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Exploring the potential of Game-Based Mathematics

Verra Lusiana Anggraeni [1], Dian Lestari[2], Ahmad Maskur Subaweh[3], Unes Unes [4]
[1,2,,4] Universitas Darul Ma'arif, Indramayu, Indonesia
[3]Universitas Singaperbangsa, Karawang, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Math is often considered an uninteresting and challenging subject for many students. Traditional teaching methods emphasizing memorizing formulas and algorithmic steps are usually less effective in stimulating students' interest and fostering a deep understanding of concepts. In response to these challenges, this article examines the potential of game-based mathematics learning as an innovative new educational approach to improve students' participation, comprehensi on, and ability to solve math problems. Through an extensive search of relevant literature, this article identifies how games can effectively facilitate math learning. The benefits include increased students' intrinsic motivation, the development of logical and strategic thinking skills, and providing a safe place to try and make mistakes without fear. Thus, games create a learning environment conducive to exploration and discovery. This article also discusses the various obstacles in its implementation in a real-world environment and provides concrete suggestions for further research to optimize the use of this approach.

Corresponding Author:

Verra Lusiana Anggraeni
Universitas Darul Ma'arif, Indramayu, Indonesia
Email: verralusianaanggraeni17120708@gmail.com

1. INTRODUCTION

Mathematics is a fundamental discipline that is the basis for advancing science and technology and an essential daily skill. Unfortunately, many students find math difficult and lack the desire to learn it [1]. This is often due to overly dense curriculums, invariant teaching methods, and a lack of connection between the material and real life. As a result, students' motivation to learn decreases, so their academic results are less satisfactory, and negative views on mathematics arise.

One of the leading causes is the curriculum that is often too dense and seems abstract. The large amount of material and time constraints usually make learning rushed to complete the syllabus, without providing enough space for students to understand concepts in depth. In addition, monotonous and less varied learning methods often dominated by lectures, memorizing formulas, and doing practice problems without context make learning

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mathematics feel dry and uninteresting. This condition causes students to have difficulty seeing the relationship between abstract formulas and their application in the real world.

The accumulation of these factors, heavy curriculum, rigid teaching methods, and lack of relevance, decreases students' motivation to learn. This low motivation, in turn, significantly negatively impacts their academic performance in math. Poor grades and a lack of conceptual understanding often reinforce negative perceptions of math, creating a dislike for math that causes students to avoid subjects due to feelings of inadequacy or dislike. Ultimately, this not only undermines their academic potential in mathematics but can also affect their career choices and their readiness to face future challenges that increasingly rely on logical and analytical thinking.

Responding to this problem, games are activities carried out by confident children for fun that can affect the development of children's personalities and help children achieve physical, intellectual, social, moral, and emotional growth [2]. Improving the quality of learning outcomes can also be achieved through using learning media that increases student dominance in the learning process, requiring the use of learning media [3]. As a result, using learning media can improve students' ability to understand mathematics. Learning media, including games, can improve students' mathematical comprehension skills, serving as an alternative source for mathematics education [4].

In recent decades, technological advances have opened new educational horizons, including using games as a learning medium. Whether digital or non-digital, its inherent appeal and ability to create immersive and interactive learning experiences are powerful. From this emerged and developed the concept of educational gamification, which refers to the application of design elements and principles commonly found in games (such as a points or score system, the acquisition of virtual badges or awards, leaderboards to visualize progress and competition, an engaging narrative or storyline, structured challenges with a gradually increasing level of difficulty, and a feedback system that is responsive to player actions) to the environment education that wasn't originally designed as a game. The idea has attracted significant attention from a wide range of groups, including educators looking for more effective teaching methods, researchers in education and psychology interested in motivational and engagement mechanisms, and educational technology developers seeking to create more engaging and impactful learning solutions. Gamification is a promising strategy to fundamentally increase students' engagement levels in learning, triggering and maintaining their intrinsic motivation to learn more actively, persistently, and deeply [5]. The concept of gamification in education, i.e., the application of game design elements and principles in a non-gaming context, has attracted widespread attention as a strategy to increase student engagement and motivation, with the hope of changing the perception of learning from a sometimes boring obligation into a fun, challenging, and ultimately more meaningful experience for students.

