Gamification in Physics: Enhancing Learning Through Interactive Web Tools (BrainPhy)

Nur Hasni Nasrudin[1,3], Muhammad Mirza Amirun Niza[2], Samsiah Ahmad[4], Rosida Ahmad Junid[5]

[1,2,3]Faculty of Computer and Mathematical Sciences, University Technology MARA, Perak Branch Tapah Campus, Perak, Malaysia.

[4]Language Studies, University Technology MARA, Perak Branch Tapah Campus, Perak, Malaysia.

[5]Green Safe Cities (GreSafe) Research Group, Department of Build Environment Studies and Technology, College of built environment, University Technology MARA, 32610, Perak Branch, Perak, Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the development of a web-based educational platform that applies gamification principles to enhance the learning of thermal concepts in the International General Certificate of Secondary Education's (IGCSE) physics curriculum. Through interactive simulations and engaging challenges, students are encouraged to explore complex thermal phenomena in a fun and motivating environment. The platform aims to improve comprehension and fosters collaboration among peers, making the learning experience more dynamic and enjoyable. The platform is designed to improve students' understanding of heat-related topics by integrating simulations, real-time feedback, quizzes, and motivational features such as experience points and rewards. The system was built using the Game Development Life Cycle model, which includes initiation, pre-production, production, and testing phases. A pilot evaluation involving 149 students aged 16 and 17 demonstrated that the platform is user-friendly, promotes engagement, and supports conceptual clarity in thermal physics.

Keyword: Physics Education, Gamification, Interactive Simulation, IGCSE, Interactive Learning, GDLC, Thermal Concepts

INTRODUCTION

Physics plays a vital role in science education by helping students recognize the basic principles of the natural world. These principles provide a foundation for understanding more complex scientific concepts across various disciplines. By engaging in physics, students develop critical thinking skills that are essential for problem-solving in both academic and real-world situations. However, many students struggle with learning physics due to its abstract concepts and mathematical nature. Traditional classroom instruction often lacks interactivity and visual support, which can result in low engagement and poor conceptual understanding among learners (Singh et al., 2021). This issue is especially evident in high school environments where students are expected to grasp challenging topics such as wave behavior, electromagnetism, and pressure without sufficient visual or hands-on tools.

To address these challenges, educators are increasingly turning to digital learning platforms that incorporate gamification and interactive simulations into the learning process. Gamification involves applying game-like elements such as points, badges, levels, and progress tracking to educational environments. Studies have shown that gamification can improve student motivation, focus, and knowledge retention in science subjects (Hamari et al., 2020). In addition, interactive simulations allow learners to explore and manipulate variables in real time, which enhances their understanding of abstract concepts through visual experimentation and active participation (Kalogiannakis and Papadakis, 2021). These innovative approaches foster a more engaging

learning atmosphere and cater to diverse learning styles, making education more inclusive. By integrating technology with traditional teaching methods, educators can create a dynamic curriculum that prepares students for the challenges of the modern world.

Although gamified platforms and simulations have gained attention recently, many existing tools are not aligned with specific syllabi such as the International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE). To effectively engage students and enhance their learning experiences, it is crucial for developers to create resources that not only incorporate gamification elements but also align closely with educational standards. By doing so, educators can ensure that students remain motivated while mastering the required curriculum. Furthermore, these platforms often separate assessment from learning activities and lack immediate feedback mechanisms. As a result, students may struggle to make meaningful connections between theoretical knowledge and practical application (Subhash and Cudney, 2018). To fill this gap, this project introduces a gamified, web-based physics learning platform specifically designed for the IGCSE curriculum. The platform integrates quizzes, real-time feedback, interactive simulations, and motivational features into a single cohesive system.

