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Gamification in the Classrooms: Exploring the Integration of Game-based Learning in Social Studies Education

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Abstract
This paper explored the integration of game-based learning in social studies education classrooms,focussing on its potential to enhance students' engagement and understanding. It further explored the potential of gamification, the application of game elements in non-game contexts, to revitalise social studies learning. It examined the integration of game-based learning, where games are specifically designed for educational purposes, within the social studies classroom. Game-based learning leverages games' interactive and immersive nature to create an active learning environment,promoting critical thinking, collaboration,and contextual understanding. The paper also examined the alignment of educational game contentand the balance between digital and non-digital game formats. Furthermore, it addressed the importance of teacher training, assessment integration, andstudent-centred approaches in successfully implementing Game-based learning. By incorporating historical simulations, strategic thinking games, and local content, this approach aims to make social studies more relatable and engaging. The role of community involvement and feedback mechanisms in

supporting a holistic educational experience were also highlighted.Some suggestions on how to effectively utilize game-based learning in social studies such as aligning games with the curriculum, incorporating local contents and the training of teachers to integrate game-based learning into their teaching were proffered.

Keywords: Gamification, Social Studies Education, Teacher Training, Student Centred Approach, Educational games

Introduction

Teaching students through traditional methods is no longer more effective than teaching them with technology. Students are more interested in learning through interactive multimedia methods and games. They tend to understand the topic easily when a teacher uses a game in learning. Game-based Learning (GBL) is becoming more attractive in education because it improves teaching and student engagement (Bade, 2022).The essence of this paperwas to perform this long-overdue analysis of games in social studies learning. Schools may be founded on the learning activities of which they are composed. These organised learning activities may include the learning of directed activities called games. In this case, schools may then be considered institutions, and games are among the activities of those institutions that bear the indelible marks of a formal system of instruction. Whether a game is taken to be free or played for its own sake, or as a part of a directed activity, as a form of learning, games are viewed as an essential part of human life. Individuals find a game a proper and profitable means for self-expression, either by excelling in each type of game or combining successful play with responsibility for others. Individuals find games entertaining, pleasurable, and powerful means of cultural expression. (Ardiu, 2019)

Educational games have started to be the defining element of education. Gradually, the classroom is becoming a gamified learning environment and becoming increasingly popular and accessible to students in conjunction with various tools, including mobile technology. These educational games have the following features: 1) they are enjoyable, 2) they make learning fun and engaging, 3) they are visual and comprehensive, 4) they are collaborative, 5) they are motivating, and 6) they promote 21st-century skills and values. (Cicchino, 2016).

Educational games help students learn to create problem-solving skills and develop higher-order thinking skills. Gamification of learning is not only about providing educational content but also includes game mechanics, game dynamics, and game design in learning content.

From the beginning, social studies educators have used games to teach concepts and ideas related to the subject. Games are defined by Zhong (2019) as "a recreational activity with a set of rules... it is something pursued for diversion, amusement or interest." According to Obro(2022), a game is any enjoyable activity in which specific rules govern human behaviour in a game's conduct. Although, games have existed and been incorporated into social studies learning, there is still a dearth or shortage of publications showing the types of games that could be used in teaching and learning social studies or the skills being improved. The fact remains that there is a need for a thorough analysis of the various games and the explanation of ways and means by which they can be used to achieve social studies learning objectives successfully. Gamification involves significantly using specific architectural elements such as content, system design, and course design in learning. The claimed purpose is strengthening the classroom and making the learning experience more meaningful. (Whitmer et al.,2002)

The use of gamification in the educational process has been prevalent in recent years. The introduction of educational games in the educational environment has sparked controversy. Some argue that it is nothing more than a trend, trying to burn them beyond traditional educational methods in a rigid way and to let it free to let it rest in oblivion. However, others recognise the full potential of educational games as educational tools. There are terms related more specifically to educational games, such as "digital game-based learning" (DGBL), "teaching with games" or "serious games". Educational games have the following attributes: 1) they are primarily designed for educational purposes, 2) they are student-centred, 3) they are hedonistic, and 4) they are practical and engage learners with the help of educational outing games. (Yablonet al.2020).

