

Changes in Primary School Students' Ideas About History After Implementing a Gamified Intervention Programme

María Martínez-Hita

University of Murcia, Spain

Cosme Gómez Carrasco

University of Murcia, Spain

Pedro Miralles-Martínez

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9143-2145>

University of Murcia, Spain

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The teaching of history requires a process of change to encourage the active learning of historical research methods rather than the mere memorisation and the learning of concepts. The use of gamification can facilitate the development of the historical thinking skills. This quasi-experimental research had the aim of analysing the evolution of the conceptions on history as a subject of students in the fourth year of primary education in Spain. An experimental group, which worked with an active learning methodology based on gamification and historical thinking, was compared with a control group, which followed a traditional methodology. To achieve the aims of the research, a mixed performance test was applied to the students before and after the classroom intervention. The results demonstrated a higher degree of evolution in the students' conceptions in the experimental group. Therefore, the use of gamified active learning methodologies based on historical thinking is recommended in order to contribute towards the improvement of history education.

INTRODUCTION

Historical thinking is becoming increasingly popular in international research on history education (Metzger & Harris, 2018; Thorp & Persson, 2020). This phenomenon is having an impact on the teaching of history, in which the learning of historical contents based on memorisation is slowly losing ground in favour of the active learning of historical research methods, i.e., the development of historical thinking (Lévesque & Clark, 2018). In addition, this approach to history teaching is in line with current trends in education, which advocate the inclusion of active learning methods in the classroom (Gómez et al., 2018).

Teaching based on historical thinking requires an awareness of how historical knowledge is constructed and of how historians work. The view that students have of history as a subject and the construction of knowledge can either favour or hinder their understanding of history (Miguel-Revilla et al., 2020; VanSledright & Maggioni, 2016).

However, students tend to have incomplete or erroneous conceptions of history and a lack of knowledge of the work of the historian and the usefulness of historical sources (Brophy & VanSledright, 1992; Brophy et al., 1992; Fraile-Delgado, 2020; Fuentes, 2002, 2006; Miguel-Revilla et al., 2020; Shemilt, 1987a, 1987b).

The methodology employed in the classroom has an influence on students' conceptions of history and can be modified positively via an active methodology which is based on the historical thinking skills (Brophy et al., 1992; Fraile-Delgado, 2020; Fuentes, 2002, 2006; Miguel-Revilla et al., 2020; Shemilt, 1987a, 1987b).

However, prior research has tended to study learners from higher levels of education (VanSledright & Maggioni, 2016), largely ignoring primary schoolchildren.

The present study aims to contribute towards correcting this imbalance in research by analysing the conceptions held by children in the fourth year of primary education on history as a subject, comparing a control group and an experimental group both before and after a differentiated teaching intervention in each of the groups.

HISTORICAL THINKING

The teaching and learning process of history takes place in two main ways in the classroom: On the one hand, education based on the use of the textbook and the learning by heart of information, dates and concepts; on the other hand, history may be taught based on constructivism and active methodologies which seek the comprehension of history as a narrative or interpretation of the past, placing emphasis on the historical method (Santisteban, 2010). The first method of teaching implies the transition of the idea of history as closed and neutral knowledge, whereas the second shows history as knowledge which can be questioned and is open to democratic debate (Miralles & Gómez, 2021; Shemilt, 1987b).

The latter approach is that which is related to historical thinking and, therefore, favours its development. It implies that students do not merely memorise past events, information and dates, which are known as first-order concepts, but that they should also develop the capacity to analyse, interpret and explain the past based on the critical analysis of sources. In other words, they learn the methods and techniques of historical research which make reference to strategic second-order concepts (Domínguez, 2015; Seixas & Morton, 2013; Thorp & Persson, 2020; VanSledright, 2004, 2011).

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