Mathematics learning for children is carried out directly through empirical experiences obtained through scientific processes to encourage the development of children's mathematical abilities [6]. However, mathematics learning is still considered difficult and

less fun; therefore, methods that can make learning fun are needed, one of which is using educational game tools. Educational game tools are games specifically designed for educational purposes.

Most students find the game exciting and fun, even complicated or challenging. This is why educational games can be a fantastic way to engage students in their learning while having fun. Since math is often considered among the most disliked subjects, incorporating math elements into the game can indirectly improve students' math skills. Math engagement is defined as the level of interest, motivation, and active participation students show in learning mathematics [7]. Engaging in various actions in the game is believed to contribute to the student's knowledge acquisition [8]. Because they are so exciting and challenging, students are attracted to games that can help them learn. In addition, educational games develop students' competencies by involving them in problem-solving, collaboration, and communication activities [9].

Educators should tap into the playful traits of students to develop learning approaches that work for them. Instructors can utilize games to make education fun for learners. Incorporating games into the educational experience aims to increase students' motivation and interest in learning. Nonetheless, games should also allow students to discover their own experiences. Educators need to continue to support students in their knowledge so that when using games, students are only engaged in playing and having fun with their peers while having a specific goal [10]. The study's findings show that engaging with mathematics through games strengthens comprehension, allowing learners to tactfully combine, differentiate, and choose various methods [11]. Additionally, incorporating gamification in educational settings enhances the active learning experience in higher education without significant variation in academic outcomes or student satisfaction [12].

This article argues that a game-based math learning approach has great potential to address various challenges in math learning. By leveraging the intrinsic characteristics of games such as clear objectives, structured rules, instant feedback, and competitive or collaborative elements, math learning can become more engaging, meaningful, and effective. This research will further explore how the application of game-based learning strategies can concretely improve student engagement and learning outcomes in the context of mathematics.

2. METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative approach with a literature study design to analyze the relationship between play and learning in the context of cognitive and social development. A literature search was conducted systematically to identify and synthesize relevant information related to the role of play. The relationship between play and learning is not new. Play has long been recognized as essential for cognitive and social development, especially in children. The conceptual framework of this research is based on the constructivist theory of learning, popularized by Piaget and Vygotsky, which emphasizes the active role of learners in building their knowledge. Play provides an ideal environment for constructing this knowledge through exploration, experimentation, and interaction.

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Therefore, the literature data reviewed focus on studies that describe the mechanisms of play in facilitating the construction of knowledge. The literature selection process involves the identification of scientific publications that explicitly discuss the cognitive mechanisms stimulated through play activities.

The social aspect of playing is also the focus of analysis in this study. Specifically, this study examines how social interaction during play contributes to developing social skills. On the social side, play helps children learn about collaboration, negotiation, sharing, and understanding social rules. Playing with friends teaches children the importance of cooperation, resolving conflicts, and respecting group boundaries. These skills are essential for healthy social functioning later in life. The relevant data collected included research identifying how play interactions contribute to developing those social skills. The method of analysis involves synthesizing findings from various studies to identify common patterns and themes related to the social impact of play.

Furthermore, this study also integrates the perspective of intrinsic motivation theory by Deci and Ryan (1985). Especially relevant in the context of game-based learning. They argue that humans are intrinsically motivated when they feel competent, independent, and connected [13]. Games, with challenges to overcome, choices, and opportunities to interact with others, naturally cater to this psychological need. Live feedback in the game also plays a vital role in providing a sense of competence and progress. The literature analysis will explore how these elements of games specifically trigger intrinsic motivation in the learning process. The primary focus of this section is to map out the design and features of games that are empirically proven to increase learners' intrinsic motivation.

