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"The boundaries of my place are the boundaries of my world": A Theoretical Approach to Gamified historical literacy and the ecology of didactic media for local history schooling

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is twofold: first, to structure the gap in the schooling of local history as an autonomous subject in Greek secondary education, which should not be crushed by the exclusively academic approach of the single didactic textbook; second, to highlight the power of history-themed games in indoor and outdoor education, reshaping the relationship between individual and collective memory. It is not only technology that "sought" the light of historical knowledge to transform it into commercial historical games, but history itself that calls upon schools to adapt to the new conditions of the digital age, utilizing novel sources and remembrance processes. This study is grounded in the Pedagogy of Multiliteracies in inclusive adolescent classrooms, whereby event interpretation presupposes critical analysis of the local social context and knowledge application in simulated environments of "transformed practice" through gamified historical literacy. The added value lies in restoring local history from "stepchild" of general history to an institutionally distinct secondary education subject, and in experientially engaging adolescent students with their local history through interactive play. Further studies must highlight the didactic importance of local history teaching inside and outside the classroom as integral to national and global history, because "the boundaries of my place are the boundaries of my world."

Keywords: locality, temporality, gamification, secondary education, critical learning

1. Introduction

The ancient Greek concept of "topos" (of my place) transcends geography, linking humans to the universe. In our era of hyper-mobility—virtual and physical—"topos" evolves into a "psychology of boundaries," becoming a "lived place" that fuses past ("then") and present ("now") in new spatio-temporal contexts. Bakhtin (1981) defines the *chronotope* as the intrinsic interplay of time and space; Koselleck (1985) and Ouxot (2019) explore time's relativity through "contemporary pasts"-ideological/practical and mythical/historical layers.

History acts as synchronic communication where "the medium is the message" (McLuhan, 1990). In information-driven ecosystems, our "place boundaries" become "world boundaries," paraphrasing Wittgenstein's dictum: "The limits of my language mean the limits of my world." Local history's power lies in making the invisible visible, turning places into palimpsests of events across time, enabling tactile "reading" of space and chronology.

Yet, Greek secondary education continues to sideline local history's experiential "topos," reducing space to a mere "theater of memory" that is ultimately derived from time. True historical right is the right to memory—recovering truth through both time and place.

In contrast, critical literacy and gamified historical literacy offer solutions for familiarizing adolescent students with the history of their local area because they are connected as two approaches that turn history from passive narration into an active, critical practice. Dinas (2016) argues that play increases motivation and "makes tangible" abstract historical concepts, demonstrating how gamification reinforces critical literacy in the teaching of history.

2. Theory background and relevant studies

The micro-level of local history (neighborhood, street) builds the "big picture" through patchwork, lived narratives, surpassing amateur approaches glorifying local figures and national superiority. Leuillot (1977), as cited in contemporary local-history historiography, defines local history as a qualitative, flexible, everyday- and individual-focused, comparative, and empirical field that rejects generalizations and insists on interdependence with other histories, not subservience. Collicott (1990) sees it as studying the past in relation to place, based on experiences; Leontsinis (2003) as microhistory on a local scale, linked to general history. Rüsen (2005) views historical narratives as reconstructions guided by truth criteria (verification, consistency), adapted to the present.

Unsworth's (1999: 509) article connects linguistic literacy with historical literacy, arguing that children learn more effectively when they engage with texts that are close to their immediate experience. In the terms of local-history literacy, this principle could be applied more productively through the schema "I experience–(re) cognize–I understand," filtered through the creeping ideological, political, and cultural viewpoints that shape such encounters.

An aim of the International Program on Multiliteracies is the development of a functional grammar equipped with a metalanguage that is educationally accessible, in order to support the critical analysis of language and other semiotic systems and to motivate teachers and students to work with that metalanguage collaboratively. The primary goal of the metalanguage is to identify and explain the differences among texts and to relate them to the cultural and situational contexts in which they are produced. The metalanguage does not impose rules or standards of correctness or privileged ways of speaking that are meant to "empower students" in a performative sense, but instead focuses the analysis on the *design of meaning* in terms of

key concepts—textual genres, discourses, voices, and modes, as well as a number of related constructs.

In the case of local history, this metalanguage enables teachers and students to become co-investigators of historical sources, which are transformed into indirect experience through on-site or virtual visits, gamification, and to function as historical detectives of archival documents, publications, oral testimony, video, and memorial information, treating these as choices of meaning design linked to specific cultural and social contexts (Leontsinis, 2002).

Multiliteracies metalanguage provides the tools for processing local history as critical, multimodal meaning design, rather than as a mere narrative of events through metalinguistic questions about what the purpose of each genre is, who the intended audience is, how it opens and closes, and which information is foregrounded and which is backgrounded or omitted. Palla (1990) contends that historical consciousness should foreground both heroic feats and destruction in a specific place and time. Nachopoulos (2009) maintains that school history reproduces the memory of the state and war, whereas Duckworth (2015) overlooks the memory of peace and everyday labor. Kyritsis (2010) argues that an incompatibility arising from epistemological issues renders local history "invisible" within Greek education.

Within the playful frame, the student is motivated to question, engage, and reproduce history as choices and actions, thereby strengthening critical historical consciousness. Thus, gamified historical literacy becomes a field of application for critical thinking, where students work with alternative versions, negotiate memories, and test possible actions in a space–time shaped by the game (McCall, 2019).

The New London Group's pedagogy outlines four steps for local history teaching—Situated Practice (experiential), Overt Instruction (conceptual), Critical Framing (analytical), and Transformed Practice (applied)—as cognitive processes. The first step, experiential learning, connects locality and chronology with students' out-of-school experiences and identity for motivation (Koutsogiannis, 2011), bridging the "known/visible" present through personal reflection and the "new/invisible" past via multimodal sources like visual texts, fostering historical literacy by linking present actions to past for self-understanding. Digital games provide realistic, conceptual environments where players embody historical characters (Chapman, 2016; McCall, 2011), akin to internal focalization in novels, while Bruner (1997) emphasizes active environmental management through experimentation, reversing from students' "here/now" to the local past via layered discoveries.