This project aims to improve the learning experience by enabling students to explore physics topics through trial and error, repetition, and the use of visual tools. By facilitating self-paced learning and providing instant feedback, the system empowers learners to take active control of their educational journey and develop a more robust understanding of complex physics concepts. Additionally, the system provides educators with an effective resource to complement traditional teaching methods through interactive and engaging content. These features promote deeper conceptual comprehension and foster a collaborative learning environment. This dynamic approach not only enhances individual learning experiences but also encourages students to share insights and problem-solving strategies with one another. As a result, learners become more confident in their abilities, paving the way for greater academic success in the field of physics. As students collaborate to solve problems and exchange insights, they strengthen their critical thinking abilities and cultivate a supportive classroom community.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Gamification in Education

Gamification in education has gained increasing attention for its ability to foster learner motivation, engagement, and persistence. Educational platforms that integrate game elements such as progress tracking, rewards, and challenges have been shown to enhance user satisfaction and academic performance. Hamari et al. (2014) highlight that gamification can positively influence behavior by leveraging feedback systems and motivational triggers. Similarly, Subhash and Cudney (2018) emphasized that game-based learning strategies increase student involvement, particularly in tasks that are repetitive or demand high cognitive effort. These findings support the integration of gamified frameworks into educational content delivery, especially in disciplines like physics that require active learner participation and conceptual understanding. By creating interactive and immersive learning environments, educators can engage students more effectively, fostering deeper comprehension of complex scientific concepts and better preparing them for real-world applications. The BrainPhy platform exemplifies this approach by leveraging gamification principles to transform physics education through interactive web tools.

Physics Learning Challenges

Physics education at the secondary school level continues to face significant instructional challenges, particularly in Malaysia, where abstract concepts are often conveyed through traditional, lecture-based methods. Singh and Schunn (2021) highlight that students frequently struggle to connect theoretical equations with tangible, real-world phenomena, resulting in rote memorization rather than authentic conceptual understanding. The inherently abstract nature of core physics topics—such as pressure, electromagnetism, and thermodynamics—emphasizes the necessity for instructional approaches that incorporate visualization and interactive learning tools. Without such resources, misconceptions tend to persist, and students may find it difficult to develop the analytical and problem-solving skills critical for success in advanced science and

engineering fields. To address these challenges, educators must adopt innovative teaching strategies that promote deeper engagement with the material. By integrating interactive simulations and collaborative projects, students can develop a more intuitive understanding of complex concepts, effectively bridging the gap between theory and practice. Platforms like BrainPhy exemplify how gamified, web-based tools can support these pedagogical goals by fostering active learning and sustained motivation.

Existing Solutions and Gaps

Several digital platforms, including PhET Interactive Simulations, Brilliant.org, and Kahoot!, have been developed to enhance engagement in physics education. While these tools provide interactive content and assessment opportunities, they frequently lack integration with formal curricular frameworks such as the IGCSE. Moreover, many existing platforms separate instructional simulations from assessment tools and do not offer immediate feedback mechanisms. According to Kalogiannakis and Papadakis (2021), the absence of unified content delivery, learner assessment, and feedback can disrupt the flow of the learning process. To address these limitations, this project introduces a comprehensive platform that aligns with the IGCSE syllabus and seamlessly integrates instructional simulations, formative assessment, and real-time feedback within a gamified environment. This unified approach aims to foster deeper engagement and more effective learning outcomes in secondary physics education.

METHODOLOGY

The project was developed following the Game Development Life Cycle (GDLC) model, which consists of four separate phases: initiation, pre-production, production, and testing. The initiation phase involved defining project goals and requirements, while pre-production focused on detailed planning and design. During production, the platform's core features and content were developed iteratively, allowing continuous refinement based on feedback. Finally, the testing phase ensured functionality, usability, and pedagogical efficacy. This structured approach facilitated clear project management, supported iterative development cycles, and ensured that the platform consistently aligned with educational objectives throughout its development. The team's coordinated efforts during each phase were crucial in addressing issues as they emerged. By fostering open communication and leveraging diverse expertise, the project met its goals and set a precedent for future educational initiatives.

Initiation

The platform's objective was defined based on identified learning challenges in thermal physics. Consultations with physics teachers and a detailed review of the IGCSE syllabus highlighted key topics such as heat capacity, conduction, convection, radiation, and kinetic theory. These topics were prioritized for inclusion due to their inherent complexity and the high frequency of student errors observed in these areas.

