

Challenges in Implementing Game-based Learning in Accounting Education: A Scoping Review

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Abstract: Digital technologies have become essential tools in advancing Game-based Learning (GBL), bringing about transformational education whilst accelerating the United Nations Agenda 2030. To contribute to the achievement of Quality Education as prescribed in the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 4), inclusive access to technology alone is not sufficient. An integrative approach that is not only effective in promoting lifelong skills development in the classroom and beyond is required to accelerate the continuous integration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and the effective implementation of GBL in the curriculum. However, the integration of GBL in education, specifically in Accounting Education, remains an underutilised emerging pedagogy. The challenges associated with implementing GBL technologies are also not well understood. This consequently hinders proactive measures in addressing them. The central argument this study makes is that without a clear pedagogical approach to accounting education, students' learning skills can be challenged, which in turn affects equitable access to transformative technological education necessary to effectively support students' academic success and advancement of innovative pedagogical practices. This study draws on a constructive theoretical framework to unlock the experiential significance of GBL in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). A qualitative study adopting a scoping literature review on digital GBL in Accounting education guided the exploration of the implementation impact of GBL, as well as the challenges experienced by Accounting instructors in its adoption. The main finding of the study revealed that GBL in Accounting is critical despite existing negative perceptions of its effective adoption as a pedagogical tool. The study argues that the experiential nature of GBL necessitates the alignment of game designs with pedagogical principles in line with educators' and students' diverse teaching and learning styles to better enhance accounting education academic experiences.

Keywords: Accounting education, Digital games, Game-based learning, HEIs, ICT, Scoping review

1. Introduction

The proliferation of digital technologies, such as social media and smart mobile technologies is cross sectoral and higher education is no exception (Alruthaya, Nguyen & Lokuge, 2021). In today's digitalised society, higher education institutions must prepare their students for the job market, which necessitates that educators adapt their teaching methods to achieve the desired learning outcomes (Fernández-Raga *et al.*, 2023). Moreover, as students born in the twenty-first century, referred to as Generation Z (Gen Zs), begin their tertiary education, educators are prompted to innovate their pedagogical approaches to address the unique learning needs of these students (Ding *et al.*, 2017). Often, Gen Zs lack the ability to fully concentrate on a single task, requiring multiple interactive activities to remain focused. Furthermore, Gen Zs are also considered the 'Net Generation', they practically cannot disconnect from the internet because they have grown in an era of constant connectivity and social media (Rothman, 2016). Consequently, Gen Z students predominantly favour visual imagery, videos, and technology over traditional auditory learning methods, such as recorded lectures (Cickovska, 2020; Cilliers, 2017). This generation also prefers multitasking, and since it tends to have shorter attention spans, they also require game-based active lectures carried out by lecturers who adopt educational "entertainment skillfully" as a means to "impart knowledge effectively" (Seemiller & Grace, 2017; Mkuti & Munyeka, 2025).

In response to digitalisation and an evolving student typology, educators have begun to explore in-class games, known as game-based learning (GBL), to increase classroom engagement and improve student motivation (Saxena & Mishra, 2021). It is worth noting that, while GBL and gamification are frequently used synonymously, they represent distinct concepts. Gamification involves incorporating specific game design elements into non-game contexts, such as marketing strategy, where customers can earn points through loyalty programs and rewards memberships (Al Fatta *et al.*, 2018). In contrast, GBL, which is the focus of this study, employs games in the educational context, integrating content derived from the school curriculum to improve students' learning experiences (Silva *et al.*, 2019).

Literature points to a lack of scholarly consensus on whether GBL fosters more impactful learning, improves students' concentration, motivation, and engagement, particularly in relation to Accounting education (Bakhsh *et al.*, 2022; Ding *et al.*, 2017; Zhao, 2019). However, Winfield and Whitelaw (2024) contend that Accounting

educators are hesitant to adopt digital pedagogies. Almunstsr et al. (2024) support this philosophy, indicating that the implementation of GBL in Accounting remains limited. Additionally, Batalha (2021) argues that a technology reform is needed in Accounting education, as the tools and technologies used by accountants in practice are not represented in the teaching pedagogies used by Accounting educators. As Bhavani et al. (2020) posit, there is sparse literature on GBL in Accounting education, which provides little insight into the challenges faced by Accounting instructors in implementing these pedagogies.

This paper will begin by outlining the significance of the study and the research questions; thereafter, the research objective and the method for selecting articles for this scoping review will be explained. The discussion that follows is divided into two parts: the challenges of implementing GBL in Accounting education and the impacts, perceptions, and opportunities for its implementation.

