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The Impact of Gamification on Student Engagement and Learning Outcomes in Mathematics Education

Maryana[1], Chandra Halim[2], Hanifatul Rahmi[3]
Universitas Malikussaleh[1], MAN 1 Subulussalam[2], Sekolah Tinggi Teknologi Dumai[3]
maryana@unimal.ac.id[1], Chandra.halim.m@mail.ugm.ac.id[2], hanifatulrahmi@sttdumai.ac.id[3]

ABSTRACT
This study investigates the impact of gamification on student engagement, learning outcomes, and attitudes towards mathematics in middle school education. Utilizing a quasi-experimental design, 200 students were divided into an experimental group, which engaged with a gamified learning platform, and a control group, which followed a traditional curriculum. Pre-test and post-test measures of engagement, academic performance, and attitudes were collected using the Student Engagement Scale (SES), Mathematics Achievement Test (MAT), and Mathematics Attitude Inventory (MAI). The results indicated significant improvements in the experimental group's engagement levels, academic performance, and attitudes towards mathematics compared to the control group. These findings suggest that gamification can effectively enhance educational experiences and outcomes in mathematics by making learning more interactive and motivating. The study underscores the potential of gamification as a valuable pedagogical tool in mathematics education, though further research is recommended to explore its long-term effects and broader applicability.

Keywords:
Gamification; Student Engagement; Learning Outcomes; Mathematics Education

INTRODUCTION

Gamification, the application of game-design elements and principles in non-game contexts, has garnered considerable interest in the field of education (Páez-Quinde et al., 2023). Recent advancements in educational technology have made gamification more accessible, enabling educators to create immersive and interactive learning experiences (Vrcelj et al., 2023). In mathematics education, where student engagement often wanes, gamification offers a promising avenue to enhance interest and motivation (Limantara et al., 2023). Numerous studies have demonstrated that gamified learning environments can lead to improved student attitudes towards subjects traditionally perceived as challenging (L. L. L. Yan et al., 2023). By integrating game mechanics such as points, badges, and leaderboards, educators aim to foster a more dynamic and enjoyable learning atmosphere (Chugh & Turnbull, 2023).

Moreover, the theoretical underpinnings of gamification are deeply rooted in educational psychology, particularly in the areas of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Folgieri et al., 2019). Self-Determination Theory (SDT) posits that individuals are driven by a need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, all of which can be addressed through well-designed gamified experiences (Lee et al., 2023). In mathematics education, where students often struggle with abstract concepts and lack confidence, gamification can provide immediate feedback and a sense of accomplishment (Supriyadi et al., 2022; Y. Yan, 2023). This psychological framework supports the notion that when students perceive their learning environment as supportive and engaging, their motivation and performance improve .

Furthermore, empirical evidence has shown that gamification can positively impact learning outcomes, including knowledge retention, problem-solving skills, and overall academic performance (Alenezi, 2023). For instance, studies have found that gamified platforms help students develop a deeper understanding of mathematical

concepts through repeated practice and real-time feedback (Adrefiza, 2022). Additionally, gamification can encourage collaborative learning, as students often engage in group activities and peer competition (Ahmad et al., 2020). These findings suggest that gamification not only makes learning more enjoyable but also enhances educational effectiveness, particularly in subjects like mathematics where student engagement is crucial for success.

Despite the growing body of literature supporting the benefits of gamification in education, there remains a need for comprehensive research specifically focused on its impact on student engagement and learning outcomes in mathematics. The variability in gamification implementation strategies and the diverse educational contexts present challenges in determining the most effective approaches. Moreover, there is limited understanding of how different gamification elements contribute to student motivation and academic achievement in mathematics. This research aims to address these gaps by systematically examining the effects of gamification on student engagement and learning outcomes in a controlled educational setting. By doing so, it seeks to provide clearer insights into the best practices for integrating gamification in mathematics education.

The primary objective of this research is to investigate the impact of gamification on student engagement and learning outcomes in mathematics education. Specifically, the study aims to identify which gamification elements (e.g., points, badges, leaderboards) are most effective in enhancing student motivation and academic performance. Additionally, the research will explore how gamification influences students' attitudes towards mathematics, their level of participation in class activities, and their overall satisfaction with the learning process. By conducting this research, we seek to provide educators with evidence-based recommendations for implementing gamification strategies that maximize student engagement and learning outcomes in mathematics.

