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## Keeping university students engaged in online courses

### Abstract

This article deals with the possibilities of various virtual teaching tools that can be used to maintain students' engagement in the process of acquiring knowledge in the context of remote teaching. It discusses such teaching methods as projects and gamification and shows which and how apps can be used to conduct webinars. In the subsequent part of the article, ways of creating interactive worksheets are presented along with the results of a questionnaire concerning the use of BookWidgets as an assessment tool. The final part of the article considers a webinar on interpreting that was part of a series of webinars conducted at AHE in Lodz by the author. The article concludes by encouraging lecturers to take advantage of the Internet to help their students acquire and revise knowledge.

**Keywords:** remote teaching, online courses, app, active learning

### Introduction

In the era of the Internet the aim of every teacher should not be to make students memorize information but to teach them how to find it, interpret it and finally apply it. Encouraging students to look for information and apply the knowledge they have acquired along with facilitating team work will result in our students' becoming life-long learners and, thus, more aware citizens. To achieve such a goal a lecturer could take advantage of such online apps as coggle (Borczyk, 2020; Pałczyńska, 2021), mentimeter.com. (Uchwat-Zaród, 2020; Kordus, 2020; Pałczyńska, 2021), AnswerGarden (Kordus, 2020; Pałczyńska, 2021) and many others mentioned in this article.

To teach remotely is not an easy task. In terms of online courses there is always the threat that students have joined a webinar but do not take any part in it. For that very

reason it seems to be a good idea for a lecturer to turn to active learning, which “implies that students are engaged in their own learning. Active teaching strategies have students do something other than taking notes or following directions.” (Handelsman et al., 2007)

## Projects

There is probably no better way to activate your students than to ask them to work on a project. Some subjects at AHE in Lodz are designed to be conducted exclusively using that method but even if your subject is not thought of as such you can still use some elements of it in your webinars.

When teaching with the usage of such platforms as Microsoft Teams or Moodle there is a possibility to create separate rooms and ask student to work in pairs/teams on solutions to some problems, to create some presentations or to discuss certain matters. In terms of classes connected with creating a piece of writing you can decide to ask students to work in groups and write something together using padlet.com (Uchwat-Zaród, 2020) or linoit.com. One of the advantages of taking advantage of these virtual boards is that students see each other’s pieces of writing and may – if you as the creator of the board let them – comment on their work.



Pict. 1. A part of padlet.com online board with students’ descriptions of their favourite films

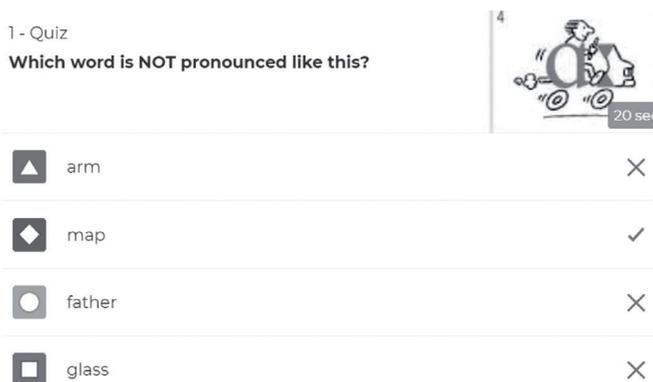
Such small projects that could be a part of your webinar may be used in virtually all classes- if you teach literature ask your students to write a short description of a book, literature period or all the most important terms that they have learnt about. If you teach linguistics ask your students to come up with different ways of approaching a text or what speech acts there are or other linguistic terms. The possibilities are endless.

Other apps that could be used to enhance group work are bookcreator.com, storyjumper.com or any other that allows people to write short stories or create comic strips for free. Instead of setting texts to translate ask your translation students to create a brochure with advice for beginning translators in the form of a comic strip. Asking them to create a story in two languages using storyjumper.com would be another possibility. Canva.com can be used as an app that is ideal for creating posters. The posters could be on the importance of family in one's life if you teach pedagogy or different symptoms of a stroke if you teach nursing. As Żylińska argues quite convincingly categorising, selecting and writing down the most important new information in a patterned way is a far better technique for memorising that rewriting or just listening to it (2013: 34).

