

Medieval-Themed Video Games For History Teaching: A Systematic Review

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Abstract: In recent years, medieval-themed video games have emerged as increasingly relevant educational tools, for history teaching, recognised for their ability to foster historical understanding, digital literacy, and critical thinking across a variety of learning environments. This systematic review investigates how these games are incorporated into educational practice and interrogates the narratives they construct about the medieval past. These aims are grounded in prior research on game-based learning and on the cultural analysis of medievalist representations. Guided by the PRISMA protocol, fourteen peer-reviewed studies published in the last ten years were identified, selected, and analysed to provide a structured and critical overview of current research in this area. The findings reveal a strong predominance of commercial titles particularly strategy and role-playing games that reproduce Eurocentric, militarised, and masculinised representations of the Middle Ages. Nevertheless, several studies report innovative pedagogical strategies that embed these digital resources within intentional didactic frameworks, aligning them with curricular objectives and supporting immersive experiences, enquiry-based learning, and the development of disciplinary historical competences. Such practices highlight the capacity of video games to operate as complex cultural artefacts, rather than mere motivational tools. Despite this potential, significant shortcomings remain. These include a lack of sustained critical engagement with symbolic and ideological representations, the scarce incorporation of gender-sensitive or intersectional perspectives, and the limited connection between explicit educational aims and the cultural content of the games. Addressing these gaps requires stronger pedagogical models that connect the analysis of digital representations with the development of historical thinking, digital literacy, and critical reflection. Overall, this study underscores both the opportunities and limitations of medieval-themed video games as didactic resources. It stresses the importance of inclusive, reflexive, and gender-aware approaches that challenge dominant historical imaginaries and contribute to the formation of culturally literate, critical, and democratically engaged citizens.

Keywords: Educational video games, Middle Ages, Historical representations, Systematic review, Digital narrative

1. Introduction

In recent decades, digital culture has profoundly transformed social, educational, and communicative dynamics. In this context, video games have established themselves as one of the most influential cultural products due to their ability to faithfully reproduce realities and generate meaningful cognitive experiences (Raessens, 2006). As part of this transformation, their presence in the educational sphere has intensified, both in formal contexts and in non-formal and informal spaces. Video games are gradually being incorporated into more flexible learning environments, where active participation, exploration, and problem-solving are valued as ways of acquiring knowledge (Marín-Suelves et al., 2022). As their pedagogical potential is recognised, video games have begun to be incorporated for educational purposes focused on the development of cognitive, social and emotional skills (Cobo & Moravec, 2011). The medieval imaginary occupies a prominent place in the symbolic and aesthetic construction of contemporary Western culture and, most notably, in digital culture. Its roots lie in a historical and cultural process that began with Romanticism in the 19th century, when Europe turned its gaze to its national past to find the foundations of its identity. It is also a source of highly idealised aesthetic inspiration (Jiménez, 2009). In this context, cultural expressions such as the Gothic novel and the emergence of Pre-Raphaelite art contributed to the spread of the Arthurian cycle, a dark aesthetic associated with the period, as well as certain ethical values. Although rooted in the most puritanical Victorianism, they would eventually permeate the present day. This period and its creations laid the foundations for a medieval mythology reimagined by the contemporary eye and mind that has been widely disseminated through literature, film, and other cultural media, fitting within the framework of neomedievalism (Carrasco et al., 2024). From ancient books of chivalry to contemporary works such as *The Lord of the Rings* (J. R. R. Tolkien), *The Name of the Rose* (U. Eco), *The Pillars of the Earth* (K. Follett) and *The Cathedral of the Sea* (I. Falconés), the Middle Ages have served as a privileged setting for stories of conflict, romance, spirituality, and heroism (Rodríguez, 2023). The leap of these

representations to the big screen and especially their appropriation by the entertainment industry, as in the Disney classics, has contributed to the consolidation of this imaginary, present since childhood. This has been prioritised over other historical periods such as classical antiquity or the Renaissance. A pre-eminence that can be explained, in part, by the durability and enormous presence of medieval monuments and buildings throughout much of Europe, the survival of important literary works and the variety of written sources that have survived to the present day. Thanks to the survival of tangible references in the current European landscape, frequent setting elements such as castles, cathedrals, and even the ideal of chivalry are part of a visual and symbolic repertoire that is easily recognisable to the contemporary public. However, this modern appropriation of the Middle Ages and its insertion into mass consumption circuits is not without its problems. The idealisation of the period, often consumed uncritically, has contributed to the perpetuation and glorification of narrative and aesthetic clichés, such as the concept of the “Reconquista” and certain historical processes of colonization (understood as civilizing) that current historiography strives to nuance, revise, or even dismantle (Ríos 2021).