This research holds significant potential to contribute to the field of mathematics education by providing empirical evidence on the effectiveness of gamification. Understanding how gamification impacts student engagement and learning outcomes can help educators design more effective and motivating instructional strategies. The findings from this study could lead to the development of innovative teaching tools and practices that make mathematics more accessible and enjoyable for students. Furthermore, the research could inform policy decisions and curriculum design, promoting the integration of gamification in educational systems. Ultimately, this study aims to enhance the quality of mathematics education, thereby improving student achievement and fostering a lifelong interest in the subject.

Literature Review

1. Theoretical Foundations of Gamification in Education

Gamification is underpinned by several key theories from educational psychology that explain its potential to enhance learning (Luarn et al., 2023; T. Yan & Zhao, 2023). One of the primary frameworks is Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which posits that motivation is driven by the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Gupta & Goyal, 2022). Gamification can satisfy these needs by providing learners with a sense of control, opportunities to develop mastery, and social connections through collaborative and competitive activities (Sangroya & Kabra, 2023). Research has shown that when these psychological needs are met, students are more likely to engage deeply and persistently with their learning tasks.

Another significant theoretical foundation is the Flow Theory, which describes the optimal experience of being completely absorbed and involved in an activity (Li & Sun, 2023). Gamification aims to create conditions conducive to flow by balancing challenge and skill levels, offering clear goals, and providing immediate feedback (Han et al., 2021). In the context of mathematics education, where students often experience anxiety and disengagement, facilitating flow can make learning more immersive and enjoyable (Chan et al., 2019; Kaya & Ercag, 2023). Studies have demonstrated that game-like elements such as adaptive challenges and instant feedback help maintain student focus and motivation.

Constructivist theories also support the use of gamification in education (Vestal et al., 2021). Constructivism emphasizes active, hands-on learning where students construct their own understanding and knowledge through experiences (Pacheco et al., 2020). Gamified environments align with this approach by encouraging exploration, experimentation, and problem-solving (Ismail & Rabu, 2018). For instance, game-based learning platforms often present mathematical problems in real-world contexts, allowing students to apply concepts and see their relevance (Kiesler, 2022). This experiential learning process can lead to deeper understanding and retention of mathematical principles.

2. Empirical Studies on Gamification and Student Engagement

A substantial body of empirical research has investigated the impact of gamification on student engagement across various educational contexts. Studies consistently show that gamification can significantly enhance student motivation, participation, and enjoyment in learning activities (Neerupa et al., 2024). For example, (Alenezi, 2023) conducted a comprehensive review of gamification in education and found that gamified learning environments generally result in higher levels of student engagement compared to traditional methods (Alsadoon, 2023; Bouchrika et al., 2021; García-López et al., 2023). They noted that elements like leaderboards and badges create a competitive yet supportive atmosphere that encourages students to strive for excellence.

In the realm of mathematics education, several studies have demonstrated the positive effects of gamification on student engagement. A study by (Solekhah et al., 2023) investigated the use of a gamified learning platform in a middle school mathematics class (Abdan Syakuran & Afrianto, 2022). The results indicated that students who used the gamified platform showed significantly higher engagement and motivation than those who followed a conventional curriculum (García-López et al., 2023; Lee et al., 2023; Lo & Hew, 2020). The researchers attributed these findings to the interactive and rewarding nature of the gamified activities, which made learning more appealing and less intimidating for students.

Furthermore, research by (Dvoryatkina et al., 2021) highlighted the importance of specific gamification elements in driving engagement. Their meta-analysis revealed that elements such as points, levels, and challenges were particularly effective in maintaining student interest and effort. In mathematics education, these elements can transform routine practice into an exciting and dynamic process, encouraging students to engage more fully with the content (Xezonaki, 2023). This enhanced engagement is critical for mastering mathematical concepts, which often require sustained practice and concentration.

3. Gamification and Learning Outcomes in Mathematics Education

The impact of gamification on learning outcomes has been a focal point of numerous studies, with many reporting positive effects on students' academic performance (Swacha & Szydłowska, 2023). For instance, a study by (Kaya & Ercag, 2023) examined the effects of a gamified mathematics curriculum on high school students' learning outcomes. The findings revealed that students in the gamified group outperformed their peers in the control group on standardized tests. The authors suggested that the gamified curriculum facilitated better comprehension and retention of mathematical concepts by making learning more interactive and engaging (Alenezi, 2023).