Importance of Games in Education

Rachid and Hassan (2020) opined that educational games offer a solution to the teaching system and that the aspect of social studies that aims to

understand societal problems, phenomena, and their control patterns cannot be completed without games, which can serve as a basis for projecting societal solutions.

Creating compelling learning spaces is a new trend visible in educational journals. Students are considered actors capable of choosing their learning pathways, and teachers must be able to guide these new actors with compelling narratives. Experiential learning is dressing up and inviting to meet in new learning environments. Simulations, role plays, and games are the sushi of the knowledge buffet. They are educating students not only about the historic age but also about the present world and the glimpse of the future that will be left behind by the struggles of the present day: its victories, its defeats, its challenges, and its hopes.

Games have become an integral part of the modern education system, designed for educational purposes in the school system. In social studies, several schools have encouraged usinggames as teaching aids. According to Noroozi et al. (2020), games are educational, competitive activities organised according to a predetermined set of rules to produce a definite outcome. Games achieve severalvital objectives in social studies, promoting discipline and creating interest. Quian et al. (2016) identified critical educational values from games as " significant as group experience—group learning activities, they help students to cope easily with language barriers, and they serve as pattern generators which draw together facts, concepts, and content." These values highlight social studies' teaching objectives in which games are utilised in teaching-learning. Stall's observations are important because social studies students in Nigerian schools are taught by teachers who rely primarily on lectures to handle the diverse experiences required for the teaching-learning process.

Shu & Liu (2019) stated that if game-based activities were included in everyday curriculum, performance in educational target matters could be enhanced. Bade(2020) also argued that implementing gaming-inspired activities should not deflect tasks but reinforce some methods by which students are taught, learn, and demonstrate their knowledge base in that setting. Bade's (2020) perspective posits a kind of intuitive, brain-based appeal in which the ability of a student to come to understand and work within a rules-based, structured setting to perform and internalise learning outcomes. It also argues that children's

neurological mechanisms for play and narrative could be harnessed to provide them with ready-made, meaningful teaching tools. Kim et al. (2009) agreed that including gaming methods in a classroom reinforced traditional learning measures, providing students with concrete reference points for understanding all the themes they explored.

Effective teachers recognise the significance of integrating gaming concepts into the social studies curriculum. Social studies aim to integrate content and critically essential strategies and skills. Therefore, the role of a social studies teacher is to have students develop capacities, traits, and skills and provide experiences that use content as a means of learning. At the same time, in very subtle and hidden ways, the students learn to delight others as well as themselves. As they play and progress in social studies skills and concepts, they experience pride, cooperation, personal worth, responsible behaviour, and feelings of ownership and belonging. Social studies, it seems, are for the students, for the sake of the students.

Games in social studies learning play a crucial role at the elementary level in helping to inculcate and reinforce the requisite attitudes, values, dispositions, behaviour, and awareness in the learners. By the time the learners take up social studies as a subject and learning is brought to, if not absolutely, a content-abstract level, then at least a more mature level, the goals and purposes of social studies would have been well internalised. (Ardiu, 2019).

Types of Games for Social Studies Learning

The role of games within the elementary social studies curriculum is very significant because they possess an appeal, meaning, and relevance to the students. Games can inspire the students to do a great deal with activities that may be somewhat new to them. Games contain both content and meaning within the same context. They are practical and efficient instruments to expose young learners to social studies content and to help them develop, select, maintain, and practice social studies skills. During this process, positive values such as self-concept and democratic habits such as responsibility, cooperation, and participation are modelled and developed.

A few of the games that can be utilised in the teaching of Social Studies concepts are:

Role-Playing Games

Role-playing, another type of game, is used to classify games that offer learners the possibility of deciding and acting as if they were involved in governmental or societal problems. An example is the simulation. A simulation is an interactive learning process game wherein learners engage in experience, place settings, study backgrounds, and characters outside their own. Simulations are concept-oriented, task-oriented, or decision-oriented. Role-playing is also a structured approach to decision-making. A decision-making model like this can help students think together about similar problems at home or school. Role-playing is concerned with learning while playing roles, temporal withdrawal of oneself from the everyday tasks actuated to another's life andentering into the thinking and feelings of the person to be role-played at that particular place, time, and settings or without any profound negative impact. (Bade, 2020)

Simulation Games

A simulation game is often called a model or an imitation of reality. In a simulation game, participants assume specific roles and make decisions based on given situations and conditions. The game's objective is to observe the pattern of decisions made by the students and the resulting consequences. The game aims to demonstrate or illustrate necessary information, principles, skills, or concepts.

