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BUILDING CAPACITY FOR DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION: A ROADMAP FOR GAMIFICATION WORKSHOPS AND STAFF READINESS IN NIGERIAN LIBRARIES

Aliyu Muhammed RABIU
comraderabiu@gmail.com
Department of Library and Information Science, Faculty of Social Sciences
Federal University Lokoja

Abstract

As the landscape of higher education in Nigeria undergoes a significant digital pivot, university libraries are increasingly pressured to adopt global best practices to remain relevant. While the "Open" scholarly ecosystem provides the necessary infrastructure, a critical "familiarity gap" exists among library personnel regarding modern engagement strategies like gamification. This article provides a conceptual framework for the implementation of gamification within library and educational settings, characterizing it as a high-potential but under-evaluated strategy for digital transformation. The research highlights three primary socio-technical hurdles in the Nigerian context: infrastructure anxiety (psychological stress from power and internet inconsistencies), conceptual misalignment (viewing game mechanics as trivial), and limited professional development historically focused on traditional cataloging. Systematic reviews indicate that librarian-led gamified interventions can produce moderate increases in engagement metrics. To address these barriers, this study proposes a comprehensive, actionable roadmap for building capacity through tiered technical competency levels and a "Champion" advocacy model. The framework emphasizes transitioning staff from "Keepers of Knowledge" to "Experience Designers" by focusing on "Applied Motivation Science" and resilient, "appropriate tech" solutions. Ultimately, the study concludes that for digital transformation to be successful, Nigerian libraries must move beyond turnkey solutions toward longitudinal evaluations and robust human infrastructure investment to ensure a vibrant, rewarding scholarly ecosystem.

Keywords: Gamification, Digital Transformation, Academic Libraries, Nigeria, Staff Capacity Building, User Experience, Library Engagement.

*Corresponding author(s) **Aliyu Muhammed RABIU** agree that this article remain permanently open access under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License 4.0 International License

1.0 Introduction

In the age of the "smart campus," the traditional image of the library as a silent repository of printed books is rapidly fading. Today, academic libraries are evolving into dynamic digital hubs, yet this transformation is not just about installing new software or buying high-end servers; it is fundamentally about the people who manage them. Digital transformation in a library setting requires more than just technical literacy; it requires a shift in how we engage with our users.

One of the most promising, yet often misunderstood, tools in this shift is gamification. By applying game-design elements like points, badges, leaderboards, and challenges to library services, we can turn a routine search for a journal article into an engaging, rewarding experience. However, for gamification to work, it cannot be a "plug-and-play" solution. It requires library staff who are not only familiar with the technology but are also ready to champion its use. This study explores how targeted, hands-on workshops can build this capacity, moving staff from a state of hesitation to a state of readiness.

The landscape of higher education in Nigeria is currently navigating a significant digital pivot. University libraries are increasingly under pressure to adopt global best practices in information management to stay competitive and relevant. At the heart of this pressure are the university libraries, which are expected to manage complex institutional repositories and Open Science initiatives.

While the "Open" scholarly ecosystem (Open Access, Open Source, and Open Education Resources) provides the infrastructure, the challenge remains user engagement. Students, often referred to as "digital natives," expect interactive and rewarding digital experiences. Gamification has emerged as a key strategy to meet these expectations, potentially increasing the usage of library databases and scholarly resources.

Despite the clear benefits, a significant "familiarity gap" exists among library personnel, as many view gamification as either a distraction or a technical hurdle too high to climb. In the Nigerian context, this gap is further widened by infrastructure anxiety regarding how

gamified systems will perform with inconsistent power or internet access, as well as conceptual misalignment stemming from a lack of foundational knowledge on how game mechanics support learning and research. Additionally, limited professional development, characterized by a historical focus on traditional cataloging over modern digital engagement strategies, remains a barrier. Therefore, examining the issues surrounding the adoption, application, and implementation of gamification has become expedient in the attempt for libraries to become fully digital.

1.1 Infrastructure Anxiety

In the rapidly shifting landscape of Nigerian higher education, the push for digital transformation often feels like a race where the runners are eager, but the track is full of hurdles. As we discuss the integration of gamification (i.e., using points, badges, and interactive challenges to make library research more engaging, progressive advocacy, and marketing of library and information services), we are going to hit a very real, very grounded wall: Infrastructure Anxiety.