1.1 Video Games as Educational Resources

Beyond their integration into different training contexts, the pedagogical value of video games lies in the dynamics and possibilities they offer for learning. Their structure combines objectives, rules, feedback, and narratives that encourage autonomous exploration, experimentation, and knowledge construction (Prats & Marín, 2021). Due to their characteristics, video games are particularly useful in activities that encourage discovery learning and problem-solving, as they promote decision-making, free exploration and hypothesis building (González-Fernández & Jiménez-Pérez, 2023). Far from being a complementary resource, video games can form part of complex educational proposals aimed at developing key skills, such as digital literacy, critical thinking, and self-regulation in digital environments (Prats & Marín, 2021). In fact, studies in history education confirm that video games can effectively improve those skills and foster specific historical thinking competences such as understanding chronology, primary sources and evaluating causality (McCall, 2023). These benefits are enhanced when their use responds to intentional didactic planning, aligned with specific objectives and mediated by critical pedagogical reflection (Prats Fernández & Marín Suelves, 2022). From this perspective, video games act as an immersive environment that allows players to experience and resolve conflicts within an almost realistic fiction. Their use in the classroom, in addition to facilitating cognitive learning, can activate emotional and relational dimensions with the aim of creating meaningful learning for students (López Gómez et al., 2023). Therefore, their incorporation into education cannot be limited to technical or instrumental use but must be accompanied by a critical view that allows us to understand what narratives, values and cultural references video games mobilise in teaching-learning processes. In addition to considering their pedagogical possibilities, it is also important to consider what types of video games are used in educational contexts and how they are classified. Video games used for educational purposes can be broadly divided into two types: educational video games or serious games and commercial video games. The former are designed with an explicit pedagogical intention and tend to focus on specific content or skills, although they sometimes have limitations in terms of narrative or gaming experience (Pérez-García, 2014; Olivas Ripoll, 2022). Commercial video games, on the other hand, originally designed for entertainment, offer immersive environments, complex dynamics and more elaborate plots that can promote meaningful learning if used with appropriate mediation (Griffiths, 2002; Gros, 2000; Alfageme & Sánchez, 2002). These titles can contribute to the development of skills such as creativity, decision-making, strategic thinking, and digital literacy, as well as allowing for critical analysis of the values, stereotypes, and representations they convey (Linares, 2019; Muros, Aragón & Bustos, 2013; Olivas Ripoll, 2022). Therefore, it is not only important which video game is chosen, but also how it is integrated into the teaching-learning process.

1.2 Video Games as Spaces for the Representation of the Middle Ages

Video games are cultural products capable of representing, reinterpreting, and narrating the past through the specific codes of the digital medium. Through interactive mechanics, immersive environments, and visual narratives, they construct experiences that mediate the understanding of the past, activating emotions, roles, and conflicts in the first person (Chapman, 2016). Much like cinema or graphic novels, they convey the past as a symbolic construction anchored in historical events (Escandell, 2023). In historically themed titles—particularly those set in the Middle Ages—there is a marked tendency to reproduce conventional imaginaries shaped by Eurocentrism, martial epicness, and the masculinisation of action (González-Fernández & Jiménez-Pérez, 2023). Castles, crusades, knights, and clerics form a readily recognisable visual representation which, while referencing real historical elements, is often constructed through simplifications and stereotypes widely disseminated by popular culture. These representations, far from being neutral, contribute to the reproduction of symbolic hierarchies and biased visions of the past, thereby influencing how players interpret and relate to history (Ramos

Soriano & del Pozo Bernaldo de Quirós, 2022). From an educational standpoint, this cultural dimension of video games represents a key didactic opportunity. Analysing how history is constructed within digital environments enables students to develop critical competences, question dominant narratives, and understand history as an interpretative process (López Gómez et al., 2023). In this regard, the video game is not merely a tool for “learning history” but a space in which to learn how to read history in its multiple narrative, visual, and symbolic layers (Uricchio, 2005). These narratives of the Middle Ages, in addition to reproducing epic stereotypes, establish a symbolic framework through which the understanding of the past is configured. As Chapman (2016) points out, historical video games do not offer neutral reconstructions but rather designed narratives that appeal to the player on both emotional and ideological levels. These symbolic constructions, while they may reinforce traditional or Eurocentric views, also open opportunities for critical analysis and historiographical debate in the classroom. Incorporating video games as objects of study enables the training of students capable of identifying stereotypes, dismantling myths, and understanding history as a social and cultural construction in constant reinterpretation (González-Fernández & Jiménez-Pérez, 2023; López Gómez et al., 2023).

In addition, recent scholarship on neomedievalism has emphasised the gendered nature of many contemporary reinterpretations of the Middle Ages, particularly the recurrent marginalisation or idealisation of female figures. For this reason, the present review also examines how women and gender roles are portrayed within the medieval-themed video games included in the selected studies. Incorporating this dimension into the analytical framework connects representational patterns with the development of critical historical skills and supports a more nuanced understanding of how digital narratives shape learners’ interpretations of the past (Yeager, 2025).

