

Benefits of using randomised selection tools to enhance student engagement in the classroom

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ABSTRACT

This article seeks to present an effective tool that can be easily implemented in a learning environment. ‘The Wheel of Names’ is an easily customisable online tool with the aim of enhancing general student participation while also promoting fairness in any context. The set objective was to investigate how to improve a growing problem in one area linked to student participation: homework completion. This motivation stemmed from the recognition that student’s homework tasks were not always being duly completed. In order to monitor student homework, ‘The Wheel of Names’ was tested, and many positive outcomes came to light. How does this tool aid teachers in achieving greater student participation in the classroom? And, what are the benefits for teachers and students alike?

INTRODUCTION

With any new development or vision in education there are challenges to overcome, in varying degrees and forms. Educators have all anticipated, welcomed, or perhaps felt apprehensive about certain changes; the recent move towards the ‘paperless’ policy at IÉSEG at the start of the academic year 2022 has often been one of these challenges. Within the language department, it has been the opportunity to adapt the way we present tasks and how to efficiently follow up with the students in class. Although paper has not been disregarded altogether, we have reflected on how we can use more of the technology available to enhance students’ learning.

Teachers have embraced the move to allow students to use their laptops in class (which was previously limited, in line with our objectives for an interactive language lesson). To welcome this trend, students are now being asked to complete their homework tasks without paper, for instance by annotating documents available from IÉSEG Online (IOL). One would have thought that the format would not have influenced the rate of homework completion, yet the issue soon became apparent: as we were no longer able see which students had their homework *physically* in front of them, it turned into a ‘policing’ job to go around the classroom checking students’ individual laptop screens. In noticing a distinct decline in the students’ motivation to rigorously complete the

exercises by the end of the year, the goal was then established to look at how a higher homework completion rate could be achieved. The discussion below sheds further light on the topic of student participation and highlights some of the many benefits and advantages of using a specific tool in *any* classroom.

DISCUSSION

How can we define ‘good’, or even ‘excellent’ student participation in the classroom? As language teachers, we all strongly agree on many of the characteristics that should be demonstrated from a student for a constructive working environment: speaking only in the required language, listening attentively to others, actively contributing to group work, as well as producing homework tasks and assignments on time. Achieving a good level of participation lies in how students come prepared for every class in order to keep up with the demands of the course. Encouraging homework to be completed in time helps students to prepare for subsequent activities in class and makes them accountable for their own learning (Dallimore, Hertenstein, & Platt, 2008).

Furthermore, IÉSEG values the importance of participation and engagement in lessons through allowing teachers to assign a separate participation grade (10% of the course grade, in the case of most English courses). This can serve to acknowledge students’ efforts, and value those who have visibly been working hard, regardless of their level. Similarly, while teachers place high importance on grading students’ participation, many have mixed feelings about how best to assign these grades (Mello, 2010). Despite the challenges that teachers face, it has been documented that student participation in higher education has many benefits for student engagement and consequent learning. When students participate because it is expected of them, they do learn (Rocca, 2010).

There are undoubtedly several other qualities that could be highlighted further concerning *how* a student should (and moreover should *not*) be engaged in the classroom – passionate discussions about this have been known to take place in the staff room over the years! The pedagogical team at IÉSEG has additionally put together a Final Grading Grid, as part of the school’s Teaching and Learning Strategy, to help teachers in the process of calculating final participation grades. It is not a task that teachers take lightly at the end of the semester, therefore using ‘The Wheel of Names’ *could*, as a result, be considered an effective and practical tool for this purpose.

WHAT IS THE WHEEL OF NAMES?

The Wheel of Names is a randomised selection tool that helps to select names or items from a list (many versions of this wheel exist on the internet). It is a technique that can be used to promote student participation and engagement in the classroom. The wheel can be spun, and the section

that stops indicates the chosen student or team. It can be used to randomly select students to answer questions, participate in discussions or lead class activities. This wheel helps to ensure that all students are actively involved in the class; additionally, it can help to create a more inclusive and fairer environment for all students.

