMENT
UiTM CAWANGAN JOHOR

Beyond Lectures: Insights from Business Discipline-

(Reflections, Transformations, and the Human Side of Teaching)

Chief Editor
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ENCOURAGING STUDENT ENGAGEMENT THROUGH STRATEGIC LEARNING CHALLENGES

Zanariah Abdul Rahman, Syaidatul Zarina Mat Din, Akmal Aini Othman, Norashikin Ismail

Engaging students in active learning is a critical aspect of effective pedagogy, particularly in courses where conceptual understanding and vocabulary acquisition are essential. In this study, structured learning challenges were implemented with pre-diploma students at UiTM Segamat who were enrolled in the Introduction to Business course. The aim was to enhance student engagement while supporting the intended learning outcomes. This approach reflects the use of game design elements in non-game educational settings to enhance learner engagement and participation (Deterding et al., 2011).

Over a four-week period, a series of carefully designed activities were integrated directly into the teaching process. Each activity aligned with the course syllabus but allowed flexibility to accommodate students' diverse learning needs. The tasks were designed to scaffold learning progressively, moving from basic recall exercises to more complex problem-solving and application-based challenges. This structured approach promoted participation, collaboration, and critical thinking, while helping students develop a deeper understanding of key business concepts. The incorporation of structured and interactive tasks aligns with gamification principles, which aim to make learning experiences more engaging and motivating for students (Deterding et al., 2011)

By examining the implementation process, student responses, and pedagogical outcomes, this study highlights the potential of strategic learning challenges as an effective method for fostering engagement and meaningful learning in lower-level business education contexts. The findings provide insights into designing interactive learning strategies that are both academically rigorous and motivating for learners.

Week 1: Introduction to Business

The first week focused on introducing students to foundational business terminology through a structured word puzzle activity. Key terms such as business, profit, and entrepreneurship were incorporated into the task. The activity began with a brief explanation of the terms and a demonstration of how to complete the puzzle, ensuring that students were familiar with the mechanics of the task before attempting it independently.

Initially, students demonstrated hesitancy and reliance on the lecturer for guidance, likely due to prior exposure to traditional lecture-based instruction. To address this, students were divided into small groups, promoting peer support and collaborative problem-solving. The lecturer encouraged discussion within groups, prompting students to explain their reasoning and clarify misunderstandings. This collaborative approach helped students gradually build confidence and reduced anxiety associated with the unfamiliar task format.

As the activity progressed, an increase in interaction, discussion, and shared problem-solving was observed. Students began to actively assist one another, demonstrating early signs of intrinsic motivation as they engaged with the material for personal satisfaction rather than for external rewards. Students' increased participation throughout the activities indicates the development of intrinsic motivation, where learning is driven by interest and personal satisfaction rather than external rewards (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The activity also provided opportunities for immediate feedback, with the lecturer circulating among groups to offer guidance, correct misconceptions, and reinforce understanding of key terms.

The Week 1 activity served multiple purposes beyond vocabulary familiarisation. It introduced students to active learning strategies, encouraged social interaction, and highlighted the value

of peer support in comprehension. By integrating a structured challenge early in the course, students were better prepared for more complex tasks in subsequent weeks.

Week 2: Types of Business Ownership
In the second week, students engaged in a word search activity focused on the topic Types of Business Ownership. Key terms such as sole proprietorship, partnership, and corporation were embedded in the puzzle, encouraging students to recognise and recall important concepts related to business structures.

To begin, students were divided into small groups and given instructions on how to complete the word search efficiently. The lecturer emphasised the importance of collaboration, suggesting that students discuss and share strategies for locating terms. This group-based approach facilitated peer learning, as students who quickly identified certain terms assisted those who faced difficulty. Such interaction promoted not only comprehension but also social engagement, fostering a sense of community within the classroom. The collaborative nature of the activity supports intrinsic motivation, as students engage actively through peer interaction and shared problem-solving rather than relying solely on external instruction. (Ryan & Deci, 2000)

Compared to Week 1, students exhibited higher confidence and greater willingness to participate. The word search activity, while simple, provided a low-pressure environment that allowed students to actively engage without fear of making mistakes. This gradual increase in task difficulty and complexity contributed to building intrinsic motivation, as students experienced both challenge and achievement.