Although research has examined game-based learning and medievalist representations, few studies explore how medieval-themed video games contribute to historical learning, how they construct narratives about the Middle Ages, or how gendered portrayals appear in these contexts. These gaps justify a systematic review that maps current pedagogical uses and representational patterns.

Based on this, the review addresses the following research questions:

(RQ1) What types of medieval-themed video games are used in educational contexts and at which levels?

(RQ2) What pedagogical approaches and methods guide their educational application?

(RQ3) How is the medieval past represented in the games examined in the included studies?

(RQ4) How are women and gender roles represented in these studies?

(RQ5) How is the medieval setting used pedagogically, and what opportunities and limitations are identified?

In light of these theoretical considerations and the growing interest in the educational use of video games, it is pertinent to systematically examine how this subject is being addressed in scientific research. The objective of this study is to identify, through a systematic literature review, the pedagogical approaches linked to the use of video games with medieval settings. The types of games employed, the educational levels in which they are implemented, and the ways in which the medieval past is represented in these digital environments. The aim is to offer a structured and critical perspective that enhances our understanding of the educational potential of such resources.

2. Methodology

In order to examine the current state of research on medieval video games in education, a systematic literature review was conducted. The process was carried out following the guidelines of the PRISMA protocol (Page et al., 2021), which is recognised for ensuring transparency, thoroughness, and quality in review studies (Moher et al., 2009). The four stages undertaken are detailed below.

Stage 1. Formulation of the research question and creation of the search equation to retrieve results

The guiding question of this study is: How has the use of medieval-themed video games in history education been addressed in the scientific literature? This question adopts an exploratory approach aimed at identifying trends, analytical frameworks, and gaps in the academic production on the subject. Although the PICO model was originally developed for clinical research, its structure can be effectively adapted to educational studies, particularly systematic reviews. In this case, the elements are translated as follows: the population (P) refers to the contexts in which video games are incorporated for educational purposes, particularly within history education (I) refers to the use of titles with medieval settings; the comparison (C) may involve different types of games (commercial, educational, or hybrid) or different educational contexts (formal or non-formal); and the

outcome (O) is linked to pedagogical objectives, cultural representations, or learning outcomes. This formulation helps to clearly delimit the object of analysis and to underpin the methodological strategy adopted. Based on the formulation of the research question, a search equation was created to be applied in Stage 2. The equation is as follows: ("medieval" OR "Middle Ages") AND ("video game*" OR "digital game*" OR "educational game*") AND ("education" OR "teaching" OR "learning")

Stage 2. Locating and identifying studies

The literature search was conducted across four academic databases: ERIC, Scopus, Web of Science (WoS), and Dialnet. These four databases were selected because they offer complementary and comprehensive coverage of research in education, digital game studies, and the humanities: ERIC as the primary source for educational scholarship; Scopus and Web of Science for their wide multidisciplinary indexing of peer-reviewed research; and Dialnet to ensure the inclusion of relevant studies produced in Spanish-speaking contexts. To ensure thoroughness and consistency throughout the process, a common search equation was applied in all databases. This equation, constructed using Boolean operators and English-language terms, combines three key components: the historical period (medieval or Middle Ages), the type of resource (video game, digital game, educational game), and the educational context (education, teaching, learning). The results of the search process are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Application of the search equation across different databases

Databases used	Search equation applied	Results obtained
ERIC	("medieval" OR "Middle Ages") AND ("video game*" OR "digital game*" OR "educational game*") AND ("education" OR "teaching" OR "learning")	9
Scopus	("medieval" OR "Middle Ages") AND ("video game*" OR "digital game*" OR "educational game*") AND ("education" OR "teaching" OR "learning")	26
WOS	("medieval" OR "Middle Ages") AND ("video game*" OR "digital game*" OR "educational game*") AND ("education" OR "teaching" OR "learning")	21
Dialnet	("medieval" OR "Middle Ages") AND ("video game*" OR "digital game*" OR "educational game*") AND ("education" OR "teaching" OR "learning")	7

A total of 63 potentially relevant publications were identified. All records were exported and incorporated into the Rayyan QCRI platform for collaborative management and screening. Duplicates were detected and matches eliminated. The result was 54 documents.

