

# **GAMECHANGE: Innovative Board Games for Youth Engagement**

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## **Academic Research – Cyprus Team**

### **GAME CHANGE (KA210YOU)**

#### **1.1 Introduction and Research Design**

The present chapter presents the academic research conducted by the Cyprus team within the framework of the GAME CHANGE (KA210YOU) project. The research was designed and implemented following academic research standards and aimed to explore the role, effectiveness, and challenges of gamification and game-based methodologies in education and youth work. The research adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative research tools, in order to provide both empirical evidence and interpretive insights into the impact of gamification on motivation, learning outcomes, inclusion, and engagement.

Cyprus constitutes a particularly relevant case study due to ongoing demographic changes, increasing cultural and linguistic diversity, and the rapid integration of digital technologies into both formal and non-formal learning environments. These conditions create a strong need for innovative, inclusive, and motivating educational practices. Gamification, understood as the use of game design elements in non-game contexts, has been identified as a promising pedagogical approach capable of responding to these emerging needs.

#### **1.2 Methodological Framework: Qualitative and Quantitative Research**

The Cyprus team implemented a mixed-methods research design. Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews with educators and youth workers experienced in the application of gamified learning methods. This approach allowed for in-depth exploration of participants' perceptions, experiences, and observed impacts of gamification in real educational and youth work settings. Qualitative research was selected due to its capacity to capture complex social and educational processes and to provide rich contextual understanding.

In parallel, quantitative research tools were employed to examine measurable outcomes related to learner motivation, engagement, and learning performance. Structured questionnaires and pre- and post-assessment instruments were used to generate numerical data that enabled statistical comparison between gamified and non-gamified learning experiences. The combination of these two approaches strengthens the validity and reliability of the findings, allowing for triangulation of results.

The methodological design aligns with established research practices in educational innovation studies and reflects similar mixed-method approaches used in European research on gamification and digital learning.

#### **1.3 Desk Research and National Context**

##### **Cyprus Team Contribution**

Desk research conducted by the Cyprus team provides a comprehensive overview of the national context in which gamification is currently developing. Over the past two decades, Cyprus has undergone significant demographic, technological, and pedagogical changes. Increasing migration and cultural diversity have resulted in multilingual classrooms, while digitalization has reshaped learners' expectations and modes of engagement. These developments have placed pressure on educators to move beyond traditional, teacher-centered instructional methods.

Within this evolving context, gamification has emerged as a relevant and increasingly discussed educational strategy. Although gamification is not formally embedded within national educational policy, it aligns with broader governmental initiatives promoting digital innovation, ICT integration, and interactive pedagogical approaches. As a result, its implementation largely depends on the initiative of individual educators, schools, universities, and non-formal education organizations.

Cyprus-based academic research strongly supports the relevance of gamification in local educational settings. Empirical studies conducted in augmented and virtual reality environments demonstrate that gamified learning experiences significantly increase student motivation, engagement, learning gains, and perceived competence. Notably, comparative studies between gamified and non-gamified VR environments revealed statistically significant advantages for learners exposed to gamified designs, particularly in terms of learning outcomes and self-perceived competence. These findings confirm that gamification is not only theoretically applicable but empirically effective within the Cypriot educational context.

## **1.4 Current Practices of Gamification in Cyprus**

### **Cyprus Team Contribution**

The desk research highlights that gamification practices in Cyprus are currently implemented in a fragmented and non-systematic manner. In formal education, gamification is most commonly applied through digital quizzes, point-based team activities, interactive challenges, and short-term project-based learning, often supported by platforms such as Kahoot or Quizizz. These practices are more frequently observed during project weeks, Erasmus+ activities, or innovative classroom initiatives rather than as part of daily instruction.

In non-formal education settings, particularly within youth organizations and NGOs, gamification is more extensively and creatively applied. Youth workers frequently use challenge-based workshops, mission-oriented activities, role-playing scenarios, and cooperative gameboards to foster engagement, teamwork, and inclusion. These environments offer greater flexibility and are less constrained by rigid curricula or exam-oriented structures.

Gamification is also increasingly present in second-language (L2) Greek classrooms, particularly for learners with migrant backgrounds. Qualitative evidence indicates that gamified activities support language development by reducing anxiety, encouraging participation, and creating low-pressure learning environments. However, educators report a lack of structured training and ready-to-use resources, limiting the scalability of these practices.

## **1.5 Attitudes, Challenges, and Barriers**

### **Cyprus Team Contribution**

Both qualitative interviews and desk research indicate that attitudes toward gamification among Cypriot educators and youth workers are generally positive. Gamification is widely perceived as a method that increases learner motivation, enhances collaboration, and supports the inclusion of shy or marginalized participants. Educators recognize its potential to transform passive learning environments into active and participatory spaces.

Despite these positive attitudes, significant challenges hinder broader implementation. These include insufficient professional training, limited access to digital tools in some schools, curriculum overload, time constraints, and a strong exam-oriented educational culture. Additionally, misconceptions persist that gamification lacks academic seriousness or leads to

superficial learning. Similar barriers have been identified in comparative research conducted in Greece and other European countries, suggesting that these challenges are structural rather than context-specific.

## 1.6 Opportunities and Future Potential

### Cyprus Team Contribution

The Cyprus team's research identifies substantial opportunities for the expansion of gamification in both formal and non-formal education. European programmes such as Erasmus+ and eTwinning provide institutional support and funding for innovative pedagogical approaches, enabling cross-border exchange of good practices. Universities and research centers in Cyprus are increasingly engaged in the design and evaluation of gamified AR and VR learning environments, contributing to evidence-based innovation.

Furthermore, youth NGOs demonstrate strong expertise in gamified methodologies and can act as mediators between research, policy, and practice. Digital cultural tools and game-inspired platforms developed locally further illustrate growing national interest in playful and interactive learning approaches. These developments position Cyprus as a fertile environment for the systematic integration of gamification through collaborative, multi-stakeholder initiatives.

## 1.7 Synthesis of Findings

The academic research conducted by the Cyprus team demonstrates that gamification constitutes a powerful educational and youth work methodology capable of enhancing motivation, learning outcomes, and social inclusion. The integration of qualitative insights, quantitative evidence, and desk research ensures a robust analytical framework. While structural barriers remain, the empirical findings confirm strong potential for expansion, particularly when supported by training, institutional recognition, and international cooperation.

These conclusions provide a solid foundation for the subsequent phases of the GAME CHANGE project, including cross-country comparative analysis and the co-creation of educational gameboards grounded in research-based practice.

## Bibliography

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