Pre-Production

A comprehensive design documentation was developed to specify the platform's modules and user experience features. Interface wireframes and supporting diagrams were created to demonstrate quiz progression, simulation stages, and user interaction patterns. The platform's modular framework included interactive assessments, visual simulations, explanatory panels, and progress dashboards, each designed to facilitate effective learning. Throughout the design process, careful attention was paid to managing cognitive load, ensuring accessibility, and accommodating the digital habits common among students within the target age group. This careful approach not only increased engagement but also promoted retention of information among learners. By integrating user feedback and iterative testing, the final product emerged as a comprehensive educational tool that effectively meets the needs of its intended audience.

Production

The application was developed using React.js as the primary frontend framework, with JavaScript ES6 employed for dynamic logic control. Tailwind CSS was used to create a responsive layout, while Vite

facilitated project bundling and enabled live development. Firebase services enabled user authentication, real-time data storage, and deployment.

Key added features are:

1. Structured quizzes with immediate feedback, layered explanations, and optional hints
2. Interactive simulations demonstrate particle motion, temperature increase, and energy transfer via conduction and convection
3. Gamification components such as experience point accumulation, achievement badges, and progress tracking are linked to topic mastery
4. Visual dashboards designed to help learners identify their strengths and areas for improvement
5. Introductory walkthroughs to familiarize new users with the platform

This technical design and feature set are intended to create an interesting and effective learning environment for students studying thermal physics.

Testing

A testing phase involved 149 participants: 61 students aged 16, 60 students aged 17, and 28 former students aged 21 to 23, all of whom had previously completed IGCSE Physics at the same school. Participants utilized the gamified web-based learning platform, which focused specifically on thermal physics topics.

During the study, students participated in thermal simulations, quizzes, and utilized progress tracking features. Usability, content relevance, interface design, and instructional impact were assessed via observations and structured surveys. The quantitative results revealed that all students regarded the heat-related content relevant to their IGCSE curriculum and found the quizzes and mock tests effective in reinforcing their understanding. The platform's interface and visual design received uniformly positive feedback.

Qualitative observations highlighted high engagement levels, with many students voluntarily repeating quizzes to improve scores and deepen comprehension. Teachers reported that students generated more conceptually driven and insightful questions after using the platform, suggesting an increase in cognitive engagement. These findings suggest that the platform successfully met its educational objectives and fostered a positive learning environment. Moreover, the observed high engagement suggests the possibility of integrating similar gamified tools across other subjects to improve overall student performance. The results collectively indicate the platform's efficacy in fostering independent learning and enhancing conceptual clarity via gamification.

System Architecture

The gamified learning platform was designed using a three-tier architecture, comprising the User Tier, Application Tier, and Source Tier. Each tier is responsible for a specific set of functionalities, contributing to a cohesive, modular, and scalable educational web application aligned with the IGCSE Physics syllabus.