The above mentioned types of activity should make students engaged but the lecturer needs to make sure that there is no silence in the rooms, as that could be the case. Sometimes just one student works on the task, while the others remain passive. For that not to occur the lecturer should visit the rooms and react if there is no interaction between the students in the rooms.

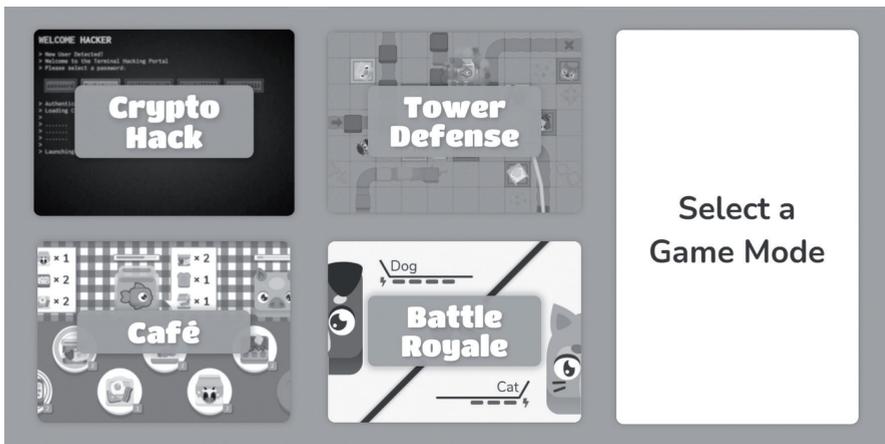
## Gamification

Benjamin Franklin is believed to have said once: “Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn.” This well-known saying advocates the usage of activating teaching techniques, as they involve students in the process of learning. Taking advantage of online gaming apps can enhance the learning experience and make it enjoyable (see: Raźniak, 2020) A variety of online applications enable such an experience. One of such apps is definitely Kahoot! You create a set of questions and then you play the game simultaneously or asynchronously by creating a challenge for your students. The questions include A, B, C, D type of questions in the free version. If a lecturer decides to invest in the app s/he gets to create other types of questions like ‘type answer’ or ‘puzzle’. It is also worth mentioning that with the use of Kahoot! Premium it is possible to create whole classes using the app, as different videos and sounds can be uploaded then as slides.



Pict. 2. An example of an A, B, C, D question on Phonetics created in Kahoot!

Gamification is useful, as it stimulates immediate, direct motivation. The students have fun and learn indirectly. According to neurodidactics, also referred to as brain-based learning the more senses take part in acquiring knowledge, the better, as it enhances memory. (Żylińska, 2013: 28). While using such apps as Kahoot! almost all the students' senses are activated. They select correct answers on their phones using the colour that corresponds to the correct answer while listening to some music that makes the whole experience even more interesting. The students answer all the questions that appear on the teacher's screen. The student gets an immediate info if s/he has answered the question correctly and if the others knew the correct answer. The teacher makes sure all the students are active and has the chance to see how much the students already know and understand. The advantages seem numerous, still Komorowska argues that the consequences of using games may be hazardous, as it makes the few winners feel superior and the losers worth less, which may result in a negative atmosphere in the classroom (2020: 9). For those sharing her view, blookey.com may be a solution. The main difference between kahoot! and blookey is that the ladder one is usually NOT won by a student whose knowledge is the widest. It is because the game result depends mostly on mere luck. It could be connected with what you choose after giving a correct answer to a question – it can be a number of points but it can be losing some points or swapping points with some other player. Because of that, blookey is eagerly welcome by students who tend to be weaker, whereas kahoot! is liked by students who feel confident with their knowledge. For that very reason a lecturer may decide to ask their students to play the games in turns.



Pict. 3. A screenshot from blookey.com showing different types of games

The above mentioned games are played by single students but there are also possibilities of introducing gamification that would stimulate group work. Flippity.net is a website with many types of different games but the one that the author would like to mention at this point is Flippity Quiz Show that resembles a popular TV show Va Banque. In this case students get to play in teams. They have to decide as a team what answer is correct and in that sense we have a situation, in which students learn from students. When using

a frame that is known to our students from other context to memorize new things, in other words – to learn, we make it easier for them to acquire knowledge.