Stage 3. Selection and eligibility of studies

To ensure the relevance and quality of the selected studies, clear inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied, as detailed in the table (Table 2) below:

Table 2: Inclusion and exclusion criteria applied

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Studies analysing video games with an explicit medieval theme	Studies on video games unrelated to the medieval period
Articles addressing the use of video games in educational contexts (formal or informal)	Studies focused solely on entertainment, with no explicit pedagogical aims
Studies published within the last 10 years (2014–2024)	Publications prior to 2014
Empirical, theoretical, or review studies focused on digital video games	Research focused exclusively on board games or analogue games

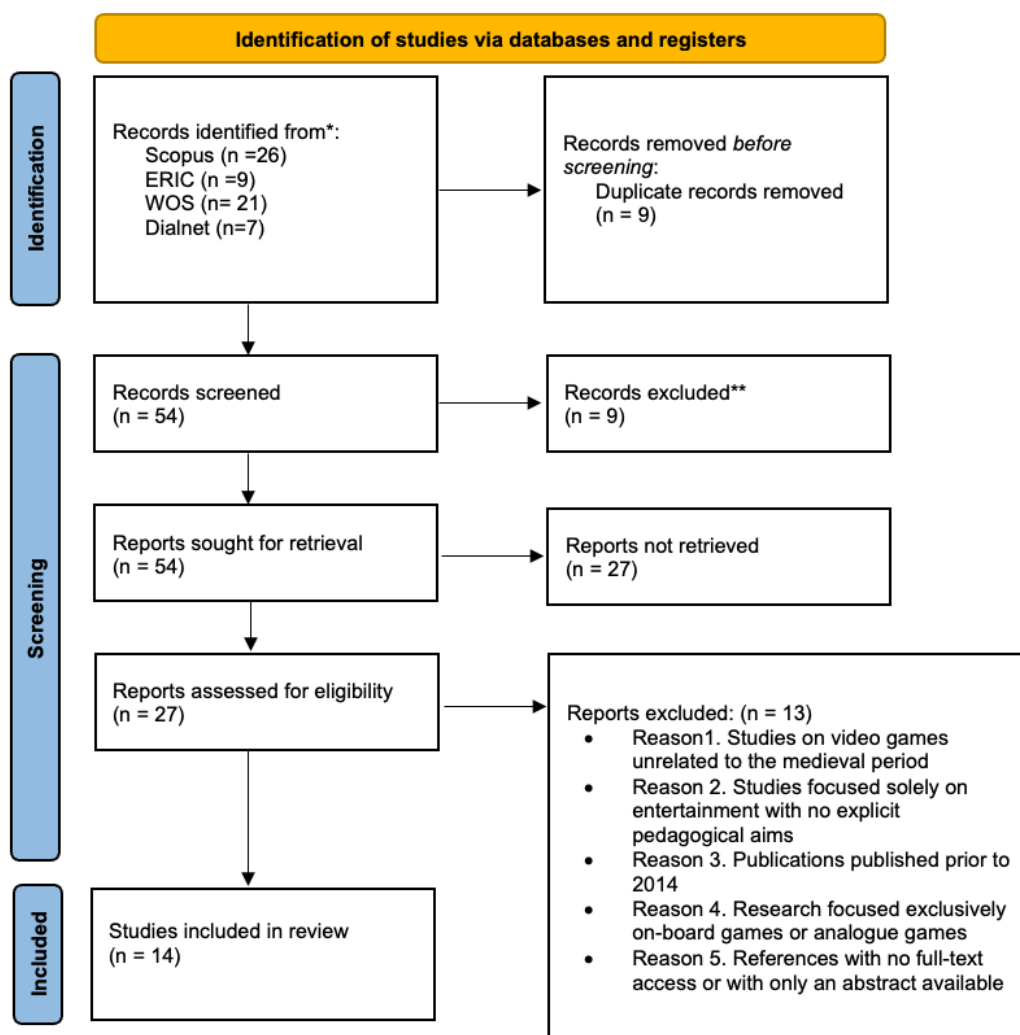
Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Full-text availability	References with no full-text access or only an abstract available

Stage 4. Data extraction and analysis

During the review process, 63 records were identified through searches in the selected databases. After removing duplicates, 54 documents remained and were subjected to an initial screening using the previously defined inclusion and exclusion criteria (see Table 2). Based on the reading of titles and abstracts, 27 studies were excluded for not meeting the thematic or methodological requirements. The remaining 27 articles were assessed in full-text format. Of these, 13 were excluded due to lack of full-text accessibility, absence of educational analysis, or insufficient connection to the medieval theme. Ultimately, 14 studies were included in the final systematic review. These are detailed in Table 3, and the full process is illustrated in Figure 1, which presents the PRISMA flow diagram.