Infrastructure anxiety isn't just a technical concern; it is a psychological state. For an academic librarian in Nigeria, the prospect of launching a sophisticated, gamified institutional repository brings a specific kind of stress. It is the nagging worry that the moment a student is about to "level up" or claim a digital badge for completing a research module, the screen will go black. This anxiety is rooted in the lived reality of two major systemic challenges: inconsistent power supply and fluctuating internet connectivity.

When we talk about gamification, we are talking about real-time engagement. By its very nature, a gamified system thrives on immediate feedback. If a student completes a task, the "reward" should be instantaneous. However, in an environment where the national grid is unpredictable, the fear is that "digital transformation" might just become another name for "digital frustration." Library staff worry that instead of fostering their research interest, they will spend their days apologizing for crashed servers or lost progress caused by a sudden outage. This creates a barrier to adoption. If the staff doesn't trust the stability of the system, they are less

likely to champion it to the students.

Furthermore, there is the issue of the "data drain." Gamified platforms often require persistent internet connections to sync leaderboards and update user profiles. In Nigeria, where high-speed broadband is not yet a universal guarantee on every campus, staff are rightly concerned about latency. They ask: Will the system be too heavy for our current bandwidth? Will students be able to access these features on their mobile data without burning through their subscriptions? This anxiety leads to a conservative approach to innovation. Many talented librarians choose to stick with traditional, offline methods not because they lack the vision, but because they are protecting the library's reputation from the perceived unreliability of the cloud.

To overcome this infrastructure anxiety, the conversation must shift from "high-tech" to "appropriate tech." We need to explore low-bandwidth gamification systems designed to be "offline-first" or capable of local caching. Imagine a library app that tracks a student's progress locally on their device and only syncs to the main server when a stable connection is detected. Or consider the installation of solar-powered "mini-grids" specifically dedicated to the library's digital hub, ensuring that even when the rest of the campus goes dark, the light of knowledge (and the fun of the game) stays on.

Ultimately, addressing infrastructure anxiety is about building a safety net. When library staff see that there are contingency plans—backup power, lite-mode versions of the software, and local server hosting—their "readiness" levels will naturally rise. Digital transformation in Nigerian universities shouldn't be a gamble on the national grid; it should be a well-engineered journey that acknowledges our unique challenges and builds solutions that are as resilient as the people using them. Only then can we move past the anxiety and start playing the game of progress.

1.2 Conceptual Misalignment

When we discuss the integration of gamification into the hallowed halls of Nigerian libraries, irrespective of their nomenclature, we often focus on the "how"—the apps, the high-speed internet, and the touchscreens. But there is a quieter, more stubborn hurdle that often goes unaddressed:

Conceptual Misalignment. This isn't a lack of technical skill; it's a fundamental disconnect in understanding how the "play" of a game actually translates into the "work" of a researcher.

To many dedicated library staff and educators, the word "game" feels light, perhaps even trivial, when placed next to the heavy responsibilities of doctoral research or undergraduate teaching. This misalignment creates a psychological barrier. There is a persistent fear that by introducing game mechanics like badges, levels, or quest-based searching, we are somehow "dumbing down" the academic process. However, the reality is exactly the opposite. When we look closer, we see that the mechanics of a good game are almost identical to the mechanics of a good researcher.

At its core, research is a quest. It starts with a problem (a challenge), requires a search for resources (gathering tools), involves overcoming setbacks (trial and error), and ends with a contribution to knowledge (the reward). Conceptual misalignment happens when staff see only the "badge" and not the "motivation" behind it. They see a digital sticker and think it's for children, failing to realize that the badge is actually a visual marker of a mastered competency a digital shorthand for "this student now knows how to navigate the IEEE database independently."

The lack of foundational knowledge on game mechanics often leads to the "Chocolate-Covered Broccoli" effect. This happens when educators take a boring task and simply slap a leaderboard on top of it, hoping it becomes fun. It doesn't work because the alignment is off. True gamification in a library setting supports learning by tapping into intrinsic motivators: autonomy, mastery, and purpose (Deci & Ryan, 2000). For example, a student struggling with a literature review might feel overwhelmed. A gamified system aligned with pedagogical goals wouldn't just give them points for clicking links. Instead, it would use "Scaffolding"—a game mechanic where tasks start simple and gradually increase in complexity. As the student finds their first five peer-reviewed sources, they "unlock" a new level of search filters. This provides a sense of mastery. The staff's role then shifts from being a "gatekeeper of books" to a "game master of information," guiding the

student through the levels of scholarly expertise.