Williamson (1997), argues that simulation games allow students to make decisions likenatural agents in industries, businesses, or authorities such as the government. The decisions could be financial, economic, social, or political. Simulation games can be cash flow games or stock flow games. Cash flow games involve students simulating the financial activities of businesses or consumers to produce, buy, sell, and incur necessary expenses such as production costs, rent, and tax payments, among others. Simulation models are used more in determining microeconomic concepts, decision problems, small-scale production activities, and macroeconomic models, which may involve producers, markets, or single events. Simulation games are observed in school-level

competitions, and game shows that aim to deepen people's understanding of the topic areas they are interested in.

Educational Games

Educational games constitute a significant part of a sector that has increased since the 2000s. Educational games are developed for hobby, improvement, and edutainment purposes. Unlike other types, these purposes are also easily anthropomorphised. Educational games aim to prevent people from forgetting (e.g., memorisation of historical dates) but also to acquire information and skills. Information is the perception of knowledge; it evolves with social relations and determines people's identities. The integration, transformation, and movement of knowledge necessitate different cognitive processes. (*Hartt et al*.,2020)

Educational games should not be considered an activity for children. Educational games can be developed to improve people's learning habits at any age, ranging from infancy to senescence. Adults can enjoy learning by playing and escape from often-overlooked habits. Despite its recent emergence, the development of educational games as a branch has been receiving increasing attention in-game software research but has not yet been fully comprehended in the literature. Game design is an arduous and time-consuming process. Conducting the process without prior planning increases the risk of failure. The design process is a meticulous and coordinated step of carrying the product from idea to application. Its purpose is to ensure that the results meet the expectations. A variety of skills related to technology are developed. In these problematic daily conditions in every country, countries develop software for education as human resources. These software varieties are frequently used in the entertainment and education of children. Educational games are usually a combination of education and entertainment. There is a play concept in the interactions, feedback, and comments. (Obro, 2020).

Digital Board Games

In general, digital board games are digital versions of traditional board games. However, differences such as buoyancy, cost, resources, and representational competencies can be seen. Digital board games require

technological equipment to support and produce this educational game. The technological equipment required can vary according to the purpose of the game design. For instance, the software and hardware requirements will differwhen designing digital board games for a room environment and wide area networks. However, in this study, the system features are discussed, considering that the study's objective, the playful learning activity, takes place in a room and is based on tangible technology. The electronic devices we use are either digital board games produced by researchers using physical keypad remote controllers or portable devices, such as smartphones or tablets, in which games are installed.(*Hartt et al.,2020*)

Digital board games produced to be used in educational settings are a creative way to use digital technology for educational purposes. Digital board games include many dynamics proven necessary for learning, such as multiplayer, collaborative, competitive, representational competencies, technologically augmented learning, and strategies dynamics. In addition, digital board games maintain the dynamics of traditional board games in their structure, such as game mechanics, rules, and game boards. These properties give a new and comprehensive focus on the educational potentials of digital board games in the context of combining traditional dynamics of board games and digital technology. (Shu & Liu,2019).

Some of the Benefits of Game-Based Learning

The benefits of using games in social studies learning cannot be overemphasised. Given these benefits, consideration for using games in learning may begiven adequate attention. The benefits of using games include providing an opportunity for some students to receive extra practice, achieving better involvement of students, reducing students' stress and anxiety, enabling long-term retention of concepts, fostering students' development and maintenance of positive attitudes towards learning, increasing students' degree of learning, creation of many enjoyable experiences that supplement classroom activities, and uniting the cognitive domains of students.

Not only are games fun and engaging, but they also have the potential to enhance the learning experience for students of any age.

Game-based learning or relying on games to enrich an educational activity or experience, offers numerous advantages. The four primary benefits of game-based learning are enjoyment, enhanced learning, classmate collaboration, and increased motivation.