The second step, overt instruction, tailors conceptualization to individual needs with teacher support, building historical metalanguage through terminology, semiotic codes, and text types digital literacy forges causal links from local to global events via inductive reasoning, with gamification enabling blended edutainment in Industry 4.0, promoting metacognition in problem-solving, logic, collaboration, and self-regulation tied to historical and modern contexts. ICT symbiosis creates dynamic environment for image literacy and gamification, achieving indirect experiential learning through virtual visits, simulations, and internet grammar techniques (Vakaloudi & Dagdelis, 2014).

The third step, critical framing, prompts students to critique knowledge as socio-culturally constructed, analyzing text elements' meaning-making and producers' motives within contexts, vital for interrogating historical sources' neutrality. Digital games reframe spatiotemporal issues via co-created narratives (Hood, 2008; Heidegger, 1977), with location-based mobile games enhancing 21st-century skills like critical thinking and multiperspectivity through virtual past visits and collective "city narratives" (HCI Group, 2013).

Finally, transformed practice applies knowledge in simulated contexts such us historical games, yielding innovative digital texts (Cope & Kalantzis, 2019; Smyrnaios, 2020; Kokkinos et al., 2022) (Tab. 1).

Table 1. The Pedagogy of Multiliteracies in Historical Literacy

The Pedagogy of Multiliteracies in Historical Literacy			
STEP 1: The placed practice	**2nd STEP: Open teaching**	**STEP 3: Critical framing**	**STEP 4: Transformed practice**
Experiential learning	Conceptual learning (cause-effect relationship)	Inductive Reasoning (from the particular to the general)	Applied learning
Active participation of students	Metalanguage (what kind of text it is, what discourse dominates, what voices are heard, what style it has, the way of representing the locality and temporality of the event)	a. Functional analysis: Construction of meaning through multimodal texts - gamified historical literacy inside and outside the classroom (game, quiz, comic, puzzles)	Use of new knowledge (production of a new multimodal text (poster, podcast, comic) with a brief metalinguistic commentary on the choice of genre, discourse, voice, style and manner)
Direct experience of the "known" and "visible" present	Conceptualization through new terminology	b.Critical analysis: Cognitive process	Revisiting the original question
Indirect experience of the "new" and "invisible" past.	Digital Literacy	Interpretation of the social context and the intentions of the producer of the historical text	Applying appropriately and creatively
Feedback	Adaptation to the student's cognitive needs	Immersion in the Principle of Critical Literacy	Simulation environment of a communication practice
Better understanding of the personal "present"	Inductive Reasoning (from the particular to the general)	Overturning the perception that historical testimonies are neutral and objective	Production of new texts by students, depending on their interests and preferences

According to Voros (1997:178), the design of a Local History Curriculum should follow the theory of concentric expanding circles**.** Learning begins with the student's most immediate environment (the birthplace**)** and gradually expands to broader contexts, such as the place of origin, place of residence, and places of hospitality or twinned locations**.** This approach allows the parallel study of related local histories without making history appear disconnected from its geographical and social context. Moreover, modern digital technology can support the criterion of direct observation by enabling virtual or remote field visits, giving students opportunities to explore and understand places even from a distance. (Fig. 1)

Figure 1: The theory of concentric expanding circles.



The use of historical digital games in history education supports a student-centered and discovery-based approach to learning. Following Bruner's view (1991) that learning is an active process, students engage with their environment through experimentation and practice, connecting the present with the past of their local area. By starting from the student's "here and now" and moving backwards into the past, learners interpret historical stimuli and rediscover them as meaningful elements of the present.

Historical digital games create representations of the past that can be either realistic or conceptual**.** Through visually convincing environments based on authentic historical elements, players explore historical settings by controlling fictional characters within historically documented contexts. Similar to historical novels with internal focalization, players construct their own narratives while interacting with the historical world without necessarily altering the broader accepted historical narrative.

These games also reshape the perception of time and space**.** Players often focus more on the progression of the game than on its historical background, while space is represented through graphics, characters, and interaction with the virtual environment. The interactive nature of digital games makes historical representation a cognitive and performative process, where users actively construct their understanding of the past through embodied participation.

2.1 Place-based and location-based learning in history education

Recent scholarship on place-based learning emphasises the value of connecting learning with the cultural, historical, and social contexts in which students live. Rather than treating knowledge as something acquired exclusively through decontextualised classroom materials, place-based approaches encourage learners to explore local environments and connect curricular knowledge with authentic places, community resources, and lived experience. In history education, this approach can create opportunities for students to encounter the past through concrete sites, material traces, archives, and local narratives. Recent work on place-based history education similarly highlights the potential of authentic encounters with local historical resources to support historical inquiry and connect formal history education with community and heritage contexts.

Local history can therefore function as a bridge between students' immediate environment and broader historical knowledge. The educational value of a place-based approach, however, does not derive simply from moving learning outside the classroom. Rather, it depends on transforming the place into a meaningful object of inquiry, where students are encouraged to observe, question, interpret, and connect local evidence with wider historical processes. Recent research on heritage encounters similarly suggests that direct engagement with historical sites

can create opportunities for students to connect formal knowledge with community memory and local heritage.

This perspective is particularly relevant to the QuayQuest intervention. The waterfront of Mytilene was not treated merely as the setting for a recreational activity but as a distributed historical learning environment. Monuments, buildings, public spaces, and other urban traces functioned as prompts for investigation. The movement between locations created a spatial sequence through which students encountered different chronological, social, and cultural dimensions of the city's history.