2. Significance of the Study and Research Questions

While numerous studies have recognised the importance of digital reform in higher education and its absence in Accounting education, there is a gap in the literature regarding GBL, its challenges, and strategies to circumvent them. As higher education institutions adapt to digitisation, changing student demographics, and diverse learning styles, Accounting educators must also include digital strategies in their teaching methodologies. Therefore, this review of existing scholarship aims to provide Accounting educators with insights to proactively address these challenges and successfully incorporate GBL into their pedagogical approaches.

This study conducts a scoping review of the existing literature to provide insights into the pedagogical challenges associated with implementing GBL in Accounting. Furthermore, this review will also attempt to answer the following research questions:

- What challenges are Accounting educators experiencing in incorporating GBL into their pedagogical approaches?
- How have Accounting educators previously integrated GBL into their instructional methods, and what were their impacts and perceptions?
- What opportunities exist for Accounting instructors implementing GBL in classrooms?

3. Research Objective and Method

The objective of this study is to explore the challenges associated with integrating GBL into the Accounting syllabus. To achieve this objective and answer the research questions, a qualitative scoping review has been conducted. Following the scoping review model proposed by Pollock et al., (2024) and the PRISMA model (Moher et al., 2015), this review will first present the inclusion and exclusion criteria, followed by the development of a search strategy. This scoping review will then screen the studies, selecting only those that meet the established inclusion criteria. Thereafter, this research will outline the study selection and data extraction processes, and subsequent sections will provide the analysis and interpretation of the findings.

3.1 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Using the PICO model developed by Stern et al. (2014), three core elements informed the inclusion criteria for this scoping review: namely, the Population, the phenomenon of Interest, and the Context. The Population comprises documents covering students in higher or tertiary education; thus, this review included only studies that specifically focus on tertiary students. Studies lacking a defined educational level or involving participants from elementary or secondary education were excluded from this research.

The phenomenon of Interest and the Context for this review are game-based learning in the field of Accounting; therefore, only studies focusing on this knowledge area were considered for suitability, and those discussing GBL in other disciplines were excluded. As previously highlighted, gamification and GBL are often used interchangeably in the literature; accordingly, both terms were included in the criteria for this review. Naik (2014) defines non-digital GBL as physical, card, and board games in the classroom. This method, as observed by Van Eck (2006) and Kalogiannakis et al. (2021), has long been established and shown to be effective. Consequently, the challenges regarding non-digital GBL in Accounting education have been excluded from this scoping review.

The final criterion, Context, was further disaggregated to address both the type of literature reviewed and the time period in which the studies were conducted. Given the rapid technological advances and the nature of the research questions, this scoping review included only primary studies published between 2016 and 2026.

3.2 Development of a Search Strategy

A search was conducted in electronic databases, using various combinations of the following search terms ("accounting education" AND (games OR gamification OR game-based learning OR educational games)). An advanced search filter was applied to narrow the results to articles published between 2016 and 2026. The databases searched were Academic Search Ultimate, Business Source Ultimate, eBook Collection (EBSCOhost), EconLit with Full Text, and Education Source. It is noteworthy that applying these search terms in healthcare and science databases yielded no relevant results for this study. The comprehensive search identified 68 articles that aligned with the search criteria, focusing specifically on game-based learning in Accounting education published between 2016 and 2026.

3.3 Study Selection, Extraction and Critical Appraisal

By assessing the abstracts of the 67 identified articles, studies that focused on physical games, those related to other disciplines such as computer science, existing secondary studies reviewing the literature on GBL in Accounting, and studies that implemented GBL for accounting professionals or learners outside of tertiary education were excluded. Duplicates or revisions to existing articles were also excluded from the study selection. Ultimately, 30 articles were excluded for not meeting the established inclusion criteria, and 37 articles were retained for this scoping review.

Following the appraisal methods suggested by Aromataris and Pearson (2014), the full texts of the 37 studies were evaluated for methodological rigour. The excluded data did not meet the requirements of the study due to performance bias: their interventions occurred outside scheduled classroom times, allowing learners to complete the digital GBL activities at their convenience, which potentially undermined the positive effects of these activities on classroom engagement and learner performance. Another reason for exclusion was that the data collected did not address the challenges associated with implementing GBL in Accounting studies and therefore did not align with the research questions of this scoping review. In addition, articles from Google Scholar were excluded to avoid the paywalls and filter limitations to specific GBL areas of study. As Aromataris and Pearson (2014) further observed, the data collected from individual studies should always address the questions posed by the scoping review. Consequently, after assessing the methodological rigour of the 37 full-text studies, 11 studies relevant to GBL in Accounting education were ultimately selected for further discussion on the challenges and opportunities presented by GBL.

