Impact of a Gamified Experience on the Promotion of Historical Thinking in Primary Education

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The use of active methodologies in the teaching-learning process is increasing in popularity. However, with regard to History, this is not the case. Nevertheless, History teaching trends emphasise the importance of their integration to achieve a practical and student-centred learning process to encourage students to develop skills such as reflection and critical thinking. The acquisition of these competences along with knowledge about History is known as historical thinking. In this quantitative study, a gamification methodology was compared to a lecture-based one. To this aim, over the period of a unit of work, two groups from two different schools participated in the study. Results show that, although both groups had the same knowledge before the intervention, the gamification group performed at a significantly higher academic level after it. In addition, a reduced version of the instructional material motivational survey, which was given to the gamification class before and after the intervention, verified that students prefer the gamification dynamic compared to their usual lessons.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, research into the didactics of History has found the need for a renewal and redefinition of the teaching of History to students (Gómez Carrasco & Miralles Martínez, 2018). A pedagogical model focused on the need to promote critical thinking in students is proposed. This model, in contrast to the traditional one, avoids the mere memorization and repetition of past events presented as closed knowledge. In addition, this renewal of the model is justified according to the new History curriculum. This curriculum demands a greater commitment to the acquisition of new skills beyond theoretical knowledge (López-Facal, 2014). Among these competences, we can highlight the importance of being able to identify reliable sources of information, critical reflection, or the ability to express oneself autonomously based on the information analysed (Gómez-Carrasco et al., 2018). From this perspective, an alternative approach, or methodological change, in History teaching is proposed. This alternative aims to develop skills, abilities, and attitudes similar to those used by historians in their professional lives. This way of educating about History content is called historical thinking.

In short, it consists of preparing students, for society in the 21st century. The mere transmission of theoretical knowledge no longer makes sense as, thanks to emerging technologies, information is at hand. Thus, historical thinking aims to put the students in the shoes of historians; learning to reflect as historians do. The new educational paradigm promotes student learning in an active and motivating way; something which makes much more sense nowadays. Among these new pedagogical approaches, gamification is presented as one of the alternatives which is becoming more popular, due to its marked playful nature (Kapp, 2012). Therefore, in the present study, an intervention is presented with the use of gamification in which historical thinking is encouraged. The results obtained, both academic and motivational, were compared with a control group using traditional classroom methodology.

BACKGROUND

Historical Thinking: Changing What our Students Need to Remember

Often, the teaching-learning process of History is based on the mere transmission of theoretical knowledge (concepts, data, dates, etc.) which students must memorize (Martínez-Hita & Gómez-Carrasco, 2018). However, as Miralles Martínez, Gómez-Carrasco and Sánchez-Ibáñez (2014) point out in their study, the methodology most commonly used by teachers continues to be lecture-based, supported by the use of a textbook. Likewise, these authors affirm that this teaching, in addition to not providing lasting learning over time to students, has become obsolete, since due to emerging technologies we have instant access to this purely theoretical knowledge. Therefore, not only does theoretical History learning make no sense, but it also means that students perceive History as closed, immutable and useless (Burenheide, 2007; Liceras, 2016). Martínez-Hita and Gómez-Carrasco (2018) point out that the students' conception of History can be altered by changing the way History is taught in class. Therefore, a renewal of History teaching towards a reflexive, critical and open-to-debate approach is necessary, through which students are able to question information and understand its usefulness. This is what we know as historical thinking (Domínguez, 2015; Lee & Ashby, 2000; Seixas & Morton, 2013; VanSledright, 2011; Wineburg, 2001).

In the seventies, we find the roots of this alternative teaching approach, seeking to learn historical methods at the same time as accumulating knowledge about purely theoretical content. Since then, dif-