

## DESIGNING INNOVATIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

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### **Abstract:**

For educators to be successful in capturing student attention in today's information intensive environment, simply creating learning opportunities is not enough. Ultimately, we need to create an engaging experience. The latest state of the art information and communication technologies do not automatically create an innovative learning environment. To justify their use in the classroom, they need to add value in the form of increased student motivation and engagement.

According to the self-determination theory (SDT), people have three innate psychological needs that affect our motivation: competence (a sense of progress, success and mastery), autonomy (a sense of being able to make meaningful decisions about our behaviour) and relatedness (a sense of connection with others). SDT represents a suitable theoretical foundation for applications in the field of education, because it stresses the importance of intrinsic motivation, which refers to doing something because it is inherently interesting or enjoyable. Building on SDT, the concept of gamification seeks to apply game elements to non-game contexts in order to engage audiences and solve problems. A true innovative learning environment is the one that engages students in a way that they are active and learn because they so desire. Every element of an innovative learning environment should therefore be judged by the extent it contributes to the sense of mastery, autonomy and relatedness of the participants. Such environments will stimulate lifelong learning and will result in knowledge that does not last only until the next exam.

We set out to design innovative learning environments and implemented changes across different courses at Ekonomška šola Ljubljana. Compared to the previous year when classes were conducted in the traditional way, new approaches resulted in: higher levels of student engagement (according to the evaluation by the teachers), higher grades, higher knowledge (according to the evaluation by the teachers and the students) and better atmosphere (according to the evaluation by the students).

*Keywords: innovative learning environments, student engagement, gamification*