As a lecturer you might also decide to take advantage of Wordwall or LearningApps.org (Pałczyńska, 2021). Those two apps are mainly used by teachers from primary schools but the author of the article sees no reason why adults could not play such games as ‘hangman’ or ‘memory’ to make the process of learning more pleasurable.

## Interactive worksheets for practice and assessment

The above mentioned apps such as Kahoot! or Blooket may be used in both online and classroom sessions. The following apps are used mainly in online sessions, both synchronous and asynchronous ones. The app that is worth mentioning in the context of online teaching is bookwidgets.com. In the author’s opinion the easiest way to use this it is to create crosswords. What makes bookwidgets.com different from other apps designed to create crosswords is that it is quick, easy and enables you to create crosswords that look attractive.



Pict. 4. A part of a crossword created in bookwidgets.com (see also: Pałczyńska, 2020: 61; 2021: 35)

Bookwidgets.com is an effective assessment tool that can be used in remote teaching. It is an app thanks to which we can create interactive worksheets, share them with our students with the usage of a link. The worksheets are automatically corrected and the teacher gets already marked papers, which saves a lot of time that is not spent on correcting the tests. The app offers a multitude of various question types and answer types.

The author of the article has used docs.google.com/forms to ask teachers familiar with bookwidgets.com if they consider it an assessment tool that would be worth recommending.

The questions were asked to the members of Facebook groups BookWidgets Ambassadors, BookWidgets Lager Onderwijs and BookWidgets. The questionnaire contained nine questions that are presented below together with answers.

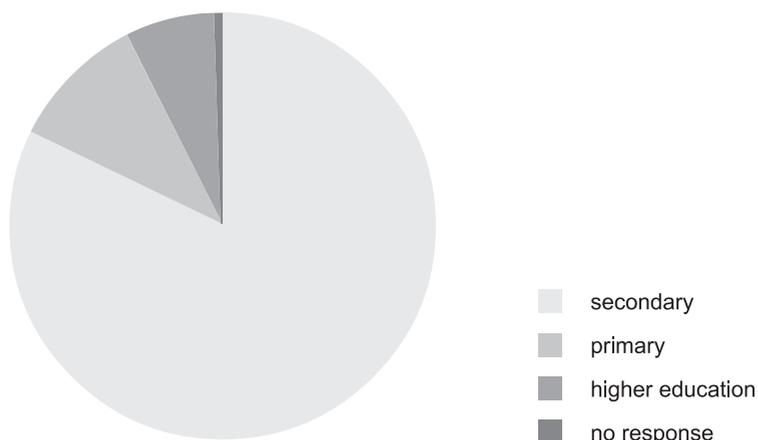
Question 1: Which country are you from?

Belgium – 129 answers; the USA – 13 answers; Croatia – 4 answers; the Philippines, Poland – 2 answers; Australia, Romania, Portugal, Spain, Russia, Argentina, Thailand, Germany, Italy, India – 1 answer.

The first question has shown that responders were mainly from Belgium, which should not be considered surprising, as the app is Belgian and the biggest number of people familiar with it come from the country of the app. It is, however, worth noticing that the app is known all over the Europe and has also reached Asia and South America. It can be claimed that the app is known virtually all over the world.

Question 2: What type of school do you work at?

What type of school do you work at?



Responders to the question, teachers familiar with the app that are active on Facebook are primarily connected with secondary education. The reason could be that the app might be considered too complicated for the primary school students who may be better off dealing with other apps that are more suitable for their age group.

Question 3: What subject do you teach?

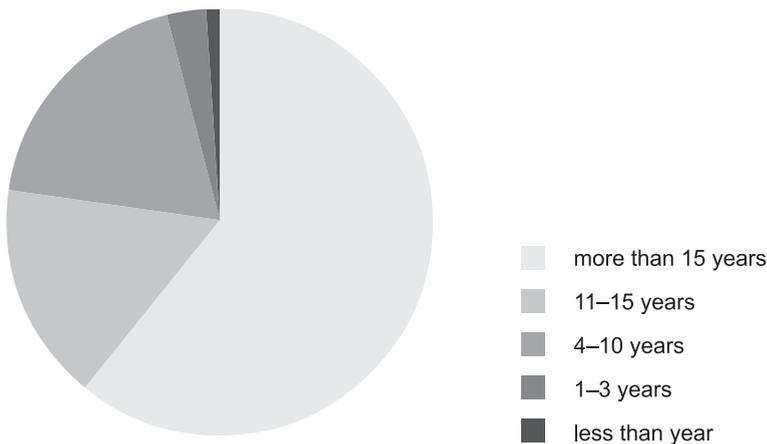
English – 29 answers, Dutch – 25 answers, French – 18 answers, History – 15 answers, Economics – 10 answers, Maths – 9 answers, Project Algemene Vakken (PAV, it's a type of general subjects course), Geography – 7 answers, Science – 6 answers, Chemistry, German – 5 answers, Latin, Religion – 4 answers, 3 answers, Economy, Spanish,