Location-based games can extend this pedagogical model by combining physical movement, narrative progression, problem-solving, collaboration, and digital interaction. Research on location-based augmented reality for cultural heritage education demonstrates the potential of such approaches to connect digital content with authentic cultural locations. For example, Kleftodimos et al. (2023) developed location-based AR applications for cultural heritage education in Greece, including experiences designed for school-aged learners in the historic Doltso district of Kastoria. Their findings indicate positive relationships between perceived challenge, interaction, and perceived educational usefulness.

Similarly, research on location-based AR applications for the prehistoric settlement of Dispilio demonstrates how gamification, storytelling, and location-aware technologies can be combined to create educational experiences in archaeological and cultural heritage settings. Such approaches allow learners to encounter historical and cultural information while physically exploring the relevant environment.

However, location-based and augmented-reality activities should not be considered educationally effective merely because they use mobile technology. Reviews of serious games in cultural heritage emphasise that their educational value depends on the integration of game mechanics with meaningful cultural content and pedagogical objectives. The physical location should remain central to the learning experience rather than functioning merely as a backdrop for digital entertainment.

In this respect, QuayQuest differs from a purely recreational city game. Its challenges were aligned with specific learning objectives and required students to identify places, interpret historical information, collaborate with peers, and create multimodal artefacts. The game structure was therefore employed as a mediating framework for historical inquiry rather than as an end in itself. This approach is consistent with recent work on gamified cultural-heritage learning environments, in which inquiry-based tasks, authentic locations, collaboration, and digital interaction are integrated into structured learning experiences.

2.2 Equity and inclusion in gamified learning

Although gamification can promote participation and engagement, its educational effects are not necessarily positive or equally experienced by all learners. Previous research has highlighted that particular game mechanics, especially competition, ranking, time pressure, and public performance, may create different participation experiences depending on learners' individual characteristics, prior experience, confidence, and accessibility needs. Consequently, the educational design of gamified activities should take into account accessibility, flexibility, and opportunities for different forms of participation (Zainuddin et al., 2020; Mora et al., 2022).

In the present intervention, students worked collaboratively and could contribute through different roles, including reading, navigation, recording, photography, presentation, and historical investigation. This structure was intended to distribute participation across team members rather than making success dependent primarily on speed, digital confidence, or willingness to speak publicly. Moreover, QuayQuest did not use competitive ranking or a public leaderboard. Its main mechanisms were collaborative problem-solving, sequential progression, historical interpretation, and multimodal production.

Nevertheless, the present study did not collect sufficiently detailed data to determine whether all students benefited equally from the intervention. Therefore, no claim is made that QuayQuest was equally accessible or equally effective for every learner. Future research should examine participation and learning outcomes across different learner characteristics, including prior achievement, digital experience, accessibility needs, and other relevant individual differences.

3. Purpose of the study

This study pursues a dual objective: firstly, to bridge the gap in integrating local history as an independent subject in Greek secondary education, considering that students, as digital natives, are more attuned to the new digital reality in their learning processes. Secondly, to develop a pedagogical approach that integrates metacognitive skills into the school curriculum through gamified teaching methods.

The role of gamification as a tool for teaching local history to adolescent students, in the already existing institutional framework of general history teaching in Greece, is a fertile ground for exploration, since the integration of gaming in the educational process is mainly applied to smaller levels of pre-school and primary school education.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Aims and Questions

The study examined whether a short, gamified, place-based learning intervention could support students' achievement in local history in comparison with conventional teacher-centred instruction. The study addressed the following research question:

RQ1: Do students who participate in the QuayQuest gamified intervention achieve higher immediate post-test scores in local history than students who receive traditional classroom instruction?

A secondary exploratory aim was to document how students engaged with historical places, sources, collaboration, and multimodal production during the intervention. The qualitative material was therefore used to illuminate the learning processes and experiences associated with the intervention rather than to establish an independent causal effect.

4.2 Research Design and Setting

A quasi-experimental, mixed-methods design was employed. The quantitative component consisted of a comparison of two intact Grade 9 classes, while the qualitative component

involved the analysis of students' learning artefacts and researcher field notes generated during the QuayQuest activity.

The study was conducted during the 2024–2025 school year at the 2nd Junior High School of Mytilene, Greece. The intervention focused on the historical waterfront and adjacent urban locations of Mytilene. These locations were selected because they contain visible layers of the city's cultural, political, economic, and literary history and can be accessed within a manageable walking route.

Two existing Grade 9 classes participated in the study. One class constituted the control group (G1, $n = 25$) and the other the experimental group (G2, $n = 25$), resulting in a total sample of $N = 50$. Students were not individually randomly assigned because the research was conducted within the ordinary organisational structure of the school. The use of intact classes constitutes an important methodological limitation and means that the findings should be interpreted as evidence of an association between instructional condition and post-test performance rather than as definitive evidence of causality.

4.3 Participants and Group Comparability

The participants were Grade 9 students enrolled in the two participating classes. The groups were comparable with respect to grade level, school setting, curriculum, instructional period, and group size. Both classes received instruction addressing the same local-history content and learning objectives and completed the same assessment instrument.

No pre-test of local-history knowledge was administered before the intervention. Consequently, baseline equivalence in prior achievement or knowledge could not be statistically established. Differences in prior knowledge, motivation, familiarity with local history, digital experience, or other relevant characteristics may therefore have contributed to differences in post-test performance.

Both groups consisted of 25 Grade 9 students from the same school and were taught within the same curricular and institutional context. However, systematic baseline information concerning prior academic achievement and other demographic or learner characteristics was not collected. Therefore, full baseline equivalence between the two groups cannot be established. This limitation is taken into account in the interpretation of the quantitative findings.

4.4 Instructional Conditions and Time-on-Task

Both groups received instruction addressing the same local-history content and learning objectives during the same overall instructional period. The intervention was implemented over two teaching hours. To reduce the possibility that differences in learning outcomes were attributable to unequal exposure time, the two conditions were planned to have equivalent allocated instructional time.