Table 3: Studies included in the review

Study	Reference
Study 1	Negro Cortés et al. (2017)
Study 2	Bokolas & Panagouli (2019)
Study 3	Sukhov (2021)
Study 4	Houghton (2023)
Study 5	Gabellone et al. (2017)
Study 6	Insulander et al. (2016)
Study 7	Gutiérrez Castillo & Molina García (2022)
Study 8	Pramono et al. (2021)
Study 9	Hiriart (2019)
Study 10	Campillo (2022)
Study 11	Mugueta et al. (2015)
Study 12	Pérez Lajarín & Rodríguez (2018)
Study 13	Alsina Riera (2021)
Study 14	Escandell Montiel (2017)



Note. Page MJ, McKenzie JE, Bossuyt PM, Boutron I, Hoffmann TC, Mulrow CD, et al. Declaración PRISMA 2020: una guía actualizada para la publicación de revisiones sistemáticas. Rev Esp Cardiol [Internet]. 2021 Sep;74(9):790–9. Available from: <https://linkinghub.elsevier.com/retrieve/pii/S0300893221002748>

Figure 1: PRISMA diagram

To extract key information from the selected articles, a detailed protocol was employed to systematise and organise the data into specific categories. This protocol included the categories and elements outlined in Table 4:

Table 4: Data extraction protocol

Category	Elements
Basic identification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Article title • Year of publication • Authors • Country of study

Category	Elements
Methodological aspects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Type of study • Study objectives • Type of video game • Educational context of application • Methodology used • Instruments and techniques
Thematic aspects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Types of representations: realistic / fictionalised / stereotypical / fantastical • Medieval elements: chivalry, religion, architecture, social roles, etc. • Thematic focus: violence? battles? treasure hunting? etc. • Female representation and participation • Level of historical accuracy: high / medium / low (as stated by the author or by own assessment)
Key findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pedagogical use of the medieval setting: is it used as historical content or merely as background? • Pedagogical critique • Key findings

Rayyan QCRI was used for the initial analysis, enabling the detection of duplicates, the review of titles and abstracts, and the selection of articles for full-text reading. Data extraction followed the previously established protocol. A database was created containing the defined variables. Quantitative analysis was conducted using Jamovi, while qualitative analysis was carried out with ATLAS.TI. Beyond describing frequencies, the analysis followed a mixed descriptive and interpretative approach. Quantitative data were used to map trends in game types, educational levels, and implementation formats, whereas the qualitative coding schemes were informed by scholarship in history didactics and neomedievalism.

3. Results

The review comprised 14 studies published between 2015 and 2023. A higher concentration was observed in 2017 and 2021, with three articles published in each of those years. The years 2019 and 2022 each contributed two studies, while 2015, 2016, 2018, and 2023 recorded only one study each. These data indicate a steady interest in medieval-themed video games in education, although the intensity has varied across the years, as shown in Figure 2.

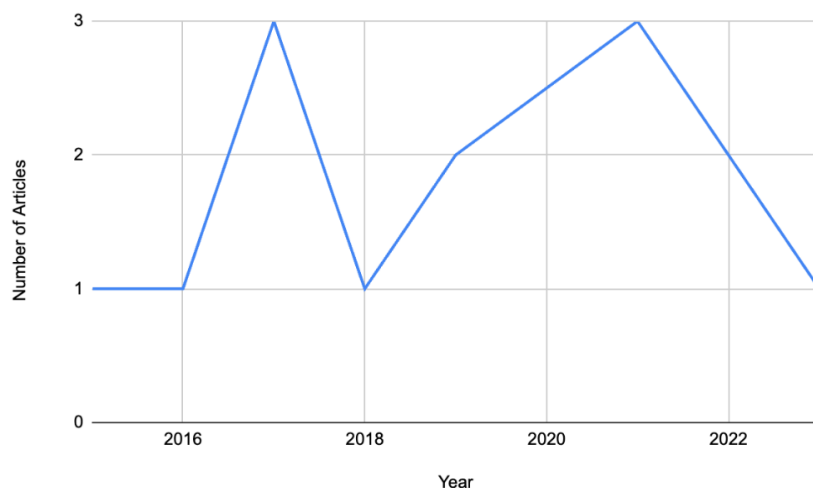


Figure 2: Distribution of studies by year of publication

The studies, represented in Figure 3, originate from various countries, with a stronger concentration in Europe. Spain accounts for the highest number of publications (n = 6), followed by the United Kingdom (n = 2). In addition, individual contributions were identified from Greece (n = 1), Russia (n = 1), Italy (n = 1), and Sweden (n = 1). There were also international collaborations between Spain and Argentina (n = 1) and between Germany

and Indonesia (n = 1), reflecting a growing and cross-regional interest in the educational use of medieval-themed video games.