Psychology, Astronomy, Music, ICT – 2 answers, Methodology and didactics in sports education, Sociology, Godsdienst (RE), Mavo Ondernemend Projects (a lower secondary education subject connected with entrepreneurial projects), STEM courses, Speech Therapy, Electronics, Electricity, Office, Law, Secretarial Skills, Greek, Algemene sociale vorming (general social education), Language, Wiskunde (Maths), Business Economics, Houtbewerking (a subject connected with working with wood), Arts, Haarzorg (a subject connected with hair care), everything – 1 answer.

Even though top subjects taught by the teachers who take advantage of BookWidgets are connected with languages, answers to the third question show that the app is used in a wide range of subjects, both humanities and economics. It seems interesting to notice that the app is even used to teach vocational subjects connected with working with wood or hair. Another result of the question is the observation that a number of teachers using BookWidgets teach more than one subject.

#### Question 4: How long have you been teaching?

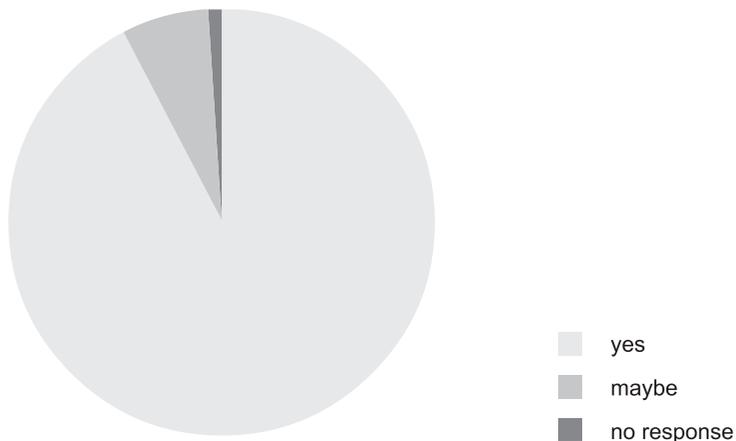
How long have you been teaching?



It is sometimes believed that new technologies are most strongly advocated by the younger generation of teachers, but answers to question 4 show that teachers who use BookWidgets have been teaching for more than ten years. Those people have already seen and used many different tools, which means that BookWidgets is an app that is appealing to experienced teachers, who know which tools are most effective ones.

Question 5:

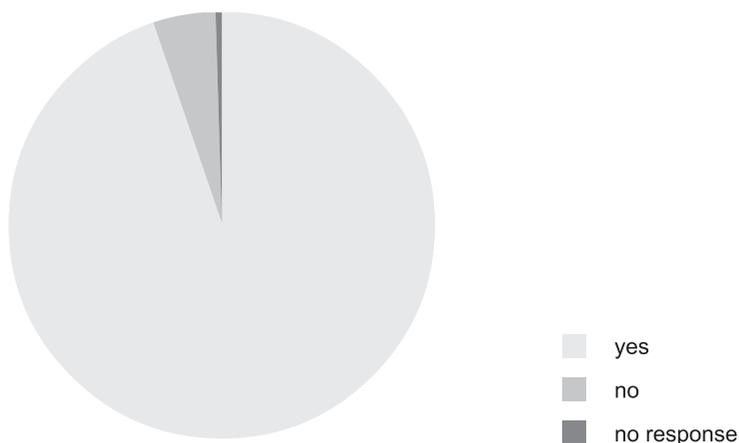
Do you think BookWidgets can be used as an assessment tool?



