

Meaningful Gamification for Journalism Students to Enhance Their Critical Thinking Skills

Ling-Yi Huang, Nanfang College of Sun Yet-sen University, Department of Literature and Media Studies, Guangzhou, China
Yu-Chu Yeh, National Chengchi University, Institute of Teacher Education, Research Center for Mind, Brain & Learning, Taipei, Taiwan

ABSTRACT

Training in critical thinking is essential for the professional development of journalism students. To achieve this goal, this study developed a gamified platform and a blended learning curriculum. During an 18-week experimental instruction period, a series of instructional activities, which included online discussions as well as classroom lectures and discussions, were conducted to enhance 32 journalism students' critical-thinking dispositions and skills. Repeated measure analysis of variance on test scores and analyses of open questions found that the participants significantly improved their critical thinking skills and dispositions through the gamified platform with the experimental instruction in a blended learning environment. The findings suggest that providing clear goals, challenges and quests, feedback, competition and cooperation, actual grading and visible status, access/ unlocking content, onboarding time restrictions, freedom of choice, and new identities and roles, as well as avoidance of over-justification, contributes to achieving a "meaningful gamification" experience, which may further lead to self-determined learning in critical thinking.

KEYWORDS

Architectures for Educational Technology Systems, Computer-Mediated Communication, Improving Classroom Teaching, Postsecondary Education, Teaching/Learning Strategies

INTRODUCTION

It has been suggested that critical thinking (CT), informal logic training, and fallacy training are essential components of journalism education, which contributes to the ideal of democracy in journalism (Herrea, 2012). Both CT and argumentation analysis concerned with fallacies have appeared in the journalism literature (Shoemaker, 2003; Walton, 2007; Stoff, 2008). However, most discussions are focused on various contexts of journalism in America. Looking at curriculum design in China, although CT was first introduced as a learning goal for students in 2001 in Hong Kong, few formal curricula have been developed to achieve this educational objective. CT has been a "null

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curriculum” because most teachers have not received training in how to teach critical thinking (Ou, 2012). Therefore, determining how to introduce and integrate CT into journalism education in China remains a new challenge.

To enhance CT skills and dispositions through one well-designed course is possible (e.g., Yeh, 2012). However, to transform the mindsets of journalism students from rigid to open-minded and to habituate them to CT requires long-term practice. In other words, a training course is only the starting point in enhancing journalism students’ CT. To cultivate more professional journalists with great CT, a valid instrument is essential to help them transfer their learning from the classroom into future everyday practices. Gamification refers to the use of game design elements in non-game contexts (Deterding, 2011); it emphasizes the connections between game elements and important aspects of learning (Nicholson, 2012). To date, it is seldom employed in CT training for journalism students. This study thus developed a blended learning curriculum in which concepts of gamification were integrated and a gamified platform was designed to enhance the effects of CT training for journalism students.

CT AND JOURNALISM EDUCATION

Definitions and Elements of CT

In 1990, under the sponsorship of the Committee on Pre-College Philosophy of the American Philosophical Association, a cross-disciplinary international panel of 46 experts yielded a robust conceptualization of CT for the purposes of instruction and educational assessment. In it, CT is defined as follows:

We understand critical thinking to be purposeful, self-regulatory judgment which results in interpretation, analysis, evaluation, and inference, as well as explanation of the evidential, conceptual, methodological, criteriological, or contextual considerations upon which that judgment is based... CT is essential as a tool of inquiry. As such, CT is a liberating force in education and a powerful resource in one’s personal and civic life... While not synonymous with good thinking, CT is a pervasive and self-rectifying human phenomenon. (APA,1990)

This consensus definition of CT (APA, 1990) not only highlighted the importance of CT but also suggested that CT skills include both cognitive and metacognitive abilities. Similarly, Willingham (2007) claimed that CT consists of seeing both sides of an issue, being open to new evidence that disconfirms your ideas, reasoning dispassionately, demanding that claims be backed by evidence, deducing and inferring conclusions from available facts, solving problems, and so forth.

However, some researchers suggested that CT dispositions should be included as part of CT (Paul, 1990; Esterle, 1993; Yeh, 2012). The disposition toward CT can be defined as the consistent internal motivation to use CT skills to decide what to believe and what to do (Facione, Facione& Giancarlo, 2000). Facione & Facione (1992) proposed the following seven characteristics of a critical thinker and, accordingly, developed the California Critical Thinking Disposition Inventory (CCTDI) (Facione, et al., 2001): (1) truth-seeking: being eager to seek the best knowledge in a given context, being courageous in asking questions, and being honest and objective about pursuing inquiries even when the findings do not support the thinker’s self-interests and/or preconceived opinions; (2) open-mindedness: being tolerant of divergent views and sensitive to the possibility of one’s own biases; (3) analyticity: prizing the application of reasoning and the use of evidence to resolve problems, anticipating potential conceptual or practical difficulties, and consistently being alert to the need for intervention; (4) systematicity: being organized, orderly, focused, and diligent in inquiries; (5) CT self-confidence: trusting the soundness of one’s own reasoned judgments and leading others to rationally resolve problems; (6) inquisitiveness: being intellectually curious and eager for learning even when application of the knowledge is not readily apparent; and (7) maturity of judgment: being judicious in one’s decision-making. This study aims to enhance journalism students’ CT skills and dispositions.

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