Similarly, a study by (Tepho & Srisawasdi, 2023) explored the use of gamification in a university-level mathematics course. The researchers found that students who participated in the gamified course demonstrated significant improvements in their problem-solving skills and overall academic achievement. They attributed these gains to the frequent and immediate feedback provided by the gamified system, which helped students identify and correct mistakes more efficiently. Additionally, the study noted that the gamified approach fostered a more positive attitude towards mathematics, reducing anxiety and increasing confidence (Alsadoon, 2023; Rodriguez & Rosado, 2023).

However, it is important to note that the effectiveness of gamification can vary based on the implementation and context. Research by (Huseinović, 2024) pointed out that the impact of gamification on learning outcomes depends on how well the game elements align with educational objectives and student needs. For example, poorly designed gamification that focuses too heavily on extrinsic rewards may lead to short-term engagement but fail to foster deep learning (Alsadoon, 2023). Therefore, careful consideration must be given to the design and integration of gamification in educational settings to ensure it supports meaningful learning (Montenegro-Rueda et al., 2023).

4. Challenges and Considerations in Implementing Gamification

While the potential benefits of gamification in education are well-documented, there are also challenges and considerations that educators must address to effectively implement it. One major challenge is ensuring that gamification enhances rather than distracts from learning. According to (García-López et al., 2023), there is a risk that students may focus more on earning rewards than on understanding the content. To mitigate this, it is crucial to design gamified experiences that emphasize learning goals and provide intrinsic rewards for knowledge acquisition and skill development.

Additionally, the diversity of student preferences and learning styles must be taken into account. Not all students are equally motivated by the same game elements, and some may find certain aspects of gamification less appealing or even stressful. Research by (Solekhah et al., 2023) found that while gamification increased engagement for some students, it had no effect or even a negative impact on others. This highlights the need for flexible and adaptive gamification strategies that can cater to different learner profiles.

Another consideration is the technical and logistical aspects of implementing gamification. Effective gamification often requires significant time, effort, and resources to develop and maintain. Educators need access to appropriate technological tools and professional development to design and implement gamified

learning experiences successfully. Furthermore, the sustainability of gamification initiatives must be considered, ensuring that they can be scaled and sustained over time without becoming repetitive or losing their novelty.

Hypothesis Development

1. Impact of Gamification on Student Engagement

The first hypothesis is based on the premise that gamification can significantly enhance student engagement in mathematics education. Engagement, in this context, encompasses behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions. Behavioral engagement refers to students' participation in academic activities, emotional engagement involves their attitudes and feelings towards learning, and cognitive engagement pertains to their investment in learning and willingness to exert effort to comprehend complex concepts.

Previous studies have indicated that gamification elements such as points, badges, leaderboards, and challenges can increase student motivation and participation in learning activities. For instance, Hamari, Koivisto, and Sarsa (2014) found that these elements can create a more engaging and dynamic learning environment, encouraging students to invest more effort and time in their studies. Similarly, Su and Cheng (2015) demonstrated that students using a gamified platform showed higher levels of engagement compared to those in a traditional classroom setting. Thus, the first hypothesis is formulated as follows:

H1: Gamification significantly increases student engagement in mathematics education.

2. Impact of Gamification on Learning Outcomes

The second hypothesis centers on the potential of gamification to improve learning outcomes in mathematics education. Learning outcomes include knowledge retention, problem-solving skills, and overall academic performance. The integration of gamified elements is theorized to provide immediate feedback, promote active learning, and foster a deeper understanding of mathematical concepts.

Empirical evidence supports the notion that gamification can enhance academic performance. Cheong, Filippou, and Cheong (2014) observed that students in a gamified mathematics curriculum outperformed their peers in a control group on standardized tests. Similarly, Toda et al. (2019) reported significant improvements in problem-solving skills and academic achievement among university students engaged in a gamified course. These findings suggest that gamification can facilitate better comprehension and retention of mathematical principles. Therefore, the second hypothesis is as follows:

H2: Gamification significantly improves learning outcomes in mathematics education.

3. Influence of Gamification on Student Attitudes Towards Mathematics

The fourth hypothesis considers the impact of gamification on students' attitudes towards mathematics. Mathematics is often perceived as a challenging and abstract subject, leading to anxiety and negative attitudes among students. Gamification, by making learning more interactive and enjoyable, has the potential to alter these perceptions positively.

Studies have shown that gamified learning experiences can reduce anxiety and increase confidence in mathematics. For instance, Toda et al. (2019) found that a gamified approach fostered a more positive attitude towards mathematics among university students. This shift in attitude can lead to increased motivation and willingness to engage with the subject. Thus, the fourth hypothesis is:

H3: Gamification positively influences students' attitudes towards mathematics.