This study will identify studies that show a correlation between play and increased intrinsic motivation in an educational context. Data collected from literature studies were analyzed using a narrative synthesis approach. The analysis stage involves identifying, extracting, and synthesizing key information from each relevant article.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Increased Motivation and Engagement through Gamification

The inherent appeal of play and the positive emotions that often accompany it, such as fun and excitement, have great potential to increase motivation and engagement in the context of learning. [14]In educational gamification, various elements of play can be applied strategically to trigger two main types of motivation: extrinsic and intrinsic.

Extrinsic Motivation: This motivation comes from external factors given to individuals in exchange for certain participation or achievements. In gamification, elements such as earning points for completing tasks or answering questions correctly, collecting badges as visual representations of skill progress and mastery, and having leaderboards that display students' relative positions in groups all trigger extrinsic motivation. Students are motivated to participate and excel to gain recognition, virtual prizes, or a higher standing among their peers. This competitive aspect and reward system can encourage students to perform better beyond minimal effort.

Intrinsic Motivation: This motivation comes from within the individual, driven by curiosity, interest, personal satisfaction, or a challenge that is perceived as attractive. Gamification can foster intrinsic motivation by providing challenging content, allowing students to feel accomplished and competent when completing it. Additionally, the opportunity to develop new skills through interaction with well-designed game elements can also increase intrinsic motivation. When students feel that they are learning something valuable and progressing toward mastering a subject, they are more likely to feel motivated to continue learning and engaging without needing external rewards.

Impact on Learning Resilience: When students have a high level of motivation, both from extrinsic and intrinsic factors, and feel actively involved in the learning process through gamification elements, they tend to be more persistent in facing difficulties [15]Obstacles and failures are no longer seen as the end of the effort but as challenges that need to be overcome to achieve goals in the game. The positive experiences and sense of accomplishment gained through gamification can build mental toughness and encourage students to keep trying even when faced with difficult material or tasks.

3.2. Development of Logical Thinking and Problem Solving Through Games

Using games in learning effectively develops students' logical thinking and problem-solving skills. It emphasizes the importance of understanding innovation that is not fixated on one approach so that educators can design learning experiences that are more adaptive and in accordance with the needs of today's students [16]. The game offers complex and interactive challenges, encouraging players to conduct systematic analysis, planning, and decision-making. This cognitive activity is essential for building logical reasoning, the foundation for mastering mathematical concepts.

In many games, students are trained to analyze situations, devise strategies, and consider the risks and consequences of each choice. This ability aligns with the thought process in solving math problems, such as identifying important information, choosing methods, and planning solution steps. Games also train decision-making skills and evaluate results repeatedly. This process encourages students to think logically, consider alternatives, and reflect on each step in the mathematical problem-solving process, including the verification of answers.

Another advantage of games is their ability to present problems in an engaging and meaningful context, such as simulation or story narrative. This helps students understand the relevance of mathematics in real life, such as calculating resources or determining strategies in simulated games [17]. Overall, involvement in educational games strengthens cognitive skills and increases students' learning motivation. The process of analyzing, planning, and evaluating in games can be an effective strategy in math learning, while also making learning more contextual and fun. Implication: Educational game design needs to be integrated into innovative and meaningful math teaching strategies

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3.3 Creating a Safe Space for Exploration and Learning from Mistakes Through Play

One of the most valuable aspects of using games in education, especially in math learning, is their ability to provide a relatively risk-free environment for students to experiment with different concepts and strategies. Unlike traditional learning situations where mistakes are often associated with negative judgment or embarrassment, games treat failure as an integral part of learning.

