

Mass media and gamification in teaching

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Abstract. The present article focuses on the inclusion of media and games in teaching, as both can become effective educational tools given that they are an integral part of students’ lives. As teachers, we may not always reflect on the ways in which we could improve our teaching methods by using mass media. As a result of attending a Digital Media Education course, I have become more aware of the wide range of activities that can be developed with secondary school students. Thus, by integrating key concepts such as media education or media literacy - which focus on developing critical thinking skills and on analysing, evaluating, and creating media messages, shifting users from passive consumers to active and informed participants - I have obtained unexpectedly positive results.

The study is based on a practical, classroom-oriented approach, combining media education principles with gamification techniques in secondary school teaching. Learning activities included the analysis of media content, creation of media products, and game-based tasks. In addition, a post-lesson reflective process was conducted through guided questions addressed to students, with responses interpreted by the teacher to evaluate learning outcomes and improve instructional practices.

The results indicate that integrating media and gamification increases student engagement, motivation, and participation. Students demonstrated improved critical thinking, digital literacy, and collaborative skills. The use of real-life media content and interactive tasks contributed to better understanding and retention of information, while gamification elements supported active and enjoyable learning experiences.

The findings suggest that combining media literacy and gamification represents an effective strategy for modern education.

Keywords: Media; Gamification; Teaching; Interactive learning.

1. Introduction

The increasing presence of mass media and digital technologies in students’ everyday lives has significantly influenced the educational landscape. As a result, integrating media and gamification into teaching has become an important approach for enhancing student engagement and developing essential 21st-century skills. Media are no longer simply sources of information; they shape perceptions, behaviours, and ways of thinking, making media literacy a crucial component of modern education.

Media education focuses on developing students’ ability to critically analyse, evaluate, and create media messages, transforming them from passive consumers into active and informed

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participants. In this context, several core concepts are essential for understanding how media function. These include the idea that media messages are constructed, that they convey embedded values, and that they are often influenced by commercial or political interests. Additionally, audiences actively interpret media messages, negotiating meaning based on their individual experiences, cultural backgrounds, and social contexts.

Fundamental principles of media literacy, as identified by organisations and researchers (Association for Media Literacy, n.d.), (Jolls & Wilson, 2014), emphasise that media messages do not represent reality directly. Instead, they are created, edited, and shaped by individuals or organisations to present a particular version of reality.

Furthermore, each type of media uses its own specific language, including codes, conventions, and techniques such as visual composition, sound, and narrative structure. Media also have important commercial, social, and political implications, as they can influence public opinion, reinforce values, and reflect existing power structures. At the same time, different media platforms impose specific constraints that affect how information is produced and communicated.

Digital-Specific Concepts (Based on MediaSmarts, n.d). The following key characteristics define the nature and impact of digital media in contemporary learning environments:

- Digital media are networked, meaning that information spreads rapidly and users are often both consumers and creators.
- Digital media are persistent and shareable; content remains accessible over time, can be easily copied, and may reach unintended audiences.
- Digital interaction has real impact, implying that online actions can have tangible, real-world consequences.

Media Education Approach (Based on Scandinavian University Press, 2021). Effective media education is grounded in several core pedagogical principles that support active and critical learning:

- Agency contributes to empowering learners to take control of their media experiences.
- Reflection supports the analysis of what is learned and consumed.
- Collaboration involves sharing and interpreting media with others.
- Culture enhances the ability to contextualise media within social and cultural environments.

Alongside media literacy, gamification has emerged as an effective strategy for increasing student motivation and participation. By incorporating elements such as challenges, rules, feedback, and interaction, gamification transforms learning into a more engaging and meaningful experience.

2. Research methodology

This study is based on a qualitative, practice-oriented approach conducted with secondary school students. The research focuses on the integration of media education and gamification in classroom activities.

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To better understand the impact of these approaches, a post-lesson reflective process was implemented. This involved guided discussions with students regarding their learning experiences, as well as a set of structured questions designed to explore their perceptions of media use and game-based learning.

The students' responses were analysed and interpreted by the teacher with the aim of identifying the effects of these methods on engagement, critical thinking, and overall learning outcomes. The findings were used to reflect on and improve teaching practices.