The control group received teacher-led instruction based on the same historical content and learning objectives. The teacher presented relevant information, guided discussion, and clarified students' questions. The experimental group participated in the QuayQuest activity, which incorporated the same historical content and learning objectives into a sequence of collaborative, location-based challenges.

The same teacher-researcher taught both the control and experimental groups, thereby reducing potential variability attributable to differences in instructor characteristics or teaching style. Although the instructional activities differed according to the pedagogical approach adopted in each condition, the same instructional content, learning objectives, and allocated teaching time were maintained across both groups. The teacher-researcher followed the planned instructional sequence and ensured equivalent coverage of the learning objectives in each condition.

Thus, the principal difference between the two instructional conditions was the pedagogical approach: the control group received traditional teacher-centred instruction, whereas the experimental group engaged in the QuayQuest gamified, place-based learning activities. These procedures were intended to strengthen instructional consistency and minimise potential instructor-related effects on the observed outcomes.
Nevertheless, because the experimental condition involved movement through urban space and collaborative activity, the nature of students' active engagement may have differed from that of the control group. This possibility represents a potential time-on-task and engagement confound and is acknowledged as a limitation.

4.5 Description of the QuayQuest Intervention

QuayQuest was designed as a low-cost, location-based, gamified learning activity for local-history education. Students worked in teams of five and followed a predefined route through historically significant locations in Mytilene. Each team completed six challenges connected with local historical figures, buildings, public spaces, events, and cultural practices.

The challenges required students to identify a historical person or location from a riddle, move to the relevant site, examine physical and historical features of the location, consult information supplied by the teacher or activity materials, solve the task collaboratively, and produce a short multimodal response, such as a photograph, selfie, video, or oral narration.

The activity therefore combined place-based learning, historical inquiry, collaborative problem-solving, and multimodal production. The game was not intended to reproduce the past literally. Rather, it used the contemporary urban environment as a starting point for interpreting historical evidence and connecting present-day places with their historical meanings.

4.6 Game Mechanics and Teacher Role

The principal game elements were the following:

- Challenge structure: The activity was organised into six sequential historical challenges.
- Progression: Teams progressed from one location to the next after completing the preceding task.
- Feedback: The teacher checked students' responses and provided immediate verbal feedback or clarification when necessary.
- Task completion: Completion was established through the production of the required artefact or response.
- Collaboration: Students worked in teams and distributed responsibilities among themselves.

- Authentic environment: The physical locations functioned both as components of the game structure and as historical learning resources.
- Multimodal production: Students documented aspects of their learning through images, short videos, and oral explanations.

No competitive ranking, public leaderboard, or material reward was used. The primary motivational mechanisms were progression through the historical route, successful completion of challenges, collaborative participation, and immediate formative feedback.

The teacher's role was that of facilitator, mediator, and historical guide. The teacher introduced the learning objectives, explained the rules, monitored student safety and participation, verified task completion, clarified historical concepts, and encouraged students to distinguish between historical evidence, interpretation, and fictional or playful elements. The teacher supervised both groups and did not provide answers before students had attempted to solve the challenges.

4.7 Intervention Fidelity

Intervention fidelity was supported through a written teaching scenario, a fixed sequence of six challenges, a predefined walking route, common learning objectives, equivalent allocated instructional time, and a common assessment instrument. Before implementation, the teacher-researcher reviewed the activity sequence, expected learning outcomes, instructions, and procedures for providing feedback.

A formal fidelity checklist or independent observation protocol was not used in the pilot implementation. Fidelity was monitored informally through the teacher-researcher's field notes and the completion of the six planned challenges. This constitutes a limitation of the pilot study. Future implementations will use a structured fidelity protocol and, where possible, an independent observer to document adherence to the planned instructional procedures.

4.8 Assessment Instrument

Learning achievement was assessed through a researcher-developed ten-item multiple-choice post-test. The test was administered immediately after completion of the instructional unit to both groups under the same assessment conditions. Each item had one correct answer and three response options. Each correct answer received one point, resulting in a total score ranging from 0 to 10.

The items were constructed on the basis of the learning objectives of the unit and addressed factual knowledge, recognition of historical places and figures, chronological understanding, and relationships between local sites and broader historical developments.
Examples of items included:

Example 1: Mytilene was liberated in:

a. November 1912
b. September 1922
c. March 1821

Example 2: On the façade of the old Harbourmaster's Office stands the statue of:

a. Elias Kazakos
b. Sappho
c. Pavlos Kountouriotis

Example 3: At "Panellinion", Stratis Myrivilis and Elias Venezis belonged to the literary generation of:

a. 1945
b. 1965
c. 1930

The complete assessment instrument is included in Appendix A. The test was used as a pilot measure and was not presented as a fully validated scale. Its content was aligned with the instructional objectives and historical content addressed during the intervention; however, further psychometric examination is required.

4.9 Reliability and Validity

Because the achievement test consisted of dichotomously scored items, internal consistency could ideally be estimated using the Kuder–Richardson Formula 20 (KR-20). However, KR-20 was not calculated in the present pilot implementation because item-level response data were not retained in a form that permitted a reliable retrospective estimation. Consequently, the internal consistency of the researcher-developed assessment could not be established statistically. This limitation is acknowledged.

The instrument should therefore be regarded as a pilot assessment rather than as a fully validated measure. Future implementations will retain item-level response data and assess internal consistency using KR-20. Further validation will include expert review of item content and alignment with learning objectives, item-difficulty and item-discrimination analyses, examination of distractor functioning, and comparison with validated measures of historical knowledge and historical thinking. The instrument will also be piloted with a larger and more diverse sample.