4. Discussion: The Challenges and Opportunities of Game-based Learning Activities in Accounting Education

4.1 The Challenges in Incorporating GBL in Accounting Education

Q1: What challenges are Accounting educators experiencing in incorporating GBL into their pedagogical approaches?

To respond to this research question, 11 studies on GBL in Accounting education were retained for this review, where 9 focused on students' perceptions of GBL, while 2 examined these perceptions from lecturers' perspectives. These challenges and how other scholars have circumvented them are organised into two themes, which are discussed below:

Time constraints

Seow and Wong (2016) developed a mobile application called Accounting Challenge (ACE) to increase students' motivation in Accounting. However, due to copyright concerns, Seow and Wong (2016) were unable to implement GBL activities using textbook questions and were instead required to design unique questions (Seow & Wong, 2016). Similarly, Calabor et al. (2019) noted that changes to course materials that needed to be integrated into GBL activities had to be updated manually, creating insufficient time to implement GBL in the classroom. The process of creating and updating GBL-specific questions was time-intensive, which is a finding shared by other Accounting educators (Baaske et al., 2025; Kuang et al., 2024).

To proactively address these challenges, Scalan and Huff (2020) enlisted graduate assistants to ease the time and administrative burden associated with developing and updating solutions, thereby reducing the time constraints that would have been experienced by the Accounting educators. Wood (2024) and Carenys et al. (2017) also opted to utilise an off-the-shelf game to overcome the identified time barriers.

Limited knowledge and insufficient technical support

Interviews conducted with Accounting instructors aimed at identifying barriers to the use of technology in the classroom revealed that many felt uncertain about which games to incorporate into their teaching (Kuang et al., 2024). Furthermore, Accounting lecturers indicated that there was a lack of information available regarding the most suitable games for their courses (Calabor et al., 2019). To address these challenges, Wood (2024) suggested that Accounting instructors consult with software development experts in other departments and seek guidance on the appropriateness of technologies to implement. Furthermore, collaboration between a lecturer from another faculty and an Accounting instructor led to the creation of a mobile app for students, thus removing this barrier (Seow and Wong, 2016).

Moreover, Calabor et al. (2019) highlighted that technological issues and a lack of technical support posed barriers to implementing GBL in the classroom. For instance, Seow and Wong (2016) developed an app compatible with both iOS and Android platforms, but encountered technical issues when app updates caused compatibility problems. To address this challenge, Carenys et al. (2017) conducted GBL activities in a computer lab at their institution. As an IT technician was available to solve technological difficulties, the activity was perceived as seamless by both the researchers and the students (Carenys et al. 2017). Additionally, Wood (2024) suggested that beta testing should be conducted prior to the deployment of any app to ensure that potential technological issues are addressed proactively.

4.2 The Perceptions of Game-based Learning Activities in Accounting Education

Q2. How have Accounting educators previously integrated GBL into their instructional methods, and what were their impacts and perceptions?

Studies indicate that the integration of GBL into Accounting education remains an underutilised emerging pedagogy mostly because Accounting lecturers do not perceive GBL to be an effective learning tool (Kuang et al., 2024). As a result, there is a growing reluctance to incorporate technology into their classrooms despite a growing number of educators who are increasingly exploring practical and innovative ways to implement tech-driven pedagogical strategies (Mposula & Oyetade, 2025). To the most part, Calabor et al. (2019) noted that some Accounting lecturers believed GBL would shift the focus of the classroom away from learning and toward the game itself. This perception has magnified negative views related to the impact that GBL in Accounting education presents, although other studies suggest the opposite. For example, studies conducted by Carenys et al. (2017) and Wood (2024) present a positive outlook of GBL strategies as pedagogical tools. Findings suggest that despite contested views, GBL serves as a supplementary tool aimed at improving motivation and critical thinking in Accounting students.