Enhanced Engagement and Motivation

One of the critical ingredients of any game is that it almost always involves doing something. We play games because they are fun and challenging; therefore, games are inherently compelling. For learners, the characteristics of games may be helpful, too. Every time one level is finished, and a new, more challenging game level is assigned, it engages their sense of accomplishment and keeps the learner's motivation flowing. Moreover, in their immersion, people can more deeply understand what they are learning and understand it at a higher level of mastery. A learner can then manipulate the material using tools to complete real-life tasks. Also, when people are antagonised, they take in large amounts of information. When embodied and convincing activities are put up against educational material, the emotional engagement with the material increases briefly; thus, its durability increases very briefly. (Bakan & Bakan, 2018).

Improved Problem-Solving and Critical Thinking Skills

The ability to think critically is vital to practical problem-solving. It underpins learning processes not constrained by superficial, surface, or one-dimensional thought and can benefit a much broader application of knowledge. Games can infuse learning with emotionally experienced passion, challenge, motivation, and commitment – combined with the release of creativity associated with the framework of conclusions that are factually supported in a conclusion-driven way – thus supporting seeing facts in a new light. At the same time, fundamental change and enduring deep learning can only come about because the passion of the game in creating profound conclusions driven by facts has a practical application in an outside game world.(Foster & Shah, 2019).

Increased Retention and Recall of Information

Dynamic experiences in a game thrive on variety. Every game playthrough should provide a player with a new experience, so a learner

must be given varied approaches to a scenario. Players in games are given the ability to make choices and strategies; there are few formats beyond games in which communication is two-way. By allowing players to make a choice, even if the outcome is set in stone, they embrace an outcome of a given scenario that reflects their objectives. Thus, as in real scenarios, learners in a game strategise to figure out how to attain a similar result.

Gameplay as a learning tool; moreover, the use of games in learning is believed to have a much more meaningful impact on an individual's ability to recall information than other learning techniques. While games are relatively low-stakes, offering only pseudo-consequences or community-based rewards, they often present the need for real-time decision-making and timing high-stress moments. This leads to an adrenaline rush that, in turn, prepares an individual's "fight, flight, or freeze" instincts. This adrenaline lingers in the bloodstream for roughly 10-20 minutes, during which time an individual experiences heightened focus and memory retention. This means that during and following gameplay, learners experience a period of increased memory recall, as their sensory cortices are heightened, and their cognitive functioning is significantly activated. This leads to better recall of learned information, making games in eLearning an excellent tool for further reinforcing information retention and recall.(Qian & Clark,2016)

In addition, game-based learning's notable capacity to enable increased retention and recall of learned material cannot be overstated. The E-Learning Industry has outlined how gameplay supports memory consolidation, a crucial component of human learning that fosters memory stability. In gameplay, a learner is compelled to steadily build an understanding of the gaming world, the game's rules, and what resources and tools can be used. This ultimately boosts a learner's cognitive retention and synaptic consolidation.

Promotion of Collaboration and Teamwork

Games are a rich platform for simulating collaborative structures, fundamental social interactions through specific teaching, and communication strategies encouraged through game design. Teasley et al. found that groups of professional female game players developed explicit communication protocols during gaming. At the same time,

Clark explained that collaboration and oral presentation skills flourished in his students, largely thanks to the online gaming vehicle of communication. These experiences explicitly support my experience that there is value in developing realistic simulations of cooperative situations with multi-tiered learning objectives.(Kim et al,2009)

According to Ogheneakoke et al. (2019), game-based learning can instil cooperative behaviours and teamwork skills in adults and younger students. Students can be assigned cooperative tasks where they work with others to complete shared goals. With specific settings, students might, for example, be put in a social dilemma where they need to elect a group leader. This may instil some leadership skillsor feedback for the students on being good leaders or followers. Collaboration and teamwork are common strategies for handling simulated situations where roles must be fulfilled.

Some of the Challenges of Implementing Games in Social Studies Learning

It is pitiable to note that, despite the benefits derivable from social studies games, the teaching strategy has not gained wide acceptance in Nigerian schools. This might be due to the negation of the pedagogical affirmation that games form an integral part of the teaching and learning process towards ensuring their qualitative improvement. By and large, games can be used in any social studies learning situation because they transform lessons into realistic settings, facilitate the learning of abstract concepts, and comprehensively develop the learners' knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Games enhance creativity and cognitive skills and foster motivation, especially when designed to meet the instructional objectives of the units of social studies. (Bade,2020).