Over 93% of responders believe that the app can be used as an assessment tool. The reasons are probably that the papers are automatically and the fact that there are many types of questions that may be asked. Moreover, the layout of the test/quiz is user-friendly, it looks attractive and can be enriched with some pictures or graphics the teacher may decide to add.

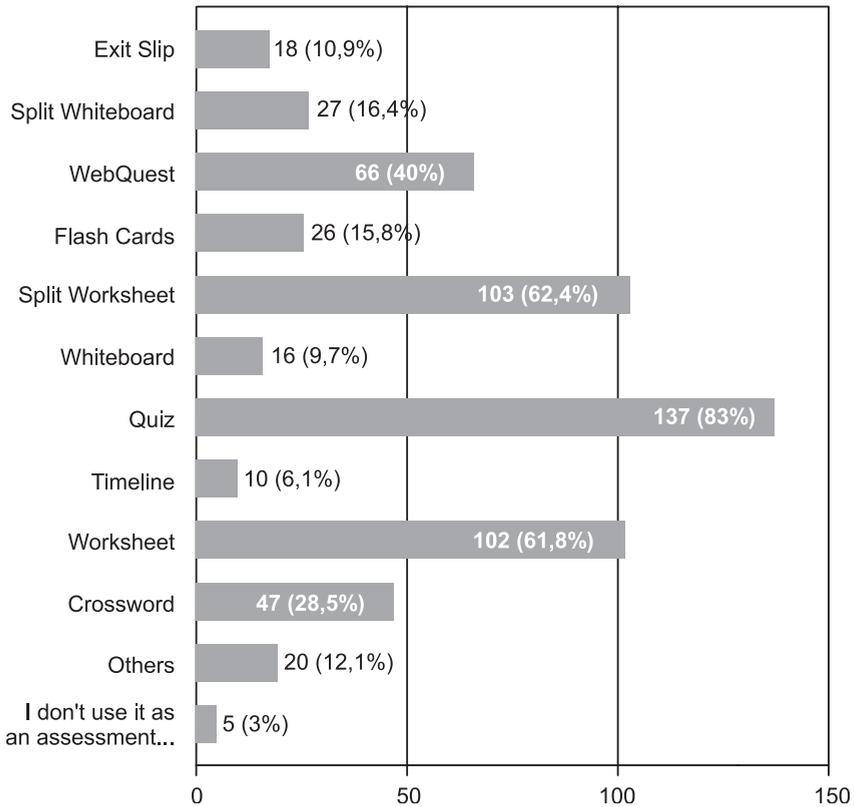
Question 6:

Do you think BookWidgets for assessment?



95% of responders stated that they use BookWidgets for assessment. It shows that the app is considered by its users to be an appropriate tool for measuring how much the students have learnt and what they still need to work on.

Question 7: If you use BookWidgets for assessment what widgets do you use for that purpose?



BookWidgets allows different types of worksheets to be created, the most eagerly used for assessment is Quiz, which has been created to be used as an assessment worksheet that is called in this app a 'widget'. It is, however, worth noticing that other types of widgets, such as split worksheet or worksheet are also commonly used. Taking into consideration that thanks to the split worksheet widget a lecturer may insert a video or a sound file next to the questions that make the whole exercise look transparent, it should not surprise that so many teachers go for that option.