3. Implementation of media and gamification in teaching

Media education aims to foster critical, reflective, and participatory citizenship in a digital world. The educational objectives of the lessons varied and included group activities designed to produce a final outcome, such as writing a newspaper article or creating a video suitable for social media. These activities incorporated specific techniques intended to highlight the characteristics of different media formats.

One example is the lesson entitled Media Manipulation, which was implemented with 11th-grade students. The lesson had a significant impact, as it combined English language learning with real-life situations and contributed to the development of 21st-century skills. The lesson was structured as follows:

- The warm-up activity, lasting ten minutes, introduced the key concepts of fact and opinion, which were further explored in the subsequent stages.
- The procedure involved selecting a viral news item and presenting it to the class using two different media channels: written articles and social media platforms (e.g., Facebook and TikTok).
- The first activity (10 minutes) required students to identify facts and opinions in both sources. After analysing the content, students organised the information into two categories—facts and opinions—while paying attention to the credibility of the sources.
- The second activity (10 minutes) asked students to justify their classifications and explain why certain elements were considered facts or opinions. They also compared the two sources, identifying which one presented the information more objectively and which relied more on subjective elements such as emotions and persuasive language.
- The third activity (10 minutes) involved analysing the news item from five perspectives: author, content, purpose, target audience, and format. Students were then asked to create their own version of the same news item for at least two different media channels (e.g., newspaper article, Facebook post, or TikTok content).
- The fourth activity (10 minutes) focused on reflection, during which students discussed how media can influence and manipulate audiences.

In addition to media-based activities, gamification was integrated as an interactive and effective teaching approach. Gamification refers to the use of game elements in learning contexts, including challenges, rules, feedback, interaction, and emotional engagement, which make learning more enjoyable compared to traditional methods.

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So-called “serious games” are designed not only for entertainment but also for educational purposes, such as learning concepts or developing specific skills. Examples include vocabulary games, alphabetical ordering activities, and spelling exercises, which support language learning through practice and repetition. While students are often motivated by winning (extrinsic motivation), the learning process becomes more engaging and effective.

More complex serious games, including simulations, provide immersive learning experiences supported by narratives (Gamelearn. 2017). A well-known example is Civilization, in which players build and manage an empire by balancing resources. Another example is Stop Disasters, developed by the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, where players make decisions to reduce risks and observe the consequences.

Other examples include DragonBox Elements, which supports learning geometry, Pulse!, which allows nurses to practise emergency decision-making, and Pacific, which develops teamwork skills. These types of games can also be used in language teaching, as they encourage collaboration and communication.

Game-based learning involves the extensive use of such games to achieve educational objectives. For instance, platforms like Minecraft can be used for individual, pair, or group activities, enabling students to collaborate and develop language skills. As noted by York (2014), different modes of the game can support a variety of learning outcomes, making the game a central component of the learning process rather than a supplementary activity.

4. Key findings

Using media in teaching enhances student engagement, motivation, and academic performance by supporting information processing through the combination of text, audio, and visual elements. Effective integration also improves digital literacy and creativity, while interactive tools such as simulations provide more personalised learning experiences. However, challenges remain, including technical barriers and the need for adequate teacher training.

Gamification in teaching can significantly increase student engagement, motivation, and knowledge retention, with improvements of up to 40% (Google Trends, 2018), often leading to higher academic performance through active and tailored learning experiences. Key elements such as points, badges, and leaderboards are most effective when aligned with learning objectives, although they may also encourage excessive competition and, in some cases, undesirable behaviours such as cheating.

5. Conclusions

Gamification has shown that it can be a valuable addition to designing effective learning. Students tend to respond positively to this approach, and in certain circumstances, it can significantly enhance motivation and improve learning performance. The key factor lies in how game-based elements are integrated into lessons, ensuring that they support educational objectives rather than distract from them.

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Media literacy and gamification can be further integrated into the teaching process by selecting appropriate videos, documentaries, and digital content. These resources can serve as effective starting points for classroom activities, particularly in English lessons, where their interpretation can stimulate discussion, critical thinking, and language development.

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