Preparation of Learning Materials

Preparation of material and familiarisation is crucial to ensure the effective use of games during the game sessions. Preparing meaningful questions is essential for a test. This stage is not easy for teachers at times. Additionally, the process requires teachers' critical thinking to generate interest among the students. Teachers need to focus on the technical process and influence the student's learning experience and the group's enthusiasm. Teachers must customise the game to fit the

student's needs to achieve a unique scenario and rewards for free manipulation learning.

Integration with Curriculum Standards

Properly integrating gamification in a teaching and learning process is not an easy task. Several challenges might be encountered. For those unfamiliar with technology, setting up a game could be time-consuming and discouraging, except for the games on websites that already have a game in packages, which are user-friendly and straightforward. The initial setup for an account and the steps a teacher needs to accomplish to build a game might make the entire learning session revolve around the setup. The activities of people who are already familiar with using technology will be more interested in having a game. The challenge is inexorable, as not all people are born in the era of IT literacy.(Kaimara et al, 2021).

Schools face many challenges when considering the implementation of game-based learning. One of the main concerns is integrating game-based learning into an already packed school day filled with educational mandates that must be covered. Another challenge is in the actual infrastructure required to support game-based learning. Although classrooms may have a computer, access to functioning technology is not always guaranteed. Schools must allocate funding to increase the number of computers available to students or allow students to bring their technology. The integration of technology into everyday learning may also require support from electives (such as a computer lab teacher), which may be an area of contention when school districts are looking to cut costs.

Access to Technology and Resources

Poor power conditions have been a significant factor leading to disruptions when an e-learning programme is ongoing. One of the issues in e-learning in Nigeria is access to Information Communication Technology (ICT) gadgets and resources. The issue of access to ICT gadgets is a fundamental source of concern for the prolonged e-learning of Nigerian pupils and students. Many pupils and students do not have access to ICT gadgets, and internet connection and electric power are challenges for many people. They found the problem of access to electronic media resources and restricted ICT consumables as part of

the push factor for e-learning in their countries. Also, the researchers in Nigeria situation discovered poor access to learning resources such as the Internet CD-ROM and poor access to facilities (like libraries and radio e-learning equipment) that can make e-learning a reality (Cozar-Gutierrez & Saez-Lopez, 2016).

Access to Technology and Infrastructure

In many cases, it is difficult for schools to acquire and maintain the necessary infrastructure and ensure that a network can support ongoing gaming activities. For these reasons, in many cases, networked games are not feasible, and offline solutions are more generally workable. This is particularly true for limited-resource schools. Access to educational technology is frequently the norm in more extensive or resource-rich school settings. In these schools, technology is often integrated into regular classroom practices. In K-12 settings, technology is available in computer labs and on cart-based checkout systems for a single visiting classroom to utilise tablet or Chromebook technology. In classroom settings, access to technology is often not a 1:1 resource due to budgetary constraints and the need to use the technology for formative and summative testing.(Yablon et al.,2020).

In the view of Yaldz(2013), using technology and gaming for educational purposes is a critical foundation for game-based learning. Here, the ability to access digital gaming platforms and the necessary technological resources (i.e. desktops, tablets, smartphones, or interactive displays) to run software ensures the possibility of including gaming elements or approaches in academic practices. Access to technology varies considerably among schools. Administrators may need to work closely with technology directors to determine how much the relevant infrastructure and software support gaming instruction in schools and classrooms. Several considerations exist regarding endpoint devices used for game-based learning, including limitations such as battery life and network security.

Teacher Training and Support

Many teachers will have had experience teaching material in a very traditional way in previous years, which moves the responsibility for learning to the students. The teacher here is seen as the knower who

will furnish the students with knowledge. Students do not know how to react when asked to listen to their opinions. A product of this is a culture of 'teach the test' and a top-down, heavily prescriptive curriculum that seeks knowledge retention only. If teachers must deliver any learning outside this, they must do extra-curricular activities, which becomes a major headache for educational management. As these teachers work within confines less than that implied in this research, they will also need to be given autonomy and confidence to carry out these activities. Refocusing some teacher training and support on 'game-based learning' to show that it can be used by any teacher running any curriculum to offer a better/different way of learning may well provide such opportunities.