4.10 Data Collection

The quantitative data consisted of students' scores on the ten-item post-test. The qualitative data consisted of students' photographs, short videos, oral narrations, completed challenges, and researcher field notes generated during the QuayQuest activity.

The artefacts were treated as evidence of students' activity, engagement, and meaning-making processes rather than as independent measures of learning achievement. Their interpretation was therefore used to complement the quantitative findings and provide insight into the learning processes associated with the intervention.

4.11 Ethical Considerations

Participation was conducted within the school context and in accordance with the applicable procedures of the school and educational authorities. Before data collection, students and their parents or legal guardians were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, the types of data collected, and the procedures used to protect confidentiality.

The study was conducted under the school's applicable administrative and safeguarding procedures. Formal institutional ethical approval was not obtained for this pilot activity; however, information and consent procedures were followed in accordance with the requirements communicated by the school. This limitation is acknowledged, and future implementations will seek formal ethics approval before data collection.

Students were instructed not to record identifiable members of the public. Student-produced photographs and videos were used for research purposes only when the relevant consent had been obtained; otherwise, they were excluded from the research corpus.

5. Results

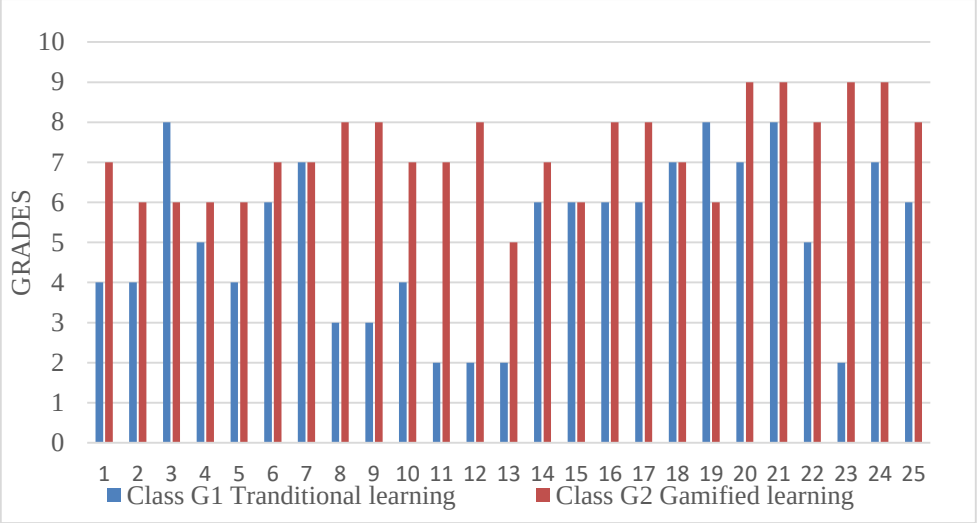
5.1 Quantitative Results

The effectiveness of the QuayQuest intervention was evaluated by comparing the post-test performance of students who participated in the gamified learning experience (G2) with that of students who received traditional instruction (G1). (Appendix B)

Both groups completed the same ten-item multiple-choice achievement test immediately after completion of the instructional unit. The same instructional content, learning objectives, and allocated teaching time were maintained across the two conditions, while the pedagogical approach differed. The control group received traditional teacher-centred instruction, whereas the experimental group participated in the QuayQuest gamified, place-based learning activities. The same teacher-researcher taught both groups, thereby reducing potential variability attributable to differences in instructor characteristics or teaching style.

Students in the traditional instruction group (G1) achieved a mean score of 5.24/10 (52.4%), with scores ranging from 2 to 8 (SD = 2.07). In contrast, students who participated in the QuayQuest intervention (G2) obtained a substantially higher mean score of 7.24/10 (72.4%), with scores ranging from 5 to 9 (SD = 1.09). Furthermore, 80% of students in the experimental group achieved a score of at least 6/10, compared with 48% of students in the control group. The experimental group also exhibited lower variability in post-test performance, as indicated by its smaller standard deviation. Figure 2 illustrates the comparison between the two instructional approaches.

Figure 2. Comparative Analysis of Traditional and Gamified Instruction in Local History Education



Overall, the descriptive statistics indicate a substantial difference in post-test achievement in favour of the QuayQuest group. The findings also suggest greater consistency in performance within the experimental group. However, because the study involved two intact classes and no pre-test was administered, the observed difference should be interpreted as an association between instructional condition and post-test performance rather than as definitive evidence of a causal effect.

5.2 Qualitative Findings

In addition to the quantitative findings, the intervention generated a collection of qualitative learning artefacts that documented students' engagement with local history throughout the QuayQuest activity.

The researcher designed a sequence of location-based riddles that guided student teams through historically significant sites along the waterfront of Mytilene. Each challenge combined historical information with collaborative problem-solving, encouraging students to connect physical locations with historical events, historical figures, and elements of the island's cultural heritage.

As they progressed through the activity, students produced a range of digital artefacts, including photographs, selfies at monuments, short videos, and brief oral narrations explaining the historical significance of the sites they visited. These artefacts provided qualitative evidence of active participation, collaborative inquiry, and students' attempts to relate historical knowledge to authentic urban environments.

The artefacts also reflected experiential engagement with local history. Students' responses demonstrated observation, discussion, historical interpretation, and interaction with the cultural landscape of Mytilene. In this respect, the place-based and gamified structure of QuayQuest appeared to encourage students to engage with historical content through direct interaction with physical locations rather than through classroom-based instruction alone.
These qualitative observations complement the quantitative results by illustrating how students engaged with the learning environment and applied historical knowledge during the intervention. However, the qualitative artefacts were primarily used as evidence of engagement and learning processes and were not treated as independent measures of intervention effectiveness.

5.3 Statistical Analysis

To determine whether the observed difference in post-test achievement between the two groups was statistically significant, an independent-samples *t*-test was conducted. The analysis was selected because the outcome variable was a numerical achievement score and the two groups consisted of independent participants.