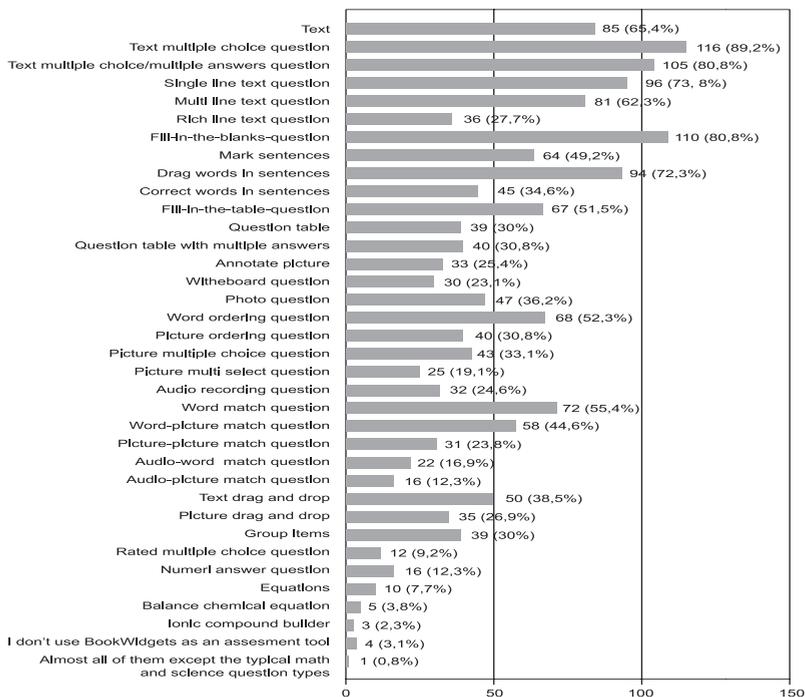
All the rowboats SONG

QUESTION 1  
What's the missing word?

1. faces
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
7.
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9.
10.
11.
12.
13.
14.

Pict. 5. A screenshot of a part of a listening exercise created as a split worksheet widget. A youtube video by Regina Spektor has been inserted on the left (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2CZ8ossU4pc&t=1s>) along with an exercise from New English File Teacher's Book (Latham-Koenig et.al., 2015: 237)

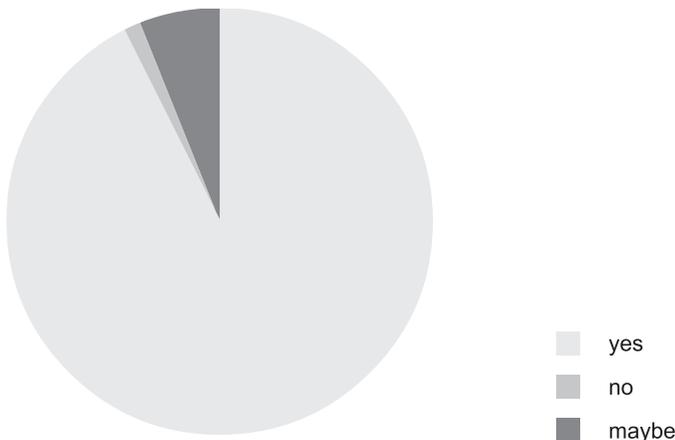
Question 8: If you use BookWidgets for assessment which question types do you use?



BookWidgets offers many different types of questions that will meet the needs of teachers of most subjects, even those teaching science with questions like ‘balance chemical equation’. Answers to that question show that most teachers opt for Text multiple choice types of questions as well as Fill-in-the-blanks questions. The latter choice is popular, as it enables a teacher to create different types of questions, even such involving choosing one possible answer out of three or more options.

Question 9:

Would you recommended BookWidgets as an assessment tool to other teachers?



93% of respondents stated that they would recommend BookWidgets as an assessment tool. It proves that teachers who are familiar with the tool not only use it to assess their students but also find it useful and would be willing to claim that it is a good way to establish how much their students have learnt and how much they still need to do to acquire certain knowledge.

Another app that has been designed to create interactive worksheets that could be used to activate university students is wizer.me. Thanks to that app you can create worksheets that grade themselves. The biggest advantage of the app is in the author’s opinion its attractive look.



Pict. 6. A part of an exercise created in wizer.me.

Similarly to BookWidgets, there are different types of questions available in this app. Interestingly, you can insert a canva design, video or any other website that may be embedded. Thanks to those options your interactive worksheet may be informative, interesting and fun to look at. Wizer.me has also another advantage that cannot be left unmentioned. In the premium version of the app, which you have to pay for, you can create differentiated versions of the worksheet. That is an incredible help for all the teachers who teach students with specific learning disabilities. Thanks to the option of differentiated worksheets different students get different types of questions without anyone realizing it.

Some lectures are fond of the materials that they store as pdf files and may not be encouraged to transfer them into other apps as that would be a tedious task of rewriting some of it. Such teachers might find liveworksheets.com extremely useful. You upload any file you have in the pdf, jpg or png format – it cannot be bigger than 5MB – then decide which parts of the document should be interactive and write what and where something should be written by the students. This way you create a fill in type of exercise that is fully interactive and automatically graded.