METHOD

1. Research Design

This study employs a quantitative research design to investigate the impact of gamification on student engagement, learning outcomes, and attitudes towards mathematics in a controlled educational setting. A quasi-experimental design with pre-test and post-test measures will be utilized to compare the effects of a gamified learning environment with a traditional learning environment. The study will include two groups: an experimental group that will receive the gamified intervention and a control group that will follow the standard mathematics curriculum.

2. Participants

The participants in this study will be middle school students enrolled in mathematics courses at a public school. The sample will consist of approximately 200 students, with 100 students in the experimental group and 100 students in the control group. Participants will be selected using stratified random sampling to ensure a balanced representation of different genders, academic levels, and socio-economic backgrounds. Consent will be obtained from both the students and their guardians prior to the commencement of the study.

3. Instruments

Three primary instruments will be used to collect data:

a. Student Engagement Scale (SES): This scale will measure behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement. The SES consists of 20 items rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree." Sample items include "I participate actively in math class activities" (behavioral), "I enjoy learning math" (emotional), and "I put effort into understanding math concepts" (cognitive).
b. Mathematics Achievement Test (MAT): A standardized mathematics test will be used to assess students' learning outcomes. The MAT will include 30 multiple-choice questions covering topics relevant to the curriculum. The test will be administered as a pre-test at the beginning of the study and as a post-test at the end to measure changes in academic performance.
c. Mathematics Attitude Inventory (MAI): This inventory will assess students' attitudes towards mathematics. It includes 15 items rated on a five-point Likert scale. Sample items include "I feel confident when I do math problems" and "I find math interesting and enjoyable."

4. Procedure

The study will be conducted over a 12-week period. Both groups will follow the same mathematics curriculum, but the experimental group will use a gamified learning platform, while the control group will receive traditional instruction.

a. Pre-Test, both groups will complete the SES, MAT, and MAI at the beginning of the study to establish baseline data.
b. Intervention, the experimental group will engage with a gamified platform that includes elements such as points, badges, leaderboards, and interactive challenges. The platform will be integrated into their regular math lessons, and students will be encouraged to participate in gamified activities both in and outside the classroom. The control group will continue with conventional teaching methods, including lectures, practice exercises, and regular homework assignments.

c. Post-Test, at the end of the 12-week period, both groups will retake the SES, MAT, and MAI to measure changes in engagement, learning outcomes, and attitudes towards mathematics.

5. Data Analysis

Data will be analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Descriptive statistics will be calculated for all variables to summarize the data. Independent samples t-tests will be used to compare pre-test and post-test scores between the experimental and control groups. Paired samples t-tests will assess within-group differences from pre-test to post-test. Additionally, effect sizes will be calculated to determine the magnitude of the differences observed. Multiple regression analysis will be conducted to explore the relationships between gamification elements and changes in student engagement, learning outcomes, and attitudes towards mathematics.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive statistics for the pre-test and post-test scores on the Student Engagement Scale (SES), Mathematics Achievement Test (MAT), and Mathematics Attitude Inventory (MAI) for both the experimental and control

2. Independent Samples t-Test

To determine if there were significant differences between the experimental and control groups, independent samples t-tests were conducted on the post-test scores of the SES, MAT, and MAI.

a. Student Engagement Scale (SES)

The results showed a significant difference in post-test SES scores between the experimental group ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 0.48$) and the control group ($M = 3.51$, $SD = 0.53$), $t(198) = 8.77$, $p < .001$. This indicates that students in the gamified learning environment reported higher engagement levels compared to those in the traditional learning environment.

b. Mathematics Achievement Test (MAT)

For the MAT, the experimental group ($M = 78.67$, $SD = 8.12$) scored significantly higher on the post-test than the control group ($M = 68.45$, $SD = 9.87$), $t(198) = 7.99$, $p < .001$. These results suggest that the gamified intervention led to improved learning outcomes in mathematics.

c. Mathematics Attitude Inventory (MAI)

The post-test MAI scores also showed a significant difference, with the experimental group ($M = 3.94$, $SD = 0.52$) reporting more positive attitudes towards mathematics compared to the control group ($M = 3.23$, $SD = 0.61$), $t(198) = 8.37$, $p < .001$. This indicates that gamification positively influenced students' attitudes towards mathematics.

3. Paired Samples t-Test

Paired samples t-tests were conducted to assess within-group changes from pre-test to post-test.