The activity also incorporated elements of formative assessment, as students were encouraged to reflect on the terms they found and explain their relevance to the topic. The lecturer provided immediate feedback and clarifications, ensuring that misconceptions were addressed in real time. This practice reinforced understanding and helped students connect vocabulary with broader concepts of business ownership.

Moreover, the word search activity supported cognitive engagement by requiring students to focus attention, recognise patterns, and recall terminology, while also encouraging social engagement through discussion and collaboration. By participating actively, students were not only learning terminology but also developing problem-solving skills and teamwork strategies, which are critical competencies in business education.

Week 3: Management Concepts
During the third week, students participated in a matching activity designed to deepen their understanding of key management concepts. Students were required to pair terms such as planning, organizing, leading, and controlling with their respective definitions. Unlike the previous weeks, this task demanded a higher level of cognitive processing, as students needed not only to recall terms but also to analyse and apply their understanding to make accurate matches. The use of structured and interactive tasks reflects gamification principles, where elements of challenge and active participation are incorporated to enhance engagement and learning effectiveness. (Deterding et. al, 2011).

To facilitate engagement, students were organised into small groups, encouraging discussion and debate over the correct pairings. This collaborative approach allowed students to articulate their reasoning, justify their answers, and negotiate differing viewpoints, fostering both conceptual understanding and critical thinking skills. The lecturer circulated among groups, providing timely guidance, prompting deeper analysis, and ensuring misconceptions were addressed.

Compared to earlier weeks, in Week 3 student confidence and active participation increased. Students were more willing to take initiative, discuss alternatives, and support peers who were struggling. The structured nature of the task provided a clear challenge that was achievable yet stimulating, promoting intrinsic motivation and a sense of competence.

Week 4: Branding and Marketing Concepts

In the fourth week, students engaged in a clue-based logo recognition activity designed to connect theoretical knowledge of branding and marketing concepts with real-world applications. Students were presented with logos of well-known companies and asked to identify the corresponding brands, linking visual cues to concepts such as brand identity, market positioning, and consumer perception.

To promote engagement, students worked in small groups and were encouraged to discuss the clues collaboratively. This activity required not only recognition skills but also analytical thinking, as students had to connect abstract marketing concepts with concrete examples from the business world. Peer discussion played a key role, as students shared insights, justified their reasoning, and collectively resolved ambiguities. The lecturer acted as a facilitator, circulating among groups to provide hints, prompt deeper reflection, and clarify misunderstandings.

Week 4 demonstrated the highest level of student engagement throughout the four-week period. Students showed enthusiasm in identifying logos, actively debated their reasoning, and related the activity to prior knowledge from earlier weeks. The task's connection to real-world business applications heightened intrinsic motivation, as students could see the relevance and practical value of what they were learning. By linking theory to practice, the activity supported meaningful learning and reinforced retention of key concepts.

The tasks were designed progressively, beginning with basic recall activities and advancing to complex problem-solving exercises, which effectively scaffolded students' learning. By aligning the challenges with the syllabus, the activities became meaningful tools that reinforced understanding rather than serving merely as engaging exercises. Feedback from students indicated that the challenges made learning more enjoyable, easier to comprehend, and encouraged active participation. Suggestions for improvement, including the incorporation of multimedia or the simplification of certain tasks, emphasised the importance of continuously adapting teaching strategies to meet diverse learner needs. The emphasis on collaboration and progressively challenging tasks supports key motivational factors such as autonomy, competence, and relatedness, which are essential for sustaining student engagement. (Ryan & Deci, 2000)

Overall, the structured learning challenges successfully fostered student engagement, illustrating the potential of strategically designed activities to enhance motivation, collaboration, and understanding in lower-level business education contexts.

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