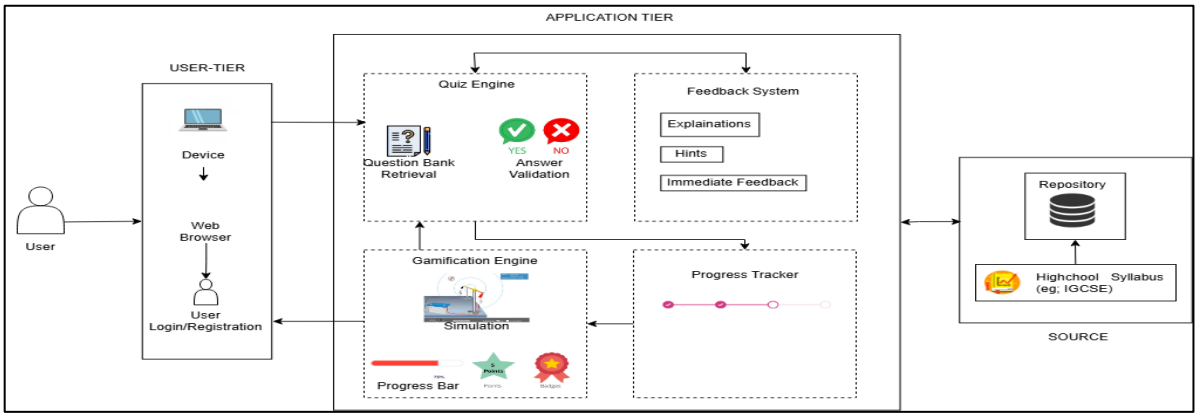

Figure 4.1: System Architecture

At the User Tier, students access the platform via a web browser on their personal devices. This tier facilitates user login and registration, enabling personalized tracking and access to the learning environment. The front end is developed using React.js, ensuring responsiveness across various devices and seamless interaction with the underlying application logic.

The Application Tier serves as the core of the system, comprising four main subsystems:

Quiz Engine

This component retrieves questions from the question bank repository, ensuring they align with the IGCSE syllabus. It facilitates answer validation by marking user responses as either correct or incorrect. The quiz engine operates dynamically with the feedback system and incorporates gamification elements to enhance user engagement.

Feedback System

Once a user submits a response, the feedback system provides immediate feedback, which includes explanations and context-sensitive hints. This mechanism reinforces learning by addressing misconceptions in real time and encouraging conceptual understanding instead of rote memorization. This approach enhances the user's engagement and fosters a more personalized learning experience. By tailoring feedback to individual responses, users can develop their skills more effectively and confidently.

Gamification Engine

This subsystem features interactive simulations, progress bars, points, and badges. The simulation module enables users to explore physical phenomena by manipulating variables and observing the resulting outcomes through visual animations. The reward system encourages learners to complete activities and willingly revisit learning tasks.

Progress Tracker

A personalized tracking system monitors user performance across various modules. Visual progress indicators assist students in identifying their strengths and areas that require improvement. This component also acts as a formative tool for both students and teachers, enabling them to assess learning outcomes over time.

At the backend, the Source Tier consists of a repository that stores syllabus-aligned content, including the heat topic utilized in this study. This repository is built on Firebase, which manages user authentication, real-time data storage, and cloud-based content delivery. All question items and learning assets are organized according to the high school physics syllabus to ensure a consistent learning progression.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A quantitative evaluation was conducted among students who are either currently studying or have studied the IGCSE Physics curriculum, focusing specifically on the topic of heat. The assessment involved 149 students, including 121 current students (ages 16 and 17) and 28 former students (ages 21 to 23) from the same school. Feedback from these students was utilized to evaluate usability, design satisfaction, and instructional value.

All 149 respondents were asked whether the learning content on heat was relevant and useful for their IGCSE Physics studies. As shown in Figure 1, 100% of students agreed that the content was helpful and directly aligned with their learning needs. This unanimous approval reflects the platform’s effectiveness in addressing curriculum-specific topics in an accessible manner.

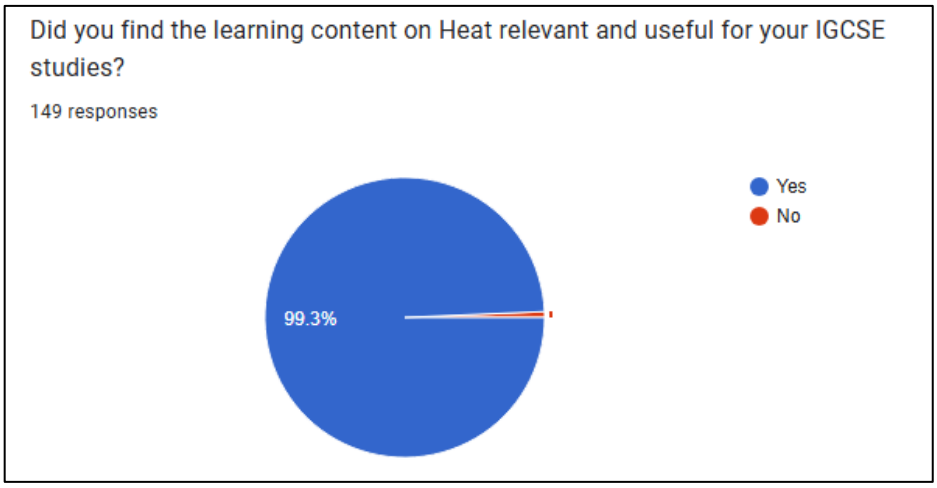

Figure 5.1: Result of Relevance and Usefulness for IGCSE Learning.