The benefits of using this technique include:

- **Increasing participation:** By giving every student an equal chance to be called on, the wheel of names can help to increase participation and motivation from all students.
- **Checking homework tasks:** The wheel can help select a number of students for the teacher to monitor (due to time constraints, teachers cannot check every item every session). The randomness avoids students' strategic anticipation.
- **Promoting fairness while encouraging engagement:** The wheel ensures that the chance of every student's participation is equal, and it reduces the chances of bias or certain students being chosen frequently. Spinning the wheel can be a fun and engaging way to get students involved in class and improve student interaction.
- **Easy to use:** The wheel is easy to create and use in a matter of minutes, making it accessible to both teachers and students.¹
- **Customisable and versatile:** By setting up a free account, class lists can be saved and quickly retrieved for any lesson. The wheel can also be customised to match the theme of the event, allowing names, sentences, *or* images to be added, as well as sound effects.
- **Breaking the monotony:** This activity helps to break the monotony of a traditional classroom setup, adding a fun and interactive way of choosing names – the 'suspense' element of who will be chosen next often appeals to students.
- **Avoiding disputes:** With this method, the selection will be based on chance, not by personal preferences to select one student over another. It is also ideal for putting students into groups, or selecting topics for presentations, making any choice fair and undisputable.
- **Creating a change in dynamics:** This wheel can furthermore be used at any moment during class time to change the lesson flow. This can in turn empower students – for example, when students are selected to take the lead in correcting exercises.

There are undoubtedly other advantages and approaches for using 'The Wheel of Names' in a classroom setting, but in the case of the issue highlighted above, the wheel essentially resolves how to best oversee homework tasks (and for other tasks during class time, 'secretly' happening behind laptop screens). In seeking a more manageable way to check student's homework

¹ The Wheel of Names is free to access, at the time of writing.

(receiving hundreds of pieces of work via email is just not feasible for any teacher), the wheel helps generate a set of student names and takes all bias out of the process. Not knowing who will be chosen in advance motivates *all* students to complete their homework, and this in turn increases participation. Furthermore, the wheel can help teachers to keep a record of students who have fully completed tasks, which they can refer to when compiling grades at the end of the semester. It's a win-win situation for both teacher and student alike – homework is duly completed as required and the students benefit from their independent work efforts.

CONCLUSION

The 'Wheel of Names' is therefore a simple but effective tool for promoting student engagement and participation in the classroom. The recent implementation of the wheel, with the aim to monitor completed homework has already had a positive effect on students: after the second week of the new semester a marked improvement in student's homework completion rate was achieved. This may sound like a 'high school' approach; however, my experience shows that a very small adjustment in strategy can significantly increase motivation. Students learn that every task has a meaningful place in the programme, and there is valuable reason for doing them. As a facilitator, the goal is to create a purposeful environment, where students can see the value in their learning. Students ultimately appreciate the expectations that we hold of them and the positive, fair messages that these send.

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An additional example of a random picker wheel: <https://fr.piliapp.com/random/wheel>

(Accessed: 21 February 2023)

Ways to use The Wheel of Names in the classroom:

<https://vestals21stcenturyclassroom.com/ways-to-use-wheel-of-names-in-the-classroom/>

(Accessed: 21 February 2023)

How the tool is used and its features:

<https://www.thetechteacher.net/2019/02/wheelofnamescom-tool-teachers-and.html>

(Accessed: 21 February 2023)

Fun ways to call on students and mechanisms for learning:

<https://duelbox.com/blog/spin-wheel-in-the-classroom/>

(Accessed: 21 February 2023)

Videos:

The Wheel of Names: A Random Name Generator for Audience Engagement

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mBIJxr-FEP4> (Accessed: 21 February 2023)

This video demonstrates how to: set up the wheel, save a wheel, customize how the wheel spins, adjust sound effects and share with other users.

How to Use WHEEL OF NAMES for Teachers | My favorite virtual spinner!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lThCb6BrVXQ> (Accessed: 21 February 2023)

This video explores: the reasons why The Wheel of Names is a preferred virtual spinner, how to set up the wheel, tips for customizing the wheel and how to save, retrieve and share wheels.

Wheel of Names - A Random Name Picker and More

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ycvl75_5eGE (Accessed: 21 February 2023)

This video also highlights how to: customize the wheel with names and pictures, change the settings of the wheel, and save your data.