4. Experimental Group

a. SES: There was a significant increase in SES scores from pre-test ($M = 3.45$, $SD = 0.55$) to post-test ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 0.48$), $t(99) = 13.12$, $p < .001$.
b. MAT: MAT scores significantly improved from pre-test ($M = 65.32$, $SD = 10.45$) to post-test ($M = 78.67$, $SD = 8.12$), $t(99) = 14.23$, $p < .001$.

c. MAI: MAI scores showed a significant positive change from pre-test (M = 3.21, SD = 0.66) to post-test (M = 3.94, SD = 0.52), t(99) = 11.45, p < .001.

5. Control Group

a. SES: There was no significant change in SES scores from pre-test (M = 3.47, SD = 0.54) to post-test (M = 3.51, SD = 0.53), t(99) = 0.98, p = .328.
b. MAT: The control group showed a minor but significant increase in MAT scores from pre-test (M = 64.98, SD = 10.12) to post-test (M = 68.45, SD = 9.87), t(99) = 3.76, p < .001.
c. MAI: There was no significant change in MAI scores from pre-test (M = 3.19, SD = 0.63) to post-test (M = 3.23, SD = 0.61), t(99) = 1.12, p = .264.

Discussion

The findings of this study clearly indicate that gamification significantly enhances student engagement in mathematics education. The experimental group, which was exposed to gamified learning environments, reported substantially higher engagement levels compared to the control group. This result aligns with previous research by (Lee et al., 2023) and (Solekhah et al., 2023), who found that gamification elements such as points, badges, and leaderboards can create a more interactive and motivating learning atmosphere. The increased engagement observed in this study can be attributed to the inherent motivational appeal of gamification, which makes learning more enjoyable and encourages active participation.

The significant improvement in learning outcomes for the experimental group supports the hypothesis that gamification can enhance academic performance in mathematics . Students who participated in the gamified learning environment scored higher on the Mathematics Achievement Test (MAT) than those in the traditional setting. This improvement can be explained by the immediate feedback and adaptive challenges provided by the gamified platform, which are known to promote deeper understanding and retention of mathematical concepts. These findings are consistent with the results of (Bai et al., 2020; Lutfi et al., 2023) , who also reported enhanced learning outcomes due to gamification.

The study also found that gamification positively influenced students' attitudes towards mathematics. The experimental group reported more favorable attitudes towards the subject after the intervention, indicating that gamification can reduce anxiety and increase confidence in mathematics. This is an important finding, as negative attitudes towards mathematics are a common barrier to student success in the subject. By making learning more engaging and rewarding, gamification can help shift students' perceptions and foster a more positive learning experience. These results echo the findings of (Solekhah et al., 2023), who observed similar improvements in students' attitudes towards mathematics with gamified learning.

The large effect sizes observed in this study highlight the substantial impact that gamification can have on student engagement, learning outcomes, and attitudes towards mathematics. However, successful implementation of gamification requires careful consideration of the design and integration of game elements. Educators need to ensure that gamified activities align with educational objectives and provide intrinsic rewards that promote meaningful learning. Additionally, professional development and access to appropriate technological tools are essential for teachers to effectively incorporate gamification into their instruction. By addressing these practical

considerations, schools can harness the benefits of gamification to enhance mathematics education.

Despite the positive findings, this study has some limitations that should be addressed in future research. The quasi-experimental design and the specific sample of middle school students may limit the generalizability of the results. Future studies could explore the impact of gamification across different age groups, educational settings, and subjects to gain a more comprehensive understanding of its effectiveness. Additionally, qualitative research methods could be used to explore students' experiences and perceptions of gamification in greater depth. Understanding the nuanced ways in which different gamification elements influence learning can help refine and optimize gamified educational strategies.

CONCLUSION

This study provides compelling evidence that gamification can significantly enhance student engagement, improve learning outcomes, and foster more positive attitudes towards mathematics. The experimental group, which engaged with a gamified learning platform, demonstrated higher levels of engagement, better performance on the Mathematics Achievement Test, and more favorable attitudes towards mathematics compared to the control group. These findings underscore the potential of gamification to create a more interactive and motivating learning environment that supports deeper understanding and retention of mathematical concepts. By incorporating elements such as points, badges, and leaderboards, educators can make learning more enjoyable and rewarding, thereby reducing anxiety and increasing confidence in mathematics. While the study's results are promising, further research is needed to explore the long-term effects of gamification and its applicability across diverse educational contexts and age groups. Overall, this study highlights the significant benefits of gamification in mathematics education and provides a strong foundation for its broader implementation in educational settings.

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