Students in the experimental group achieved significantly higher post-test scores than students in the control group, $t(48) = 4.74$, $p < .001$. The corresponding effect size was very large (Cohen's $d = 1.34$), indicating a substantial standardised difference in post-test achievement between the two instructional conditions.

Given the use of two intact classes and the relatively small sample, the assumptions underlying the independent-samples *t*-test were considered relevant to the interpretation of the findings. Independence was addressed by treating each student's post-test score as a single observation and the two classes as separate groups. However, formal statistical and graphical checks of normality, extreme outliers, and homogeneity of variances were not conducted in the present pilot implementation. This limitation is acknowledged. Future studies will include systematic assumption checks and, where appropriate, non-parametric sensitivity analyses.

The statistically significant difference and large effect size provide preliminary evidence of a strong association between participation in the QuayQuest intervention and higher immediate post-test achievement. However, the absence of a pre-test means that pre-existing differences between the two intact classes cannot be ruled out. In addition, the implementation by the teacher-researcher and the use of a researcher-developed assessment introduce further potential sources of bias. The findings should therefore be interpreted cautiously and should not be regarded as definitive evidence of a causal effect.

Overall, the results are encouraging and suggest that the QuayQuest approach warrants further investigation using stronger experimental or quasi-experimental designs, larger samples, baseline measures, systematic fidelity monitoring, and a more extensively validated assessment instrument.

6. Discussion

The findings of the present study provide preliminary evidence of a positive association between participation in the QuayQuest intervention and students' immediate post-test achievement in local history. Students who participated in the gamified, place-based learning experience achieved higher post-test scores than students who received traditional teacher-centred instruction. The difference was statistically significant, and the large effect size indicates that the observed between-group difference was substantial in standardised terms. However, because the study used two intact classes and did not include a pre-test, the findings should be interpreted as evidence of a strong between-group association rather than as definitive evidence of a causal effect of the intervention.

These findings are broadly consistent with previous research indicating that gamification can support learning outcomes, although the magnitude of effects varies considerably across contexts and study designs. Meta-analytic evidence has reported positive effects of gamification on cognitive, motivational, and behavioural outcomes, while also highlighting

substantial heterogeneity and the importance of contextual and design-related factors (Sailer & Homner, 2020). Similarly, Bai et al. (2020) reported a positive overall effect of gamification on learning performance, while noting that shorter gamified interventions may sometimes produce stronger effects. More recent meta-analytic evidence has also reported positive effects of gamification on learning outcomes, while identifying moderators related to educational discipline, user characteristics, duration, learning environment, and design principles (Li et al., 2023).

The relatively strong effect observed in the present study should therefore not be interpreted as evidence that gamification alone necessarily produces large learning gains. Rather, the result may be related to the particular pedagogical configuration of QuayQuest. The intervention combined game mechanics with explicit learning objectives, historical inquiry, collaboration, immediate feedback, movement through authentic locations, and multimodal production. This interpretation is consistent with research suggesting that the educational value of gamification depends not simply on the presence of game elements but on how those elements are integrated into the learning process. In the present intervention, challenges, progression, feedback, collaboration, and task completion were embedded within a structured history-learning activity rather than added as isolated motivational features.

A particularly important feature of QuayQuest was its place-based character. Rather than presenting local history exclusively through classroom materials, the intervention positioned historically significant locations as learning resources. Students were required to move through the urban environment, identify relevant places, examine their characteristics, interpret historical information, and connect present-day locations with historical events and figures. This approach is consistent with place-based perspectives on learning, which emphasise the educational value of authentic environments, local knowledge, community contexts, and learners' relationships with the places in which they live. In this respect, the findings suggest that local history may provide a particularly suitable context for combining place-based learning with gamified pedagogies.

The use of location-based and digitally supported activities may also be particularly relevant to history and cultural-heritage education. Location-based learning can enable students to encounter historical places directly and to connect documentary or teacher-provided information with the physical environment. Similarly, digitally mediated heritage experiences can combine text, images, audio, video, and interactive tasks to support situated engagement with cultural resources. In QuayQuest, digital production was not used merely for technological novelty; photographs, short videos, and oral explanations were integrated into the historical challenges and provided students with opportunities to document and communicate their interpretations of the places they encountered.

The role of local history within this framework is particularly important. Learning about the past through local and regional contexts can provide students with a concrete point of entry into broader historical processes. Historical places, buildings, monuments, literary figures, and community narratives can function as tangible reference points through which students connect abstract historical concepts with their immediate cultural environment. In the present study, the waterfront of Mytilene functioned not simply as the setting of the intervention but as an active component of the learning design. The transition from classroom-based historical content to situated exploration may therefore have contributed to students' engagement with historical knowledge.

The qualitative artefacts further support this interpretation, although they should be understood as complementary rather than independent evidence of learning effectiveness. Photographs, videos, oral narrations, and completed challenges documented students' active participation, collaborative inquiry, and attempts to interpret historical places. These artefacts suggest that students engaged with history through observation, discussion, movement, representation, and communication. Such processes are compatible with broader conceptions of historical learning in which students are encouraged not only to recall factual information but also to interpret evidence, contextualise events, establish relationships between people and places, and communicate historical meaning.

The findings also highlight the potential of gamified environments to support experiential and situated forms of historical learning. The educational value of the game did not depend on reproducing the past literally. Instead, the game structure created a framework through which students could investigate the relationship between historical information and contemporary places. Riddles and challenges prompted students to search, discuss, interpret, and make decisions, while the physical environment provided concrete reference points for those processes. Thus, the intervention can be understood as combining elements of gamification, place-based learning, experiential learning, and digital heritage education.