## Exemplary webinar on interpreting

The author of this article conducted a course on specialised interpreting in the winter term 2020/2021 at AHE in Lodz. Below you will find a description of the way each webinar was conducted that you might find interesting or even inspiring.

Before any webinar the lecturer placed on the platform vocabulary connected with the topic of the webinar. Using the flipped classroom technique (see a.o.: Nouri, 2016; Chudak, 2020; Równiatka, 2020; Padzik, 2021) the lecturer shared a link with a genial.ly presentation that included vocabulary connected with the topic, i.e. work and employment, products or marketing. Along with the genial.ly presentation the students got a link to a quizlet.com app, thanks to which they could practise the vocabulary that would be needed during the webinar. Those materials were considered as an introduction and might have been but did not have to be taken advantage of by the students. At the beginning of the webinar the lecturer presented the vocabulary by reading it and went straight on to practising it with the usage of such apps as Blooket, Wordwall, Learningapps and BookWidgets. The order is not random. Blooket is the first option, as it does not promote students with greater knowledge. Thanks to that all of them will be able to revise or learn the words that will be needed later without being discouraged or inferior to others. The lecturer also took part in the game, which showed the students that it can be played by anyone. Moreover, when a student gets to score more points than the lecturer – which can easily happen! – s/he feels good about herself/himself. It stimulates a positive learner-teacher relationship. When the group consists of people who are gamers the best options in Blooket are probably Crypto Hack, Café or Tower Defense (see: Pict. 3). If there are students in the group who are not into such entertainment it is probably better to play it safe and go for some kind of Quest – in October and November it is Candy Quest that is visually associated with Halloween – because it is easier to understand the rules. The next step would be revising the vocabulary with the usage of Wordwall or Learninapps. A number of exercises can be created thanks to those apps just one being a matching exercise.

0:08

profit and loss account	a balance sheet	bottom line	current assets	a deduction	a financial statement	general ledger	book value	accounts receivable, receivables
accounting office	assets	fixed/capital assets	fiscal year	intangible assets	amortization, depreciation	liabilities	financial year	

- |                          |                               |                          |                         |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> | sprawozdanie finansowe        | <input type="checkbox"/> | aktywa obrotowe         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | księga główna                 | <input type="checkbox"/> | pasywa                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | rok obrotowy                  | <input type="checkbox"/> | rachunek zysków i strat |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | amortyzacja                   | <input type="checkbox"/> | aktywa niematerialne    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | bilans, zestawienie bilansowe | <input type="checkbox"/> | rok podatkowy           |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> | wartość księgową              | <input type="checkbox"/> | potrącenie, odliczenie  |
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Submit Answers

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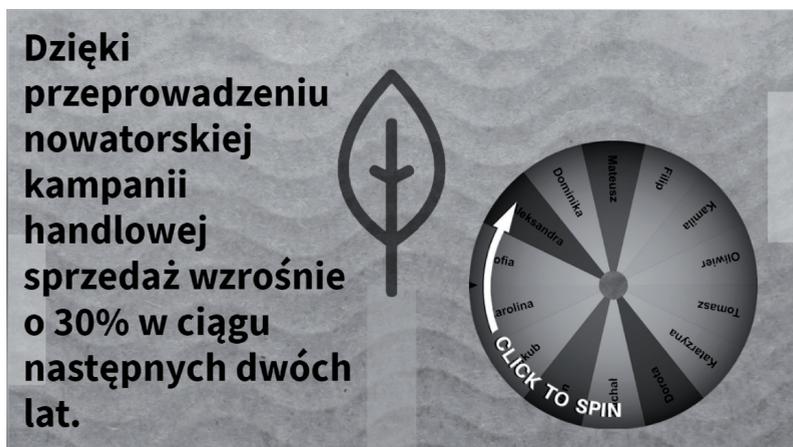
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Pict. 7. A matching exercise on accounting created in wordwall.net.

The exercise could be done together, in turns or individually depending on the students' choice. It could be also done twice: once together and once individually. The exercise could be also quickly turned into other types like quiz, gameshow or even maze chase that looks similarly to a Pac-Man game that most of us are familiar with. One disadvantage of Wordwall is that you can create no more than five games in the free version.