From Negative to Positive perceptions of instructors

Despite evident contesting views on the perceptions of instructors, it is clear that the adoption of GBL transforms Accounting education, and that there are evidence-based opportunities that can be drawn from GBL despite the existing pedagogical implementation challenges. Literature reveals that, when educators are skilled with developmental pathways, they enhance traditional teaching and learning methods by enabling students to experience a “living curriculum” which equips them with industry-ready experiences (Makhathini, Adam & Akpa-Inyang, 2024:273). Hence, the adoption of GBL strategies has also shaped how some educators perceive them as opportunities in a digitally driven educational environment. This study identified 3 themes which answer to research question 3 and reflect transformed perceptions of GBL activities as opportunities for successful teaching and learning outcomes:

4.3 The Opportunities for Game-based Learning Activities in Accounting Education

Q3. What opportunities exist for Accounting instructors implementing GBL in classrooms?

In response to the above research question, this study argues that the rapid pace of education in a digitally driven educational environment requires a pedagogical alignment where curriculum frameworks infuse both technology and GBL strategies. By so doing, accounting students are more likely to demonstrate higher levels of interest in the accounting subject whilst developing deeper understanding, classroom engagement and performance as discussed below:

Interest and engagement

By creating a custom mobile app that improved students’ understanding of undergraduate Accounting concepts, Seow and Wong (2016) found that the app’s interface and design were appealing to students, which improved

their interest in Accounting. Similarly, Moran et al. (2018) found that students who engaged in a digital business simulation developed a greater interest in Accounting theory. James et al. (2025) also found that the use of a gamified app led to increased classroom engagement and fostered collaborative discussions in an undergraduate Accounting course. Conversely, Baaske et al. (2025) argued that, while GBL can promote positive learning behaviours, its effects should not be perceived as universally applicable. Consequently, this underscores the necessity of tailoring GBL activities to accommodate diverse student demographics and iteratively refining them (Wood, 2024).

Interface design and usability

In an undergraduate Accounting course, Montero et al. (2019) implemented multiple-choice questions through a digital game format, and findings from this study indicate that the real-time feedback students received motivated them to engage further with Accounting concepts. Similarly, Calabor et al. (2019) and Seow and Wong (2016) observed that Accounting students displayed higher levels of engagement when they received immediate feedback and when the platform featured an appealing interface. This emphasis on immediate feedback and user-friendly design is further supported by the findings of de Oliveira Durso et al. (2019), who noted that students found GBL activities less enjoyable when they were overly complex, as participants struggled to navigate the game's interface.

Class performance and critical thinking

While some studies report that the use of GBL improves classroom engagement and motivation without improving students' Accounting performance (Baaske et al., 2025; James et al., 2025), others indicate that students who engaged with the GBL activities more frequently were likely to achieve better marks (Montero et al., 2019; Scalan & Huff, 2020). Although there is no scholarly consensus on this matter, researchers agree that the real-world application of these activities (Calabor et al., 2019), the improvement of students' adaptability and critical thinking skills (de Oliveira Durso et al., 2019), as well as the increase in motivation (Moran et al., 2018), leads to improved engagement with learning outcomes in Accounting and better knowledge retention (Scalan & Huff, 2020).

5. Conclusion

This study provided a scoping review of the existing GBL literature to provide insights into the pedagogical challenges associated with implementing GBL in Accounting Education. Additionally, the study identified the positive impacts and perceptions of GBL in Accounting education when it was adopted as a pedagogical approach, highlighting opportunities in this field. The study found that, although GBL has been adopted in many disciplines, its implementation in Accounting education remains limited. Despite these limitations, the study's practical contribution indicates that in higher education, student demographics are changing, necessitating innovative pedagogies to sustain student motivation and improve engagement. While this scoping review study aimed at exploring the earlier body of knowledge on GBL, its impacts and perceptions, and implementation challenges in Accounting, this study extended the existing corpus data. Thus, highlighting the benefits and positive perceptions of GBL in Accounting, which have been noted strongly in this article. Nonetheless, many challenges in GBL implementation still remain, causing a deterrent to effective implementation by Accounting instructors. However, to retain students' engagement, motivation, and performance over longer periods, it is imperative to continuously develop instructors' technological skills to match the relevant and contemporary competencies that Accounting Education demands. It is, therefore, commendable that the implementation of GBL in Accounting Education adopts real-time pedagogical strategies that are not only relevant to the subject matter but also prioritise inclusivity and content personalisation. Only then can, can the implementation of GBL in Accounting education enhance learner engagement and subject comprehension that transcends beyond the classroom into sustainable workplace readiness.

Ethics and AI Declarations: The authors declare that this is an original work of the authors and no AI tools were used during the preparation of this work. The authors take full responsibility for the written content in this article. Ethics approval has been provided by the authors' institutional IIE Research Ethics Committee (IIE REC).

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