At the same time, gamification should not be assumed to benefit all learners equally. Although the present study did not systematically measure differences in students' motivation, digital competence, physical mobility, or accessibility needs, these factors may influence how students experience location-based and collaborative gamified activities. Some students may benefit from movement, social interaction, and multimodal tasks, whereas others may experience challenges related to mobility, sensory needs, anxiety, digital familiarity, language, or preferences for less competitive learning environments. Research on gamification has also identified that some learners may experience anxiety, jealousy, or limited perceived utility rather than increased enjoyment. Future implementations of QuayQuest should therefore incorporate inclusive design principles, provide alternative ways of participating where necessary, avoid unnecessary competitive pressure, and ensure that access to digital devices and learning resources does not disadvantage particular groups of students.

This consideration is particularly important because the present intervention did not use competitive ranking, public leaderboards, or material rewards. Instead, its motivational structure relied primarily on progression, collaboration, challenge completion, and formative feedback. This design may offer an inclusive alternative to highly competitive forms of gamification, although this interpretation requires empirical investigation in future studies rather than being assumed from the present findings.

The present findings should also be considered in relation to the broader literature on gamification. Meta-analytic research indicates that gamification can have positive effects on learning, but the size and stability of those effects vary according to instructional design, context, learners, and outcome measures (Sailer & Homner, 2020; Bai et al., 2020; Li et al., 2023). The very large standardised difference observed in the present study is therefore best regarded as a promising pilot finding rather than as an estimate of the typical effect of gamification in history education. The relatively small sample, the use of two intact classes, and the researcher-developed assessment instrument all limit the extent to which the effect size can be generalised.

Several limitations should consequently be acknowledged. First, participants were not randomly assigned, and the study involved only two intact classes. Second, no pre-test was administered, meaning that baseline differences in prior achievement or knowledge cannot be ruled out. Third, the sample was relatively small and was drawn from a single school in Mytilene. Fourth, formal statistical checks of the assumptions underlying the independent-samples *t*-test were not conducted in the pilot implementation. Fifth, the researcher-developed ten-item assessment was used as a pilot instrument and its internal consistency could not be estimated retrospectively because item-level response data were not available. Finally, intervention fidelity was monitored informally rather than through a formal fidelity protocol or independent observation.

The single-school and single-location context also has implications for generalisability. Mytilene provides a particularly rich historical and cultural environment, and the effectiveness of QuayQuest may partly depend on the availability of accessible historical sites, meaningful local narratives, and a manageable urban route. The same intervention may not produce identical outcomes in rural settings, geographically dispersed communities, schools with limited access to cultural heritage sites, or contexts in which students have different relationships with local history. Nevertheless, the underlying pedagogical principles—connecting curriculum content with authentic places, using structured challenges, promoting collaboration, and incorporating multimodal production—could potentially be adapted to other locations. Future studies should therefore test the intervention in different schools, regions, cultural contexts, and educational settings in order to determine which elements are context-dependent and which are transferable.

Another important issue concerns the duration of the observed learning effect. The present study assessed achievement immediately after the instructional unit and therefore provides evidence only of short-term learning performance. It cannot establish whether the observed improvement was retained over time. Future research should incorporate delayed post-tests to examine retention of historical knowledge and, where possible, longitudinal follow-up to investigate whether repeated exposure to place-based and gamified learning contributes to sustained engagement with local history. Longer-term studies could also examine whether such interventions influence students' historical thinking, motivation, sense of connection to cultural heritage, collaboration, and attitudes towards history learning.

Future research should consequently employ stronger quasi-experimental or experimental designs, including pre-test and delayed post-test measures, larger samples involving multiple classes and schools, and systematic monitoring of intervention fidelity. Where feasible, studies should also use validated measures alongside researcher-developed assessments and retain item-level response data to permit reliability and item-level analyses. Mixed-methods designs could further integrate achievement data with measures of motivation, historical thinking, collaboration, accessibility, and learner experience.

Overall, the present study provides promising preliminary evidence that a gamified, place-based learning environment such as QuayQuest can support students' immediate achievement in local history while creating opportunities for active engagement with cultural heritage. The findings suggest that the educational potential of gamification may lie not simply in adding game elements to instruction, but in designing coherent learning experiences in which challenges, collaboration, feedback, digital production, and authentic places serve explicit educational purposes. At the same time, the methodological limitations of the present pilot study require cautious interpretation. Further research across different locations, learner

populations, and longer time periods is needed to establish the generalisability, inclusiveness, and durability of these effec

7. Conclusions

This study provides preliminary evidence of the potential of gamified, place-based learning to enrich local history education. Students who participated in the QuayQuest intervention achieved higher immediate post-test scores than students who received traditional teacher-centred instruction. Given the quasi-experimental design, the use of two intact classes, the absence of a pre-test, and the relatively small sample, these findings should be interpreted as evidence of a strong association between the instructional condition and post-test achievement rather than as definitive evidence of a causal effect.

The study suggests that the educational value of QuayQuest lies not simply in the incorporation of game elements, but in the integration of gamification with explicit learning objectives, historical inquiry, collaboration, formative feedback, multimodal production, and authentic places. By combining these elements, the intervention created opportunities for students to engage actively with historical content and to connect curricular knowledge with the cultural environment in which they live.

A particular contribution of the study is the application of gamified, location-based learning to local history education in a secondary-school context. Rather than restricting digital game-based learning to classroom environments, QuayQuest used the historical landscape of Mytilene as an extension of the learning space. Students were encouraged to explore historical locations, interpret information, collaborate with peers, and communicate their understanding through multimodal artefacts. In this respect, the intervention illustrates how local cultural heritage can function as an authentic educational resource and how digital technologies can mediate students' interaction with historical places.

The findings also highlight the potential of local history to provide a meaningful context for situated and experiential learning. By approaching the past through familiar places, students can potentially connect historical knowledge with their immediate cultural and social environment. Such approaches may help bridge the distance between abstract historical information and students' lived experiences, while creating opportunities for observation, interpretation, discussion, and communication of historical meaning.

