



PART 1

Read the text below and answer questions 1–13.

THE POWER OF PLAY: AN INTRODUCTION TO GAMIFICATION IN EDUCATION

Gamification in education refers to the deliberate use of game-like elements in non-game learning environments to support educational aims. Typical elements include points, badges, levels, timed challenges, and narrative “quests”, but the intention is not to entertain students for its own sake. Instead, designers use these mechanics to clarify goals, structure practice, and make feedback easier to notice. In psychological terms, gamification tries to shape learning behaviour by modifying cues and consequences around study, so that students can see what to do, do it repeatedly, and understand the results quickly enough to adjust.

One reason the approach spread is that many traditional classrooms provide weak or delayed signals of progress. A student may work for weeks before receiving a grade, and even detailed comments can arrive after the moment when revision would have the greatest impact. Gamified systems attempt to create immediate feedback loops: small tasks generate rapid information about performance, which then guides the next attempt. This resembles a simplified learning cycle in which action, feedback, and adjustment happen repeatedly, rather than being postponed to the end of a unit. When designed well, these loops can make competence feel reachable because progress is broken into visible steps.

The behavioural logic behind many systems is related to operant conditioning, where the probability of a behaviour increases when it is followed by a reinforcing outcome. In educational settings, the “reinforcer” might be a badge, a progress bar, access to a new level, or recognition of mastery. However, reinforcement is not automatically beneficial. If the reward is unrelated to learning quality—such as speed, quantity, or sheer compliance—students may learn to chase the reward rather than the skill. This is why progression mechanics matter: they determine what counts as progress and what behaviours are repeated. A well-chosen mechanic reinforces strategies that improve understanding, while a poorly chosen one reinforces superficial activity.

Gamification is often associated with digital platforms because software can track performance, adapt difficulty, and display progress continuously. Yet it can also be implemented without screens, through classroom routines such as milestone charts, “quest” checklists, or structured challenges that are checked by a teacher. The medium is less important than the design logic: the same badge can represent meaningful mastery or meaningless accumulation. In practice, teachers who use gamification successfully often



treat it as cognitive scaffolding—temporary supports that guide attention, sequence practice, and reduce uncertainty—rather than as a replacement for instruction. The game layer can help students start and persist, but learning still depends on explanations, examples, and opportunities to apply knowledge.

Supporters frequently emphasise persistence. Many valuable skills require repetition, and repetition can be emotionally difficult when progress is slow or invisible. A gamified structure can reduce discouragement by offering shorter cycles of effort and reward, which can keep learners practising long enough to experience competence. Once competence grows, motivation may become more internal, because students can feel improvement directly. In this sense, game elements can function as a bridge: they maintain practice early, when the skill is fragile, and then become less central as students develop confidence and habits.

Critics, however, warn about the overjustification effect, where external rewards undermine intrinsic motivation by shifting attention from enjoyment or mastery to prize-seeking. If students begin to ask “How many points is this worth?” rather than “What will I learn?”, the activity can become transactional. The risk rises when competition is highly visible, when rewards are scarce, or when learners fear public comparison. Students may take shortcuts, avoid challenging tasks that threaten their score, or disengage once the reward system is removed. For these reasons, many researchers argue that gamification should prioritise mastery goals and private progress over public ranking.

Research evidence reflects both promise and limitation. Studies sometimes report improved participation and short-term performance, particularly when tasks align closely with learning objectives and feedback is frequent and specific. Other studies find weaker effects, benefits restricted to certain learners, or enthusiasm that fades as novelty disappears. Reviewers often conclude that gamification is most effective when it strengthens good teaching—by clarifying goals, supporting practice, and improving feedback—rather than when it is treated as a motivational “hack” applied to weak materials. This also suggests that evaluation should look beyond clicks and time spent, examining whether students can transfer skills and explain their reasoning.

Equity and classroom climate are equally important. Competitive features can energise some students while discouraging others, especially those who start behind, dislike public ranking, or have experienced repeated failure. A digital divide can also shape outcomes: if practice depends on devices, stable internet, or quiet space at home, a gamified homework system may widen gaps even if classroom participation looks equal. Designers therefore increasingly recommend choices, multiple routes to success, and chances to



retry without penalty, so that game mechanics communicate that learning is iterative and recoverable.

A final challenge is measurement. What is easy to count is not always what matters educationally. If points reward minutes logged, number of attempts, or speed, students may optimise the metric rather than deepen understanding. Stronger designs reduce this by tying rewards to demonstrated mastery and by using feedback that explains errors, not just scores. In the end, gamification works best as a disciplined design approach: it can structure attention and persistence, but its success depends on whether the chosen mechanics serve learning rather than distracting from it.

Questions 1–5

Choose **TRUE** if the statement agrees with the information given in the text, choose **FALSE** if the statement contradicts the information, or choose **NOT GIVEN** if there is no information on this.

- 1 The passage suggests gamification can make progress and feedback easier for learners to notice during study.
- 2 The passage states that classroom gamification must use digital technology to automate scoring and feedback.
- 3 The passage states that gamification is more likely to reduce intrinsic motivation in younger students than in older students.
- 4 The passage indicates that visible competition can discourage some students, especially those who begin at a disadvantage.
- 5 The passage suggests that rewarding time logged can lead students to focus on measurable activity rather than deeper understanding.

Questions 6–10

Select the correct answer.

- 6 According to the passage, gamification is intended primarily to
 - A replace teaching with entertainment so students remain engaged
 - B remove the need for assessment by making learning feel like play
 - C support learning by clarifying goals and providing more immediate feedback
 - D reduce practice demands by substituting short challenges for repetition
- 7 The passage suggests gamification can help persistence because it can



- A** provide short cycles of effort and reward until competence develops
- B** ensure learners avoid difficult tasks by choosing only easy point options
- C** eliminate interruptions by removing collaborative classroom activities
- D** guarantee mastery by increasing the amount of competition in lessons

8 One risk identified by critics is that gamified rewards may

- A** prevent students from learning skills that require repetition
- B** make feedback too frequent to be useful
- C** reduce autonomy by removing all choices in learning tasks
- D** encourage point-chasing and shortcuts rather than understanding

9 What does the passage report about research into gamification?

- A** It shows uniform long-term gains across learners and subjects
- B** It shows mixed effects influenced by design, alignment, and fading novelty
- C** It confirms effects are strongest when competition is highly visible
- D** It demonstrates digital systems are consistently superior to non-digital ones

10 The passage suggests competitive elements are most likely to be harmful when they

- A** include levels that allow students to retry after mistakes
- B** are paired with frequent, specific feedback on learning objectives
- C** make public comparisons that demotivate learners who are behind
- D** allow learners to choose tasks rather than complete identical activities

Questions 11–13

Match each statement with the correct category, **A–D**, below. **NB** You may use any letter more than once.

List of Categories

- A** Motivation risks (intrinsic/extrinsic balance)
- B** Evidence limitations (research findings)
- C** Equity and classroom climate (social factors)
- D** Measurement problems (data vs learning)

11 Public ranking may undermine confidence and participation for learners who dislike comparison or who start behind.

12 Reported improvements may depend on design choices and may fade once the newness of the system disappears.



13 When points are tied to easy-to-count activity, students may optimise the metric instead of building deeper understanding.

Answer Key

1. TRUE
2. FALSE
3. NOT GIVEN
4. TRUE
5. TRUE
6. C
7. A
8. D
9. B
10. C
11. C
12. B
13. D