Furthermore, there is a misalignment regarding Research Engagement. We often complain that institutional repositories are ghost towns, with low upload rates from faculty and students. If we understood the mechanic of "Social Influence," we could align the repository's interface to highlight trending research or "Top Contributors" within a specific department at Nigeria libraries. This isn't about playing a game; it's about using human psychology to encourage the sharing of Open Access materials. It turns the solitary, often thankless task of uploading a thesis into a visible contribution to the university's global standing.

To fix this misalignment, we need a shift in our professional vocabulary. We need to stop talking about "playing games" and start talking about Applied Motivation Science. We need to show library staff that game mechanics are simply tools to manage the "Cognitive Load" of their users. When a library interface is designed well, it reduces the frustration of the search and increases the joy of the discovery. Ultimately, overcoming conceptual misalignment is about realizing that "play" is the brain's favorite way of learning. When we align the rigor of Nigerian academic research with the engaging mechanics of gamification, we aren't making the library less serious—we are making it more effective. We are building a bridge between the foundational traditions of the library and the dynamic, interactive future of the digital age.

1.3 Limited Professional Development

For decades, the heart of the library was the card catalog—a silent, wooden sentinel of cross-referenced knowledge. To be a "good" librarian in the traditional Nigerian academic setting meant mastering the art of Dewey Decimal Classification or Library of Congress Subject Headings. It was a world of precision, physical shelf-reading, and the meticulous management of "the collection." However, as we pivot toward the digital age at Nigeria libraries and beyond, we are uncovering a quiet crisis: Limited Professional Development. Our legacy of focusing on traditional cataloguing has left a gap in which modern digital engagement

strategies such as gamification should take over.

This isn't an indictment of the older generation of librarians; it is a reflection of a historical focus. For nearly a century, the library's primary value was its ability to organize physical chaos. We spent our professional development hours learning how to preserve paper, how to repair bindings, and how to ensure that a book was exactly where the call number said it would be. This was essential work. But while we were perfecting the "back-end" organization of information, the "front-end" of how humans actually interact with information was being revolutionized by the digital world.

The problem we face today is that professional development (PD) in many Nigerian libraries hasn't quite caught up with the "User Experience" (UX) revolution. We still have many staff members who can categorize a complex treatise on molecular biology in their sleep but feel paralyzed when asked to design an interactive digital badge for a student who completes an online research module. This is because our training has historically been "Resource-Centric" rather than "User-Centric." We were taught to care for the book, but not necessarily to "engineer the engagement" of the reader.

When we talk about gamification, we are talking about a sophisticated engagement strategy. It requires a baseline knowledge of behavioral psychology, interface design, and digital literacy. However, when PD opportunities arise, they often default to "Digital Literacy 101"—basic word processing or simple database searching. We rarely see workshops that challenge library staff to think like digital creators. This creates a professional culture of "maintenance" rather than "innovation." Staff members may feel that their job is simply to keep the digital repository running, rather than actively designing ways to make students want to use it.

The transition from a "Cataloger" to an "Engagement Specialist" is a massive psychological leap. It requires unlearning the idea that a library must be a place of passive consumption. Modern digital engagement strategies require librarians to be proactive—to use social media, to create competitive research "quests," and to analyze user data to see where students are getting

stuck. Without specific, high-level professional development in these areas, staff naturally retreat to what they know: the traditional, safe world of cataloging and shelf management.

To break this cycle, we need a "New Deal" for library professional development in Nigeria. We need to move beyond basic computer skills and start teaching Information Visualization, Gamification Design, and Community Management. We need to empower our staff to see themselves not just as "Keepers of Knowledge," but as "Experience Designers." Ultimately, the library is only as digital as the people who run it. By expanding our professional development to include modern engagement strategies, we aren't discarding our traditional roots; we are giving them wings. We are ensuring that the meticulous organization of the past meets the vibrant, interactive energy of the future.

2.0 Review of Related Literature

2.1 Preparing Librarians and Library Staff to Implement Gamification in Library Instruction

The implementation of gamification and game-based modalities by librarians has been consistently associated with improvements in engagement metrics and learning outcomes. Quantitatively, Marquez-Chin and Araki (2020) documented increases in learner confidence and completion rates in information literacy gamified activities. Decreases in support requests and increased learner confidence were repeatedly observed across multiple evaluations (Capdarest-Arest et al., 2019; Gorman, 2021).