Another game remembered by most students and positively associated with childhood is 'memory' that can be created and played thanks to Learningapps. To make sure the vocabulary is mastered the lecturer could also decide to play hangman which is available both in BookWidgets and Learningapps. To make the first part of the webinar – revising the vocabulary – more transparent for both the teacher and the students the lecturer may decide to place all the exercises on padlet, wakelet or insert them in genial.ly. Before the students move on to interpret they are ready to test their vocabulary knowledge. They are asked to do a BookWidgets crossword individually (see: Pict. 4). Those crosswords could be graded as a part of the students' assessment. Such a structure of a webinar makes students aware of the importance of having a look at the vocabulary list before the session. The more words they know before the webinar the more effective the class is. After the first webinar most of my students had a look at the materials I sent before each online session.

Once the vocabulary is introduced and mastered the most important part of the webinar may begin – interpreting. The first exercise could be a type of controlled interpreting that involves interpreting sentence by sentence. For this part the lecturer prepared a genial.ly presentation, in which there were sentences to be translated and an inserted from wheeldecide.com wheel with the students' name. The lecturer read the sentence that was supposed to be translated and spun the wheel to show which student should do it. This type of exercise is visually attractive, keeps the students alerted and makes everybody active, as all the students try to figure out how to interpret the sentence while the wheel is spinning.



Pict. 8. An interpreting exercise created in genial.ly with the use of wheeldecide.com.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For a tutorial how to do it go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SpGslb86KHO>

The last part of the webinar is interpreting whole utterances that can be found online i.e. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nhysi3PATRc>. At this point the students are ready to cope with this difficult task, as the vocabulary is mastered and they have already done some controlled type of interpreting exercise.

Interpreting may turn out to be a tedious job that requires a lot of training and on-going learning. Before every task an interpreter needs to learn the vocabulary that will be needed during interpreting. Because of that it is a good idea to prepare students for such challenges. After a few webinars constructed in the way described above the students do find the time to have a look at the vocabulary before the session. They understand that the knowledge of the words will make interpreting easier. Specific for the interpreting job habits are created.

## Conclusions

Among numerous challenges of remote teaching the “need for teaching materials in the form of interactive multimedia (images, animations, educational games) to engage and maintain students’ motivation” (Ferri et al., 2020: 4) is mentioned by a number of scholars (see: Thomas, Rogers, 2020; Mukhtar et al., 2020; Verawardina, 2020). The Internet offers a number of websites and apps that make it possible to plan and conduct engaging, interactive webinars not only for primary or secondary school students but also for university students who learn in a more effective way when activated. Thanks to the application of active learning, which “engages students in the process of learning through activities [...] as opposed to passively listening to an expert” (Freeman et al., 2014) a lecturer makes students are engaged in the webinars. There is another advantage for the lecturer. S/He is aware of who takes an active part in the webinar and who is merely a name on the list – an issue that was often mentioned when the emergency remote teaching started.

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## Netography

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<https://www.flippity.net/>

<https://www.liveworksheets.com/>

<https://www.mentimeter.com/>

<https://www.storyjumper.com/>

## Streszczenie

### Jak utrzymać zaangażowanie studentów podczas zajęć zdalnych

Tematem artykułu jest pokazanie możliwości wykorzystania różnych wirtualnych aplikacji w celu utrzymania zaangażowania studentów w żmudny proces zdobywania wiedzy w systemie edukacji zdalnej.

Wspomina się w nim o takich metodach pracy, jak projekty czy grywalizacja, pokazując jednocześnie, jakie konkretnie narzędzia i w jaki sposób można w ich kontekście zastosować. W dalszej części tekstu przedstawiono sposoby tworzenia interaktywnych kart pracy oraz wyniki badań na temat zastosowania aplikacji BookWidgets do oceniania.

Przykład zaplanowanego w oparciu o metody aktywizujące webinarium z tłumaczeń ustnych, jakie przeprowadzane były przez autorkę artykułu w Akademii Humanistyczno-Ekonomicznej w Łodzi w roku akademickim 2019/2020, stanowi kolejną część artykułu, który zakończono zachęceniem nauczycieli akademickich i nauczycielek akademickich do sięgania po bogate źródło, jakim jest internet dający możliwość przekazywania, powtarzania i utrwalania wiedzy.

**Słowa kluczowe:** nauczanie na odległość, edukacja zdalna, aplikacja, nauczanie aktywizujące