PART 3

Read the text below and answer questions 27–40.

CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES AND THE FUTURE OF GAMIFIED LEARNING

A

Gamified learning is routinely promoted as a pragmatic route to higher engagement, yet critics argue that adoption has raced ahead of careful evaluation. In many schools, points, badges, streaks and level-ups are introduced because they are simple to deploy, visually persuasive to parents and administrators, and easy to market as “innovation” during procurement cycles. The deeper question is not whether such elements can change behaviour—Skinnerian conditioning predicts they can—but whether they improve learning in durable and equitable ways. Engagement is a means, not an endpoint: a system that boosts short-term participation may still fail if it does not deepen understanding, if it widens gaps between groups, or if it teaches students to treat learning as a transaction rather than a practice of meaning-making and judgment.

B

A central worry is what some writers call motivational “swap”: rewards begin to displace the value of the content itself. When reinforcement is frequent and low-effort, attention is trained toward quick wins, and students may come to ask what earns points rather than what builds competence. Supporters reply that motivation is multi-layered and that extrinsic incentives can function as scaffolding, sustaining practice until mastery becomes intrinsically satisfying. Critics counter that this is an empirical claim, not a comforting assumption. From the perspective of extrinsic vs intrinsic motivation, the risk is greatest when mechanics reduce autonomy, emphasise surveillance, or turn learning into status competition—conditions that self-determination researchers associate with the crowding-out of interest. The transition from external rewards to internal commitment may occur for some learners and tasks, but it can also stall, especially when ranking and scarcity amplify anxiety about public performance.

C

A related critique targets reductionism in the measurement of learning. Many platforms count what is easy to record—clicks, time-on-task, consecutive days of use, or number of attempts—and then treat those proxies as success. Predictably, students “optimise the metric”: they repeat familiar items, guess rapidly, or avoid challenging questions that threaten a visible score. Stronger designs attempt to link rewards to demonstrated understanding through richer assessment, for example by requiring explanations, spaced retrieval, or mastery evidence that cannot be faked by speed. Yet these improvements

raise complexity and, often, teacher workload, because systems must be calibrated, exceptions handled, and feedback interpreted. The more a platform claims to represent genuine learning, the more it depends on expert judgement and high-quality assessment design—features that are costly, unevenly distributed, and difficult to scale across subjects.

D

Equity and governance concerns expand the critique beyond motivation and test scores. Competitive mechanics can discourage learners who start behind, while “always-on” homework can penalise students without devices, quiet space, or predictable time. At the same time, many gamified products rely on extensive data capture: response time, error patterns, persistence after failure, and patterns of use across the day. Proponents argue that such traces enable personalisation and early intervention, but critics frame this as data commodification, where student attention becomes a resource to monetise and where “engagement” metrics can serve commercial incentives. This leads to algorithmic governance questions about who owns the data, how long it is stored, whether it can be reused beyond education, and how schools can audit systems whose logic is proprietary. Concerns intensify when third-party analytics or AI-driven adaptation is layered on top, because teachers may struggle to override recommendations or explain decisions to students and parents.

E

There is also a cultural critique about the kind of learner a game-like system imagines. Progress bars imply linear growth; levels imply hierarchy; streaks imply uninterrupted participation; and leaderboards imply that comparison is motivational. These assumptions fit some domains of repetitive practice, but they can misrepresent learning where progress is uneven, exploratory, or creative, such as inquiry projects and creative writing. When students internalise the mechanics, they may become less willing to experiment, because experimentation risks visible failure and the loss of a streak or rank. Over time, this can narrow what students see as “good learning”: safe productivity is rewarded, while intellectual risk-taking is punished. In that sense, the tool does not merely measure learning; it can reshape learners’ beliefs about competence, error, and identity in the classroom.

F

Evidence reviews mirror these concerns by highlighting the difference between novelty and sustained impact. Short studies commonly find spikes in participation, but longitudinal efficacy is harder to establish: effects may fade as the mechanics become familiar, or benefits may concentrate among students already confident with the subject. Better

research designs track outcomes over months rather than days, compare cohorts, and examine subgroup effects to see whether a “successful” rollout is masking concentrated discouragement. They also distinguish between persistence and achievement, and ask whether improvements transfer beyond the gamified context once points and badges are removed. Methodologically, this requires combining quantitative outcomes with classroom observation and student voice, because harms such as anxiety, avoidance, or stigma can be real even when average scores rise.

G

The most realistic conclusion is that gamification will remain part of education, but its role is likely to become narrower and more regulated. Rather than treating game elements as universal motivators, future designs may apply them selectively where practice and feedback loops genuinely matter, limit them where measurement distorts learning, and impose stronger safeguards where data collection is involved. That implies clearer learning objectives, transparent reward logic, and professional oversight of adaptive systems, including requirements for explainability so teachers and students can understand why tasks change. It also suggests practical guardrails—data minimisation, opt-out routes, and evaluation “sunset clauses” that force schools to review whether benefits persist. In this view, the future of gamified learning is less a race for more features than a negotiation among effectiveness, fairness, and trust.

Questions 27–31

Choose **YES** if the statement agrees with the claims of the writer, choose **NO** if the statement contradicts the claims of the writer, or choose **NOT GIVEN** if it is impossible to say what the writer thinks about this.

27 The writer suggests that points, badges and streaks are sometimes adopted because they are easy to deploy and visually persuasive.

28 The writer claims that reward-focused design inevitably reduces intrinsic motivation for all learners.

29 The writer suggests that some game structures may misrepresent learning in areas where progress is uneven, such as creative writing.

30 The writer suggests that evaluation of gamified learning should be carried out over months rather than days.

31 The writer states that schools should delete student data after a fixed period of time.

Questions 32–36

The text has seven paragraphs, **A–G**. Which paragraph contains the following information? Choose the correct letter, **A–G**. **NB** You may use any letter more than once.

32 A warning that visually persuasive game elements must still be judged by durable learning and equity.

33 The idea that measurable proxies can push learners toward score-protecting strategies rather than deeper understanding.

34 A critique that certain mechanics impose a misleading model of progress on exploratory or creative domains.

35 Concerns about ownership, storage, auditing, and secondary use of learner data as a governance problem.

36 The view that gamification will persist but will be applied more selectively and constrained by trust and oversight.

Questions 37–40

Select the correct answer.

37 What does the writer mean by motivational “swap”?

A Students avoid practice because feedback becomes too frequent.
B Learners may come to value the reward more than the content being learned.
C Teachers replace instruction with gaming to increase time-on-task.
D Schools stop evaluating learning because engagement appears higher.

38 In paragraph **C**, students are most likely to “optimise the metric” when success is defined mainly by

A clicks, time-on-task, or number of attempts
B explanations of errors and demonstrated understanding
C taking intellectual risks even when failure is visible
D collaborative discussion and peer feedback

39 In paragraph **D**, one benefit claimed by proponents of data collection is that it can

A remove the need for teachers to monitor progress
B ensure platforms do not aim to increase “time in app”
C prevent students from developing shallow strategies
D support personalisation and early intervention

40 Which option best matches the writer's conclusion about the future of gamified learning?

A It will disappear because its effects cannot be evaluated credibly.
B It will mainly expand competition because competition is the most reliable motivator.
C It will persist, but designs will be more selective and governed around effectiveness, fairness and trust.
D It will become more feature-heavy, with streaks and leaderboards as the standard approach.

Answer Key

27. YES
28. NO
29. YES
30. YES
31. NOT GIVEN
32. A
33. C
34. E
35. D
36. G
37. B
38. A
39. D
40. C