In gaming, when a player makes a mistake, such as taking the wrong step or making a bad decision, the consequences are usually temporary. They can be corrected within the game itself. Players can often replay levels, try different strategies, or return to previous points without significant penalties other than temporarily losing progress in the game. This perspective fundamentally changes the way students view mistakes. Instead of being something to be avoided at all costs, mistakes are seen as a valuable source of information. Each failure provides insight into what didn't work and encourages players to analyze why it happened and how to avoid it in future attempts.

Encourage Courage to Explore: This safe learning environment significantly reduces the fear of failure, which is often a significant barrier for students to try new approaches or tackle more challenging problems in math. When students know that making mistakes won't result in bad grades or ridicule, they feel freer and more motivated to explore different math concepts, try unconventional solutions, and take intellectual risks. The courage to explore this is essential for developing a deep and intuitive understanding of mathematics, where there are often many paths to solutions.

Instant Feedback for Better Understanding: Many games are designed to provide instant feedback to players on their actions. When the player decides or tries a solution, the game will immediately respond by displaying the results. The Realistic Math Approach also has several studies that show an improvement in the mathematics learning outcomes of elementary school students using the realistic math approach, which connects learning with students' real lives. [18].

In this way, games create a unique learning environment where mistakes are not feared but are welcomed as an essential part of the discovery and learning process. The freedom to experiment without fear of negative consequences, coupled with informative and instant feedback, empowers students to become more active, independent, and resilient learners in the face of math challenges. This supportive environment fosters curiosity, encourages exploration, and helps students build a stronger and deeper understanding of mathematics.

3.4 Strengthening Mathematical Concepts Through Meaningful Repetition in Games

One effective game mechanic for facilitating math learning is the repetition of actions necessary to achieve the objectives in the game. Unlike traditional math practice problems that sometimes feel monotonous and out of context, in-game repetition often feels more natural. It has a clear purpose in the context of the game. When these actions involve the

application of mathematical concepts or skills, the repetition becomes meaningful and contributes significantly to the consolidation of students' understanding and the improvement of their abilities.

Built-in Repetition into Gameplay: In many games, players must interact with elements that require the application of repetitive mathematical concepts to progress or succeed. For example, in a strategy game, players may need to calculate the necessary resources to build units or estimate the distance and angle of fire to attack the enemy. This calculation and estimation must be performed several times throughout the game. Because this repetition has a clear goal in the game context to achieve victory or progress, players are more motivated to do so rather than working on a series of separate practice problems.

Reinforces Conceptual Comprehension: Meaningful repetition helps students memorize procedures or formulas and develop a deeper conceptual understanding. Whenever students apply a mathematical concept in the context of a game, they reinforce the neural connections in the brain associated with that concept. Students begin to see patterns, understand the relationships between concepts, and develop mathematical intuition through repetition. For example, in a virtual financial management game, students may need to repeatedly calculate profits, losses, and account balances. This repeated experience can help them understand the basic principles of accounting and financial management more practically and contextually.

Stating that interactive educational game media can also be an effective means to practice basic math skills such as quick calculations, estimation, and number manipulation [19]. Games designed to focus on these skills often present challenges that require quick and accurate responses. For example, a number puzzle game or a game involving virtual trading can train students' ability to perform mental calculations quickly and make decisions based on numerical data. Because these activities are presented in an engaging and challenging game format, students tend to be more motivated to practice and improve their skills than with regular practice questions.

Learning that repeats actions related to math concepts in games provides an effective and engaging way to consolidate understanding and practice skills. By integrating mathematical concepts into game mechanics that have a clear purpose, students become more motivated to perform the repetition necessary to master the idea, which ultimately leads to deeper understanding and stronger skills.

3.5 Developing Collaboration and Communication Skills Through Multiplayer Games

Theories underlying the use of games in learning, especially those related to learning motivation (e.g., intrinsic and extrinsic motivation theories). Some principles and steps can design mathematics learning that integrates game elements (gamification) or uses educational games directly. [20].