The evidence base is heterogeneous in design and outcome rigor. Systematic reviews, such as those by Hamari et al. (2014), have found that gamification produces small to moderate increases in measurable engagement metrics. In library settings, librarian-led, course-integrated game activities corresponded to discrete gains in assignment performance and reduced help-seeking (Domínguez et al., 2013). However, a survey by Smith and Baker (2021) found that gamification is still infrequently used in advanced searching instruction, where prevailing teaching modalities remain lectures and live demonstrations, suggesting a gap between reported successes and routine adoption.

Mechanistically, game elements

increase motivation and promote spaced practice through repeated tasks, consistent with foundational theory articulated by Brigham (2015). For specialized practice, implementers should adopt rigorous pre-post measurement with standardized rubrics and pilot scalability in low-technology formats before committing to resource-intensive platforms (Domínguez et al., 2013). In sum, gamification is a high-potential pedagogic strategy that currently rests on promising but incomplete evidence.

2.2 Gamification and Library Engagement: An Advanced Integrative Review of Efficacy, Mechanisms, and Transferability

As synthesized by Hamari et al. (2014) and Sailer et al. (2017), gamification produces small to moderate increases in measurable engagement metrics in learning and online-program contexts. Librarian-led, course-integrated game activities corresponded to discrete gains in assignment performance and reduced help-seeking. Certainty is moderate in short-term, controlled educational settings but low for sustained library-wide behavioral change because of heterogeneous interventions, short follow-up, and selection and novelty effects.

Mechanistic plausibility is strong via feedback loops, goal framing, and social reinforcement (Deterding et al., 2011), but translational fidelity to library service contexts requires careful tailoring and evaluation. Applying adherence and digital engagement findings highlights necessary implementation constraints. Smith and Baker (2021) identify personalization, reminders, usability, and complementary human support as consistent facilitators of adherence for digital interventions. Libraries aiming for persistent engagement should therefore pair gamified overlays with personalization of tasks and accessible human touchpoints.

Synthesizing meta-analytic and pragmatic instructional evidence yields a disciplined verdict: gamification reliably increases short-term engagement and can improve task performance when embedded in assessed instruction. In library contexts that mirror structured learning episodes, such as credit-bearing information literacy classes, escape room and contest formats are mechanistically credible and empirically

promising.

Summary of Literature Review

This literature review evaluates the efficacy, mechanisms, and implementation of gamification within library and educational settings, characterizing it as a high-potential but under-evaluated strategy. While the research consistently demonstrates that gamification effectively boosts short-term engagement and participation, its long-term success remains contingent on better longitudinal data and improved staff readiness.

The evidence for the efficacy of gamification is marked by measurable improvements in both learner outcomes and engagement metrics. Librarian-led interventions, such as escape rooms and "Amazing Race" style competitions, have resulted in moderate effect sizes. Furthermore, meta-analyses indicate a moderate effect size, with Cohen's d ranging from 0.4 to 0.5, regarding behavioral change and engagement in online programs (Sailer et al., 2017).

Despite these positive results, significant implementation challenges hinder widespread adoption. A notable "readiness gap" exists; although workshops have been shown to increase librarian confidence, many practitioners still default to traditional lectures in actual classroom settings (Smith & Baker, 2021). Additionally, infrastructure and resource constraints pose a hurdle, as high-tech formats like Virtual Reality (VR) are often too resource-intensive to scale compared to low-tech, active-design activities.

3.0 List of Selected Libraries Across the World with Gamification Strategies

1. University of Huddersfield (UK) – Project "LemonTree"

Institution History: Founded in 1825, it gained university status in 1992.

Gamification Start Date: 2011–2012. Developed by Andrew Walsh.

The Strategy: It used a "stealth" approach where students earned points and badges automatically for standard library activities.

The Effect: The library reported a significant correlation between library usage and higher grades, transforming the library's image from a "silent warehouse" to an interactive partner.

2. University of Michigan (USA) – Project "Biblio-Bouts"

Institution History: Established in 1817.

Gamification Start Date: 2010–2011. A federally funded research project (via IMLS).

The Strategy: A tournament-style game where students competed in "bouts" to find and evaluate sources.

The Effect: Research showed that students who played the game developed higher-level critical thinking skills.