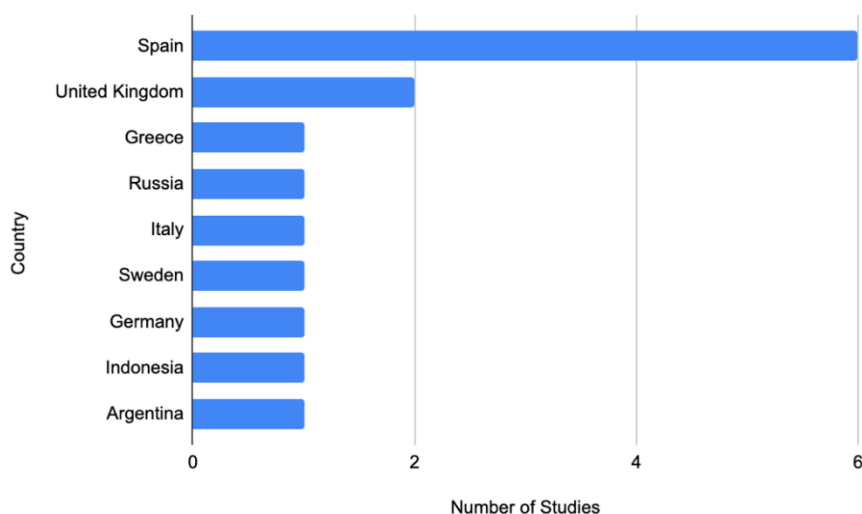


Figure 3: Countries of origin of the included studies

Three main methodological approaches were identified: theoretical and critical (n = 7), empirical (n = 4), and applied or linked to action research (n = 3). The first group addresses conceptual, pedagogical, or cultural issues related to the use of medieval-themed video games. Empirical studies include surveys, comparisons of learning experiences, or usability analyses, whereas applied studies focus on the design, validation, or implementation of educational proposals. As summarised in Table 5, the aims of these studies vary considerably. Some focus on the evaluation of specific games in real educational contexts (n = 2), while others explore their use in school programmes without focusing on a particular game (n = 3). Notably, several studies offer a critical analysis of historical representations in video games (n = 5), revealing how narratives of the Middle Ages are constructed. A smaller number of studies are dedicated to the development of digital educational resources (n = 2), the analysis of specific classroom cases (n = 1), or pedagogical reflection from a theoretical standpoint (n = 1).

Table 5: Research aims of the included studies

Objective category	Description	f	Studies
Evaluation of specific video games	Analyses the educational impact of specific titles in real teaching contexts.	2	Negro-Cortés et al. (2017); Mugueta et al. (2017)
Exploration of use or design in school settings	Investigates how medieval video games are integrated into programmes or educational practices without focusing on a single title.	3	Bokolas & Panagouli (2019); Sukhov (2021); Hiriart (2019)
Critical analysis of historical representations	Examines how video games construct narratives about the Middle Ages and their educational implications.	5	Houghton (2023); Campillo (2022); Pérez & Rodríguez (2018); Alsina (2021); Escandell (2017)
Development and validation of digital resources	Presents the creation and implementation of educational games or tools.	2	Gabellone et al. (2017); Pramono et al. (2021)
Case study analysis in the classroom	Focuses on specific educational settings to examine the use of video games for learning.	1	Insulander et al. (2016)
Theoretical review or pedagogical reflection	Offers a general methodological perspective on the educational use of video games.	1	Gutiérrez & Molina (2022)

3.1 Educational Level of Application

The reviewed studies are primarily situated in higher education ($n = 6$), where video games are integrated into degree programmes related to History, Heritage, Visual Culture, and Digital Media. This concentration at the university level reflects a trend towards their use as tools for critical analysis, cultural exploration, and didactic support in advanced academic contexts. Secondary education also features prominently ($n = 5$), particularly in subjects such as History, with approaches focused on historical representation and narrative. In the case of primary education ($n = 3$), although studies are fewer, they offer relevant experiences that integrate video games into school projects with clear pedagogical intent. Non-formal education contexts were also identified ($n = 3$), such as cultural dissemination activities or heritage-related initiatives, as well as informal self-learning environments ($n = 2$), reinforcing the potential of video games as educational tools beyond institutional settings. Museums ($n = 2$) stand out as mediating spaces, where educational video games are used to communicate historical content to younger audiences. In contrast, teacher training is addressed in only one study ($n = 1$), revealing an area of development that is still in its early stages. Titles such as *Age of Empires II* and *Assassin's Creed* appear across several formal levels, whereas others like *Hanse 1380* or the *Yrsum Game* are linked to non-formal or museum settings. This distribution suggests a significant relationship between the type of video game and the educational context in which it is applied. As both variables are categorical, a chi-square test was conducted to assess their association. The analysis ($\chi^2 = 7.70$; $p = 0.0212$) reveals that commercial games are used predominantly in formal educational contexts, while educational and hybrid games tend to be employed in non-formal settings.