In the bid to enhance active learning, some social studies teachers in Nigeria apply games as a teaching strategy in their classrooms. The case studies presented in this section are schools that the researcher has contact with. As such, the researcher observed and documented the uses and applications of games to learning. The case studies are presented in the order of the names of the headteachers. These teachers use games as drills or reinforcement devices and teach new or complex topics. Other than drill and practice games, the types of games are used to teach new content.(Williamson,1997).

Game-Based Learning Initiatives in Nigerian Schools

Today, there is limited evidence of the provision of games in schools in Nigeria. While the national curriculum is viewed as an offer to schools – and therefore, the nature of games offered matters due to the range of benefits that schools ought to deliver – the report's findings showed that both skilled and unskilled games, along with puzzles are used to teach determined nations' historical events and demonstrate easy learning of social studies concepts in Nigerian classrooms. Furthermore, this implies that children already understand social studies terminologies and themes. At the same time, they play, after which the teacher will understand the children's level of understanding and their worldviews. The advantage of gaming in social studies learning is that it is easy to assess learners at any point of play to ascertain that they understood the social studies concept or terminology just introduced.(Bade, 2022)

Between the 1950s and 1980s, Nigerian schools included games such as Ludo, draughts, and Ayo Olopon as part of the curriculum. These were aimed at developing children's cognitive and psychomotor skills and offering opportunities to maximise leisure time. As countries adopt a nationalistic approach to curriculum planning, they rely on their history and experience to fashion curriculum content that will build their citizenry's social, economic, and political lives. In Nigeria, the 6-3-3-4 system of education evolved after experiencing years of the British education system. This curriculum is not different from that of other West African countries. Unfortunately, the government only stipulates games that may only benefit the learners' psychomotor skills. Other skills and the unique ways children learn can end up short-changed. (Ogheneakoke et al, 2019).

Conclusion

It is truism that teaching students with the traditional methods or strategies is no longer fashionable and effective any longer, with the availability and exposure of students to technological resources that enhance learning, it is imperative of all teachers to spice up their teaching with relevant gadgets, through the application of educational gamesSocial studies classrooms and pedagogical content knowledge can be significantly influenced by employing game-based learning strategies. Gamification has the ability to enrich social studies classrooms with its simulated content, diversity, entertaining environment, and creative application that simulates real and sustainable knowledge transfer. Teachers must strive to recognise the importance of game-based learning strategy and integrate relevant gaming concepts into their class activitiesto retain and sustain the interest of the learners in the learning process. Teachers who deal with the implementation of gamification in areas like social studies, which require the use of ready materials intensively, experience important convenience in terms of reaching their goals.

Suggestions for Effective Utilisation of Game-based Learning in Social Studies Education

Game-based learning is a powerful tool that can enhance Social Studies education. Here are some suggestions for its effective utilisation.

1. **Align Games with Curriculum:** Ensure that the games used in social studies education align with the national curriculum. This will help reinforce key concepts that are relevant to educational goals.
2. **Incorporate Local Content**: Utilize games that reflect the local context or incorporate local content, such as the people's history, culture, and current events. This will help students connect with the material on apersonal level and make the learning experience more engaging.
3. **Interactive and Collaborative Learning**: Incorporate multiplayer or team-based games to promote student collaboration, communication, and social interaction. This can help in developing critical social skills.
4. **Teacher Training**: Train teachers to integrate game-based learning into their teaching strategies effectively. This includes understanding game mechanics,facilitating gameplay,and aligning games with educational goals.
5. **Use of Local Resources and Content**: Develop or adapt games using local resources and content. This can make learning more relevant and impactful for students
6. **Feedback and Reflection**: Incorporate opportunities for students to reflect on their gameplay experiences and provide feedback. This helps consolidate their learning and improve future game-based learning activities.
7. **Student-centred Approach:**Allow students to have a voice in selecting the games they play. This can increase their motivation and engagement in the learning process.
8. **Encourage Critical Thinking**: Select games that require strategic thinking,problem-solving,and decision-making. This encourages students to think critically about social studies concepts or topics.
9. **Assessment Integration**: Integrate assessment tools within the games to monitor student progress and understanding. This can include quizzes,challenges,and missions that test knowledge and skills.
10. **Consider Age and Learning Style:** Not all games are equal. Pick age-appropriate games that cater to different learning styles (visual, auditory, kinesthetics).

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