3. National Library Board (Singapore) – "Quest of the Celestial Dragon"

Institution History: Established in 1995.

Gamification Start Date: 2012–2013. A massive, nationwide narrative-driven campaign.

The Strategy: Using a manga/fantasy storyline to encourage children and teens to borrow books and collect physical trading cards.

The Effect: A massive spike in circulation rates among teenagers, demonstrating that "Narrative" is often more powerful than "Points."

4. Aarhus Public Library, Dokk1 (Denmark) – "The Global Libraries Project"

Institution History: Opened in 2015 as Scandinavia's largest public library.

Gamification Start Date: 2015–2017. Gamification as a core part of its "Design Thinking."

The Strategy: Utilized physical gamification, including LEGO-based leaderboards.

The Effect: Won the "Public Library of the Year" award in 2016; led to an explosion in community participation.

4.0 Actionable Roadmap for Building Capacity within the Academic Library Ecosystem

The following is a comprehensive, actionable roadmap for building capacity within the academic library ecosystem. This framework is designed to move library personnel from a state of "traditional preservation" to one of active digital engagement, specifically through the strategic application of gamification in everyday library operations.

1. Deconstructing the "Play" Stigma: The Psychological Shift

The most formidable barrier to gamification in Nigerian higher education isn't a lack of servers or software; it is a lack of Conceptual Alignment. Therefore, the first actionable step in capacity building is a psychological "unlearning" process.

From "Games" to "Gamification": Capacity-building workshops must clearly distinguish between gaming (playing for entertainment) and gamification (using design elements to solve non-game problems). Staff preparation must emphasize that we are extracting the mechanics of engagement such as rapid feedback loops, progress transparency, and social proof to optimize library workflows.

The Pedagogy of Play: Librarians must see themselves as educators. Gamification aligns perfectly with Bloom's Taxonomy, shifting the user's experience from lower-order thinking of "Remembering" to higher-order "Applying" and "Creating" (Kapp, 2012).

2. Tiered Technical Competency Levels

Digital transformation is a team sport. Capacity building should be tiered so that every staff member has a meaningful role.

Level 1: Foundational Literacy (The Generalist): For all staff. They must be comfortable with terminology like XP (Experience Points), Onboarding, and Scaffolding. Training should involve "User Journey Mapping" to identify friction points in the library experience.

Level 2: Design and Management (The Librarian-Architect): For subject librarians. They must learn the "Art of the Quest" to translate academic requirements into engaging challenges. They need hands-on training with the "backend" to award badges and update leaderboard scores.

Level 3: Data Analytics (The Systems Specialist): For IT and Systems Librarians. Their role is to ensure the "game" is balanced and effective. They must use analytics to keep the library in the "Flow Zone" (Hamari, 2019).

3. Designing "Appropriate Tech" Solutions

In the Nigerian context, capacity building

must be grounded in reality. Infrastructure Anxiety is a valid reason for staff hesitation. Preparation must focus on "Resilient Design." Low-Bandwidth Gamification: Staff should be trained to implement "Lite" strategies, such as using SMS-based triggers or simple web interfaces that don't require heavy graphics. Offline-First & Physical **Gamification:** Actionable preparation includes "Hybrid" models. Staff can be trained to manage physical Stamp Cards or LEGO-based Leaderboards in the library lobby. These physical markers of progress are immune to power outages.

4. The "Champion" Model: Sustainable Cultural Change

You cannot force a culture shift; you must seed it. The "Champion" model is the most effective way to ensure long-term adoption. Peer-to-Peer Learning: Identify "Gamification Champions" in each department. These champions receive advanced training and act as internal consultants. This peer-led approach reduces the "Expert-Layman" divide. Gamifying the Gamifiers (Incentivizing the Staff): The capacity-building program should be a game. Staff who complete workshops earn badges. By experiencing the "dopamine hit" of a well-earned badge, staff develop empathy for the students' experience (Nicholson, 2015).

Conclusion: From Readiness to Reality

Building capacity for gamification is an investment in the human infrastructure of the library. By deconstructing the stigma of play, tiering technical training, designing for Nigerian infrastructure, and empowering internal champions, academic libraries can move beyond "Cataloging" and into the "Engagement" era. This means that the digital transformation won't just be a collection of PDFs in a repository; it will be a vibrant, competitive, and rewarding ecosystem. When library staff are "Ready" conceptually, technically, and emotionally, they stop being afraid of the future and start building it.

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