3.2 Types of Video Games Used and Characteristics

The analysis reveals a wide range of video games used for educational purposes related to the medieval period, including both commercial titles and those specifically designed for educational contexts. As detailed in Table 6, the games have been individually classified according to their type, pedagogical purpose, and mode of use. Most identified games are commercial ($n = 5$), such as *Crusader Kings II*, *Age of Empires II*, *Medieval: Total War*, *Assassin's Creed*, and *Kingdom Come: Deliverance*. Although not originally designed for educational purposes, they have been incorporated into formal educational contexts due to their historical accuracy, strategic depth, or narrative value. These titles enable the exploration of content such as political and social organisation, warfare dynamics, feudalism, and the Crusades through a critical lens. Three games were developed with explicit educational intent ($n = 3$), including *Hanse 1380*, *El Camino del Cid*, and the *Yrsum Game*. Designed for teaching or heritage dissemination purposes, these games are used in schools, museums, or as part of extracurricular activities, addressing medieval history from analytical, comparative, or experiential perspectives. The hybrid category ($n = 3$) includes titles such as *Maldita Castilla*, *Tzar: El Cid and the Reconquista*, and *Civilization*, which, although not originally pedagogical, have been adapted for cultural, narrative, or historical analysis. Finally, one case of a modified game ($n = 1$), *Total War: Medieval II*, stands out. It was adapted in collaboration with historians to enhance its historical accuracy, highlighting processes of co-creation between designers, educators, and subject-matter experts.

Table 6: Types of video games and description of use

Video game	Type of game	Description
Crusader Kings II	Commercial	Grand strategy game set in the Middle Ages. Used in higher education to explore complex historical processes through political dynamics and dynastic succession.
Age of Empires II: Definitive Edition	Commercial	Real-time strategy. Employed to illustrate feudalism, the Crusades, and medieval military structures through tactical simulations.
Assassin's Creed	Commercial	Open-world action-adventure game. Its historical narrative and medieval urban settings are used to foster critical analysis of history and heritage in secondary and higher education.
Medieval: Total War	Commercial	Turn-based and real-time tactical strategy game. Used for its strategic portrayal of medieval warfare and depiction of political and religious structures of the time.

Video game	Type of game	Description
Maldita Castilla	Hybrid	Platformer inspired by Castilian medieval mythology. Its educational use lies in the cultural and symbolic analysis of legends and medieval Spanish iconography.
Kingdom Come: Deliverance	Commercial	Historical role-playing game with high fidelity to 15th-century daily life and social structures. Used in higher education to study material culture and historical simulation.
El Camino del Cid	Educational	Mobile serious game designed to promote knowledge of the Cid's heritage and history through quizzes, geolocation, and educational scavenger hunts.
Yrsum Game	Educational	Non-commercial educational game focused on Anglo-Saxon life. Designed to teach medieval social and daily structures through an analytical and immersive approach. (Prototype documented by Gabellone et al., 2016).
Hanse 1380	Educational	Developed for heritage spaces, this game simulates Hanseatic League maritime trade in the 14th century with didactic and cultural dissemination purposes.
Tzar: El Cid and the Reconquista	Hybrid	Strategy game based on territorial conflicts among Iberian kingdoms. Used in classrooms to address military history and key historical figures of medieval Spain.
Civilization	Hybrid	Although generalist in scope, it is used in education for its simulation of civilisational evolution, including the medieval period, with emphasis on diplomacy, religion, and territorial expansion.
Total War: Medieval II (modded)	Modified commercial	Strategy game adapted with historians' input to enhance historical accuracy. Used to teach medieval military history, architecture, and political systems.

3.3 Pedagogical Approaches, Methodologies, and Techniques in the Educational Use of Video Games

The data reveal a wide range of pedagogical approaches in the use of video games for history education. Among them, game-based learning (n = 6) and gamification (n = 4) stand out, employed both to structure didactic proposals and to enhance student motivation. References to the edutainment approach (n = 3) were also identified, in which the video game serves as an entertaining resource with formative potential. Several studies apply theoretical frameworks derived from ludology and narratology (n = 4), particularly in analysing the ludic and narrative structure of games. A significant number of studies promote critical or historical thinking (n = 5), focusing on how video games construct discourses about the past. Experiences related to heritage education (n = 3) and experiential learning (n = 3) also appear, particularly in museum contexts and digital reconstructions. Some approaches adopt a constructivist and critical perspective (n = 2), especially in the use of digital media to encourage historical reflection. From a methodological perspective, qualitative approaches (n = 6) and case studies (n = 4) are predominant, followed by design-based research (n = 3) and action research (n = 2), particularly in school contexts. These approaches allow for situated exploration of how students interact with video games and how these influence their learning processes. Regarding techniques and instruments, structured questionnaires (n = 5) are common, used to assess prior knowledge, perceptions, or acquired learning. Interviews and focus groups (n = 3), usability testing with prototypes (n = 3), and direct classroom observation (n = 4), including the analysis of student-generated materials, were also employed. In addition, many studies apply textual, visual, or narrative analysis techniques (n = 5), focusing on game structure and historical representations. Several works also rely on literature reviews or theoretical analysis of educational experiences (n = 3).

