

Embedding Gamified Mental Health Assessments into Online Courses and Campus Activities for Engagement and Behavioral Change

 An abstract graphic in the bottom left corner consisting of several thin, curved lines in dark blue, light blue, and grey, forming a stylized, branching shape.

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Abstract

The increasing prevalence of mental health concerns among students in higher education demands innovative approaches to enhance engagement with mental health resources. Gamified mental health assessments, integrating game mechanics into mental health interventions, offer a promising solution to address this challenge. This chapter explores the integration of gamification within higher education settings, focusing on its impact on student engagement, well-being, and behavioral change. By leveraging theories such as the Health Belief Model, Self-Determination Theory, and the Fogg Behavior Model, gamified interventions create dynamic, interactive platforms that motivate students to actively engage in self-assessment and mental health management. Case studies of successful gamified mental health programs from universities worldwide highlight the positive outcomes of these tools, including increased participation in mental health screenings, enhanced coping strategies, and reduced stigma surrounding mental health. The chapter further examines practical considerations for the widespread adoption of these tools, including scalability, cost-effectiveness, and ethical challenges. The integration of gamification in mental health interventions represents a transformative approach to supporting student well-being, offering a scalable, engaging, and accessible model for mental health care in academic environments.

Keywords: gamification, mental health assessments, student engagement, well-being, behavioral change, higher education.

Introduction

Mental health challenges among students in higher education have emerged as a significant concern, with increasing rates of anxiety, depression, and stress reported across global academic institutions [1]. The pressures of academic performance, social dynamics, financial instability, and the transition to adulthood contribute to the growing mental health burden faced by students [2]. Traditional approaches to mental health support, such as in-person counseling and workshops, while effective for some, often fail to engage a broader student population [3]. Many students avoid seeking help due to stigma, lack of accessibility, or a belief that their issues are not severe

enough to warrant professional assistance [4]. This gap in engagement with mental health resources highlights the need for innovative, accessible, and non-judgmental interventions that can effectively address students' mental health needs [5].

In response to these challenges, gamified mental health assessments have gained attention as a promising solution [6]. By incorporating game mechanics such as points, rewards, and progress tracking into mental health tools, gamification offers a way to engage students more actively in their mental well-being [7]. Unlike traditional methods, gamified tools provide an interactive and dynamic platform for students to engage with mental health assessments and resources in a way that feels less clinical and more appealing [8]. These tools tap into students' intrinsic motivation by creating an environment where their participation is rewarded and their progress is visibly tracked [9]. The design of these platforms focuses on making mental health care more accessible, engaging, and enjoyable, thus increasing students' willingness to use these services [10].

The integration of gamification into mental health assessments is grounded in psychological and behavioral theories, which suggest that people are more likely to engage in health-promoting behaviors when they feel motivated, rewarded, and empowered [11]. The Health Belief Model, Self-Determination Theory, and the Fogg Behavior Model offer useful frameworks for understanding how gamified interventions can influence student behavior and promote consistent engagement with mental health resources [12]. By utilizing these models, gamified mental health tools are designed to address students' perceptions of mental health risks, the benefits of seeking help, and the barriers that might prevent them from engaging with mental health services [13]. These interventions can shift attitudes toward mental health, reduce stigma, and encourage students to take proactive steps in managing their mental well-being [14].

Case studies of successful gamified mental health programs in higher education demonstrate the positive impact that such interventions can have on student engagement and well-being [15]. Programs such as the University of Michigan's Mindset and the University of California, Berkeley's Wellness Challenge have shown that gamification can significantly increase participation in mental health assessments, foster a sense of community, and encourage healthy behaviors [16]. These programs provide students with a platform to complete mental health check-ins, receive real-time feedback, and earn rewards for engaging in wellness activities [17]. As a result, students feel more connected to the resources available to them and are more likely to seek support when needed [18]. These successful examples highlight the potential of gamification to improve both the reach and effectiveness of mental health interventions in university settings [19,20].