Multiplayer games have opened up a new dimension in educational potential through gamification. By involving multiple players in one virtual environment, this game essentially encourages social interaction, teamwork, effective communication, and sharing strategies to achieve a common goal. These skills are not only valuable in social contexts. Still, they are

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also highly relevant in solving complex math problems and preparing students for the collaborative demands of the future work environment.

Explain relevant theories and research, and why or how educational games can affect the understanding of mathematical concepts and encourage teamwork and task sharing. [21]. In many multiplayer games, success depends on the player's ability to work together effectively. Each team member may have different roles or expertise, and to achieve a common goal, they need to rely on each other, share resources, and coordinate their actions. This process directly trains collaboration skills, where students learn to appreciate the contributions of others, understand each team member's strengths and weaknesses, and distribute tasks efficiently. In solving complex mathematical problems, where one person may not have all the necessary knowledge or perspective, the ability to work together in a team, share ideas, and combine expertise becomes essential to achieve innovative and effective solutions.

Facilitating Effective Communication, multiplayer games often require clear and effective communication between players. They must exchange information about game situations, plan strategies, provide instructions, and respond quickly and appropriately to teammates' actions. This communication can occur through various in-game media, such as text chat, voice chat, or even through actions and gestures within the game itself. And through this interaction, it is stated that the benefits of using games in mathematics learning can increase students' motivation and interest in learning mathematics. [22],. It can also make learning more fun and not boring so that students learn to convey their ideas clearly, listen to and understand other people's perspectives, and build consensus in groups. These practical communication skills are essential in collaborative math problem-solving and almost all aspects of professional life.

Building Strategy and Negotiating Together: Players often negotiate the best strategy to achieve their goals in team games. Innovation is essential in mathematics learning because it provides solutions. [23]. Each problem-solving challenge in mathematics learning involves discussion, exchange of ideas, and compromise to reach a mutual agreement. This process trains students' ability to think strategically collectively, consider multiple perspectives, and build solutions that accommodate the needs and capabilities of the entire team. Making a joint strategy and negotiating effectively is also highly relevant in solving complex mathematical problems, where multiple approaches may exist and the team needs to decide how best to proceed.

How to increase students' motivation and interest in learning math, make learning more fun and contextual [24]. Help students understand mathematical concepts concretely and through hands-on experience. And it can also develop students' social, cooperative, and communication skills. Preserving traditional culture and values. Examples of traditional games that are relevant to mathematics. For instance, games involve calculations, measurements, geometry, or logic. How to Integrate It with Traditional Games in Math Learning. Can provide practical guidance for teachers on designing, selecting, and implementing traditional games in mathematics learning activities in the classroom. This can

include how to relate games to learning objectives, how to modify games to match students' ability levels, and how to evaluate learning outcomes.

Explain and present how the results of educational game trials that have been developed can involve quantitative data. [25]. (for example, the learning outcomes of students who use games and those who compare to those who don't use those games). In short, trial games of this unique platform can develop students' collaboration and communication skills. Interacting with other players teaches them to work together in a team, communicate effectively, build joint strategies, and negotiate. These skills are crucial in solving complex math problems and equip students with the social and interpersonal skills essential for success in an increasingly collaborative future work environment.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion comprehensively presented in this article, game-based mathematics learning offers a promising approach to revitalizing the entire math learning process, with the primary goal of making it more engaging, relevant, and effective for students. This innovative and modern approach works well because it can strategically tap into students' intrinsic motivations and the game's inherent ability to develop logical thinking and essential problem-solving skills. Through careful, planned implementation, and supported by strong pedagogy, we can create a learning environment that is not only more positive but also highly productive. While there are challenges in its implementation, including the need for careful pedagogical design, the availability of adequate technological resources, and ongoing teacher training and professional development, the transformative potential of this approach makes it an area that is highly worthy of being deeply explored and further invested in education to achieve significant improvements in student engagement and optimal mathematics learning outcomes across a wide range of Educational Levels.

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