In terms of visual design and presentation, the platform received equally positive feedback. As shown in Figure 5.2, **100% of the students reported** that the interface was visually pleasing and suitable for a physics learning application. This outcome highlights the effectiveness of the UI design strategy in providing a clean, user-friendly, and subject-appropriate experience.

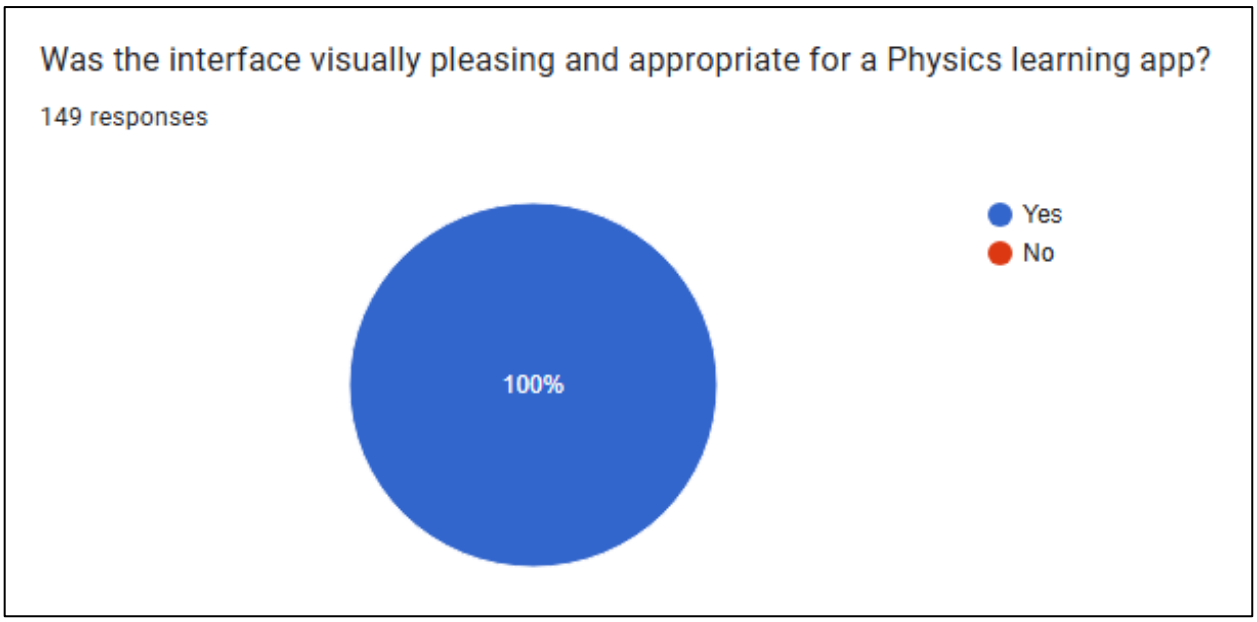

Figure 5.2: Result of overall design satisfactory.

The overwhelmingly positive ratings for overall design satisfaction reflect the application's success in delivering financial information to users through visualization elements. The high scores indicate that the design resonates well with the user base, which is essential for an engaging experience and understanding. However, some lower scores suggest that a few users find the design merely sufficient for their needs, despite the overall favorable results. One participant recommends enhancing the button design by incorporating a greater degree of interactivity. The researcher will consider these suggestions for future improvements.

One of the key pedagogical features of the platform is the inclusion of quizzes and mock tests designed to reinforce understanding. As illustrated in Figure 5.3, **100% of respondents reported** that the quizzes and assessments helped them better understand the heat topic. This result reinforces the importance of formative assessments and active recall in science education. Such tools not only enhance retention but also provide immediate feedback, enabling learners to identify areas for improvement. Therefore, integrating these interactive elements can significantly elevate the overall educational experience.