At the same time, the study indicates that the implementation of gamified historical learning requires careful pedagogical mediation. Teachers remain essential in establishing learning objectives, guiding students' interpretation of historical evidence, clarifying the distinction between historical evidence and fictional or simulated elements, and ensuring that technology serves educational rather than purely entertainment purposes. The findings therefore support a view of gamification as a pedagogical framework that requires purposeful instructional design rather than as an end in itself.

Considerations of inclusion are also important. Although the present pilot did not systematically examine differences in students' accessibility needs, digital experience, motivation, mobility, or participation patterns, location-based and collaborative gamified activities may not benefit all learners in the same way. Future implementations should therefore incorporate inclusive design principles, provide alternative forms of participation where

necessary, and avoid unnecessary competitive mechanisms that may disadvantage particular learners.

The generalisability of the findings should also be considered cautiously. The study was conducted in a single school and within the specific historical and cultural environment of Mytilene. The availability of accessible historical sites, the characteristics of the local community, and students' familiarity with the cultural environment may have influenced the learning experience. Nevertheless, the underlying design principles of QuayQuest—authentic place-based exploration, structured challenges, collaboration, feedback, and multimodal production—could potentially be adapted to other historical and cultural contexts. Further research across different schools, regions, educational levels, and cultural settings is therefore required to determine the transferability of the approach.

Finally, the present study examined immediate post-intervention achievement and therefore cannot establish whether the observed learning gains are maintained over time. Future research should incorporate pre-test and delayed post-test measures and should examine longer-term outcomes such as retention of historical knowledge, historical thinking, motivation, collaboration, engagement with cultural heritage, and students' attitudes towards history learning. Larger samples, multiple classes, systematic fidelity monitoring, validated assessment instruments, and appropriate reliability analyses would also strengthen the evidence base.

Overall, the study contributes a promising pilot model for integrating gamification, digital technologies, place-based learning, and cultural heritage into secondary-school local history education. QuayQuest demonstrates the feasibility of moving historical learning beyond the classroom and into authentic cultural spaces while maintaining a structured curricular focus. The findings do not establish that gamification alone causes improved achievement, but they provide a strong basis for further investigation of how carefully designed, inclusive, and place-sensitive gamified experiences may enrich history education for adolescent learners.

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Appendix A

QuayQuest Game Riddles

Challenge 1

My homeland is Lesvos.
I stand proudly and gaze upon it
in the rose garden of a women's school,
writing poetry and music.

Recite the following three lines by the person described, at the spot where their statue stands:

Δέδυκε μέν α σελάννα

Και πληϊάδες· μέσαι δέ νύκτες, παρά δ' ἔρχεθ' ὤρα.

Ἐγώ δέ καθεύδω.

Sappho fr. 48, *Midnight*

Challenge 2

I once was an island,
my name was METELIN,
and my crown was a castle.
A glorious canal separated me from the mainland,
connecting my two harbours.

Which canal am I?
State the name of the canal after you move to the point on the waterfront (Prokymaia) where its mouth used to be.

Challenge 3

My fame was great
among Greeks and Ottomans
for wealth and gold.
Today I am the "Motel",
known to all young people,
who visit me often,
but for very different reasons.

Once you have found this building, take a photograph of its entrance.

Challenge 4

Everyone remembers 1912
as a year of victory and freedom
for the whole Archipelago.

Go to the place where the statue of the liberator of Lesvos stands.
Take a selfie with the statue.

Challenge 5

When I was a child, I was an Ottoman shipyard.
In my youth, the "Lesbian Spring" often gathered in my shade.
When I grew older, new buildings were constructed in my courtyard,
and I lost much of my natural beauty.

Go to one of the three buildings in the Municipal Garden and take a photograph of it.

Challenge 6

I stand in front of the old Harbourmaster's Office
to remind you that…

Go to the statue of Elias Kazakos and record a short video (1 minute), in which each member of your group briefly refers to the role and contribution of this historical figure.

Appendix B



Diagnostic Assessment Test

Grade 9 (Classes G1 and G2)
School year: 2024–2025

Student's full name: .....

How well do I know the history of my hometown?
Select the correct answer by circling it.

1. Sappho founded in Mytilene the first:

a. Conservatory of music
b. School of poetry and music for women
c. Sanctuary of the Muses

2. Euripus was the canal that connected the two harbours of the town:

a. The western with the eastern harbour
b. The northern with the southern harbour
c. The northern with the eastern harbour

3. The Imperial Ottoman Bank played a primary role in:

a. The island's independence from Ottoman rule
b. The subjugation of Hellenism
c. The control of the country's commercial activities

4. On the façade of the old Harbourmaster's Office stands the statue of:

a. Elias Kazakos
b. Sappho
c. Pavlos Kountouriotis

5. Mytilene was liberated in:

a. November 1912
b. September 1922
c. March 1821

6. The "Grand Bretagne" Hotel, as a product of the "School of Mytilene", was designed by:

a. Elias Venezis
b. Panos Kourtzis
c. Argyris Adalis

7. The "Great Orchard" (Megalo Perivoli) in its present form consists of:

a. The "Panellinion" café – Ermou Street (old market) – Saint Therapon Church
b. The Municipal Garden – Municipal Theatre – Old Town Hall
c. Sappho Square – Old Harbourmaster's Office – "Lykavitos" Hotel

8. At "Panellinion", the historic café of the city, Stratis Myrivilis and Elias Venezis used to gather. They belonged to the literary generation of:

a. 1945
b. 1965
c. 1930

9. The old Town Hall of Mytilene is an eclectic building of the 19th century and features elements of the:

a. Neoclassical style
b. Gothic style
c. Doric style

10. The Municipal Theatre of Mytilene is named after its benefactor:

a. Vostaneio
b. Eugenideio
c. Rouselleio

I wish you every success!