



PART 2

Read the text below and answer questions 14–26.

GAMIFICATION IN EDUCATION: MORE THAN JUST POINTS AND BADGES

A

Gamification in education refers to the use of game-derived design features in non-game learning environments in order to shape engagement, persistence, and the experience of progress. In popular accounts it is often reduced to visible mechanics—points, badges, and leaderboards—yet these are best understood as a thin layer of signalling rather than the engine of learning. Designers who take gamification seriously emphasise other features: explicit goals, rapid feedback loops, calibrated challenge, and meaningful choice. These elements aim to make effort feel intelligible and worthwhile, so that students can see how present actions connect to future competence. For this reason, the question is not whether a classroom “has points,” but whether the design supports the psychology of sustained learning.

B

One reason gamified systems can feel compelling is that they translate complex tasks into structured sequences. When a difficult curriculum is broken into achievable steps, learners receive frequent cues that they are moving forward. This can strengthen self-efficacy and reduce avoidance, particularly for students who interpret confusion as failure. However, not all motivation is the same. Behaviourist approaches associated with B. F. Skinner treat rewards as reinforcers: a learner repeats behaviour that is followed by a valued outcome. Such extrinsic incentives can increase participation in the short term, but they do not guarantee that learners will internalise the value of the activity. The phrase “chocolate-covered broccoli” is sometimes used to describe superficial gamification: wrapping an unappealing task in sweet external rewards without changing the underlying learning experience.

C

Critics argue that when design relies heavily on extrinsic rewards, it can distort both goals and behaviour. If students work mainly to collect tokens, their effort may decline once the incentive is removed, particularly when the activity itself has not become more meaningful. In addition, public ranking systems can produce motivational side-effects: leaderboards may energise a small number of top performers while making low performance conspicuous and therefore socially costly. Students who expect to appear at the bottom may disengage, not because they are unable to learn, but because they wish to avoid public evidence of failure. The result is a paradox: a system intended to increase



engagement can amplify fear of embarrassment and reduce willingness to attempt challenging work.

D

In response, proponents of “meaningful gamification” draw on Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which argues that intrinsic motivation is supported when three psychological needs are met: autonomy (a sense of choice and agency), competence (the feeling of improving through mastery), and relatedness (connection to others and a sense of belonging). In practical terms, this implies a different design emphasis. Rather than rewarding mere completion, a system might offer optional pathways, allow students to select tasks at different difficulty levels, or frame learning within collaborative missions that foster social support. Narrative structures—solving a mystery, managing a simulated community, or testing a hypothesis for a real audience—can also provide coherence, so tasks feel purposeful rather than arbitrary. The goal is not to eliminate structure, but to ensure that structure helps students value the learning itself.

E

When gamification reinforces practice patterns that are already supported by learning science, it can be particularly effective. For instance, language-learning applications often use daily “streaks,” immediate correction, and spaced review to encourage regular retrieval practice rather than sporadic cramming. In mathematics, adaptive platforms can adjust task difficulty in response to performance, keeping learners in a productive zone where errors are informative but not overwhelming. These examples matter because they illustrate a key principle: game elements are most defensible when they support deliberate practice—repetition with feedback, focused attention on errors, and gradual increases in challenge—rather than merely increasing the amount of time spent clicking through tasks.

F

Even so, design quality is a decisive variable. If rewards are misaligned with learning objectives, students may optimise the reward structure while doing little that promotes durable understanding. A platform that grants points for speed, for example, can encourage guessing rather than reflection; a badge system that rewards “completion” can motivate students to rush through content without correcting misconceptions. For this reason, serious implementations rely on measurement that goes beyond finishing tasks. Effective systems examine error patterns, revision behaviour, and evidence of transfer—whether a skill learned in one context can be applied to a new problem. Without such diagnostics, gamification risks producing the appearance of progress while leaving underlying competence unchanged.



G

Finally, gamification has constraints that are social as well as technical. Digital platforms often assume access to devices, stable internet, and time for frequent practice—conditions that are unevenly distributed. Disparities in resource availability can therefore determine who benefits, regardless of potential learning gains. Cultural context can also shape responses: some learners find competition energising, while others experience public comparison as threatening or inappropriate. For teachers, these realities imply a cautious conclusion. Gamification is not a substitute for instruction, nor is it automatically equitable. It works best when teachers align game mechanics with lesson goals, provide scaffolding for struggling students, and interpret data as diagnostic information rather than as a scoreboard. In this role, gamification can enrich feedback and persistence—provided it serves learning rather than merely decorating it.

Questions 14–19

Which paragraph contains the following information?

14 A concern that unequal access to devices, internet, or time can determine who benefits from gamified learning.

15 An illustration of gamified tools supporting regular practice through daily routines and immediate correction.

16 The claim that sustained engagement depends on design features beyond visible scoring and badges.

17 A description of how a psychological theory links intrinsic motivation to autonomy, competence, and social connection.

18 The warning that motivation based on external incentives may collapse once the incentives are withdrawn.

19 A concern that learners may exploit the reward structure while making little genuine progress in understanding.

Questions 20–23

Complete the summary below. Choose **ONE WORD ONLY** from the text for each answer.

How gamification can support learning

Well-designed systems use rapid **20** loops to help learners understand their progress. Behaviourist approaches may treat rewards as **21**, encouraging behaviours that lead to valued outcomes. Self-Determination Theory identifies autonomy,



competence and **22** as psychological needs that support intrinsic motivation. To assess genuine learning, effective systems also examine **23**—whether knowledge or skills acquired in one context can be applied to a new problem.

Questions 24–26

Select the correct answer.

24 Why can leaderboards have a negative effect on some learners?

- A** They can make students depend on frequent rewards instead of feedback.
- B** Students expecting a low position may withdraw to avoid having poor performance exposed publicly.
- C** They encourage students to complete tasks rapidly without correcting misconceptions.
- D** They prevent learners from choosing tasks at different levels of difficulty.

25 What characterises “meaningful gamification” in the passage?

- A** Rewards are withheld until students have demonstrated complete mastery.
- B** Competition is used to make difficult learning activities feel more valuable.
- C** Game design supports choice, mastery and social connection rather than simply rewarding completion.
- D** Students are given maximum independence so that external structure does not affect motivation.

26 Which statement best reflects the writer’s conclusion about educational gamification?

- A** It can be useful when game mechanics serve learning objectives and are combined with appropriate support and evaluation.
- B** Its strongest effect comes from making otherwise unattractive tasks more entertaining.
- C** Its success depends mainly on providing equal access to devices and internet connections.
- D** It works most effectively when teachers minimise intervention and allow the game system to guide students.

Answer Key

14. G

15. E

16. A

17. D



18. C

19. F

20. feedback

21. reinforcers

22. relatedness

23. transfer

24. B

25. C

26. A