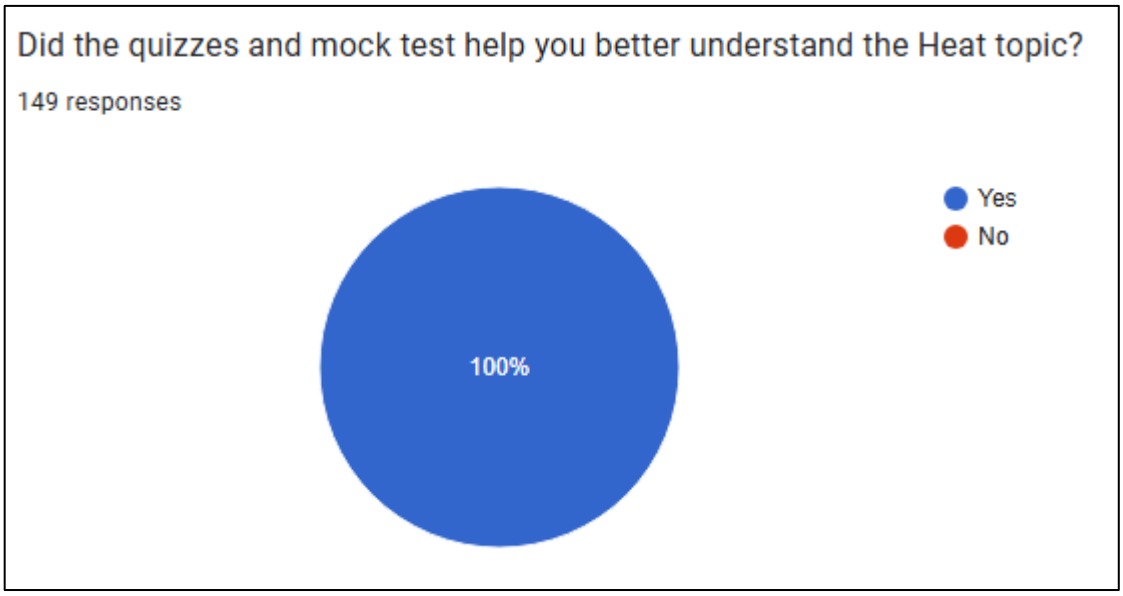

Figure 5.3: Usefulness of Quizzes and Mock Tests for Concept Understanding

The overwhelmingly positive feedback suggests that students not only engaged with the content but also gained a deeper understanding through repeated testing and feedback loops. Several students took the initiative to revisit quizzes in order to improve their scores and comprehension, demonstrating intrinsic motivation fostered by gamified elements such as points, badges, and feedback.

In summary, the evaluation demonstrates that the gamified learning platform successfully met the needs of both current and former IGCSE students. Participants rated the platform's content, interface, and assessment features with high satisfaction. Notably, the use of visual simulations, structured quizzes, and feedback systems proved particularly beneficial in helping students understand challenging concepts related to thermal physics.

CONCLUSION

This study presents the design and implementation of a gamified educational platform that focuses on thermal concepts within the IGCSE Physics syllabus. By integrating simulations, quizzes, feedback, and hints into a single digital system, the platform addresses the cognitive and motivational challenges students encounter when learning heat transfer and particle theory. Evaluation with the intended student population confirmed that the platform is effective, engaging, and suitable for both classroom and independent learning. The positive feedback from students highlights the potential of gamified approaches to transform traditional learning environments. Future iterations of the platform may explore additional features, such as opportunities for collaborative learning and adaptive learning paths, to further enhance student engagement and understanding. Future enhancements will also consider adapting the platform for mobile applications, providing personalized feedback using artificial intelligence, and expanding the subject matter beyond thermal physics. These advancements could significantly broaden the platform's reach and improve its effectiveness, making learning more accessible and tailored to individual needs. By integrating these features, educators can foster a more dynamic and inclusive learning experience that addresses the diverse requirements of all students.

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