3.4 Typologies of Historical and Aesthetic Representation in the Video Games Analysed

The video games examined in the reviewed studies display a wide range of aesthetic styles and approaches to representing the Middle Ages, ranging from rigorous reconstructions to symbolic or fantastical settings. From the analysis of the texts, four major typologies were identified:

- Realistic aesthetics (n = 5): These representations are grounded in archaeological, documentary, or scholarly sources to recreate detailed aspects of the period such as spaces, architecture, clothing, material culture, and social hierarchies. This approach is found in games like Kingdom Come: Deliverance, Hanse 1380, or educational prototypes developed in collaboration with museums.
- Fictionalised aesthetics with historical basis (n = 4): These combine plausible medieval elements with narrative or commercial liberties. While recognisable historical settings are reconstructed, they are often simplified or modified for entertainment or accessibility. Games such as Age of Empires II, Assassin’s Creed, and Crusader Kings II belong to this category.
- Stereotypical, epic, or parodic aesthetics (n = 3): These representations rely on popular clichés of the medieval imaginary castles, knights, crusades with strong symbolic emphasis. Such images, inherited from popular culture, are used without critical intent or historical fidelity, as seen in Maldita Castilla, Tzar: El Cid and the Reconquista, and El Camino del Cid.
- Symbolic or fantastical aesthetics (n = 1): These incorporate superficial medieval references without aiming for historical reconstruction. A notable example is Fortnite, which, although not a historical game, occasionally features medieval-themed skins, game modes, or settings such as swords, castles, or knights. Some studies use these elements critically or didactically, even though the game does not follow a historical logic. While medieval-themed video games frequently contain simplifications or biased portrayals of the past, their educational validity does not rely on their accuracy but on the pedagogical framing through which they are used. When integrated into guided activities, these distortions can become productive tools for developing critical historical thinking, prompting learners to question representations, contrast sources, and analyse how historical narratives are constructed in digital media.

3.5 Historical Elements Represented in the Video Games Analysed

Beyond narrative or gameplay, the titles studied stand out for integrating historical elements that allow for a visual and conceptual exploration of the Middle Ages from different perspectives. As summarized in Figure 4, the most frequent representations correspond to medieval architecture (n=7), with references to Romanesque and Gothic styles, defensive structures, religious structures, and domestic spaces. Religion (n=6) and social roles or estates (n=6) are also constant, with particular attention paid to Christianity, feudal stratification, and the organization of social life. War conflicts (n=5), focusing on local wars, crusades, and historical military campaigns, occupy a prominent place, as do certain aspects of daily life (n=4), such as food, hygiene, and rural work. Other elements that appear to a lesser extent include medieval trade and economics (n=4), specific historical figures (n=3), and political organization (n=2), especially in simulations and strategy games. This distribution suggests a predominance of traditional approaches, centred on the masculine, military, and religious structures of the past, leaving other themes such as culture, art, women, and non-institutionalized forms of education in the background.

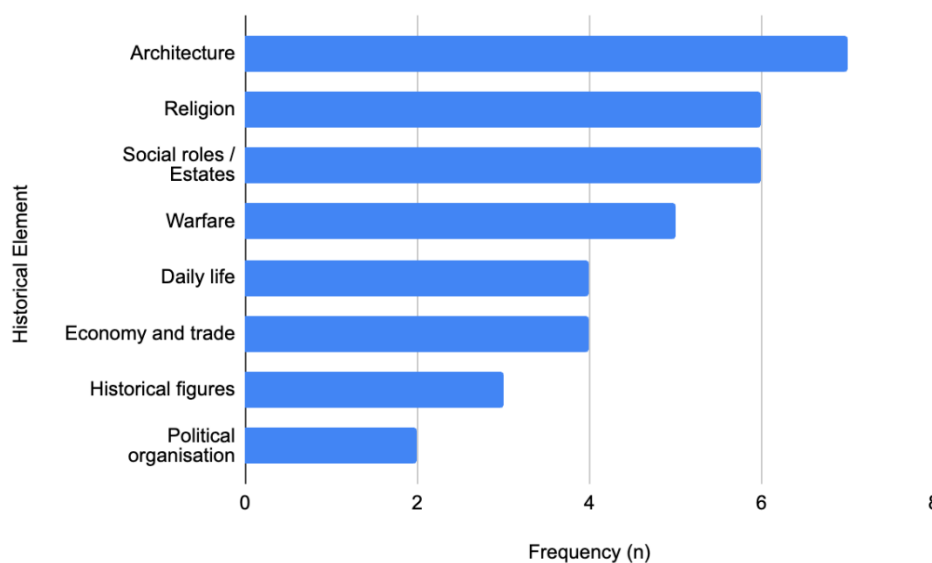


Figure 4: Representation of historical content in the educational video games analysed

3.6 Dominant Themes in the Video Games Analysed

Beyond gameplay mechanics, the review reveals a clear thematic trend towards strategic and military domains. Titles such as *Age of Empires II* and *Crusader Kings II* place battle, territorial conquest, and military expansion at the heart of both narrative and gameplay ($n = 5$). In these cases, violence is not presented as glorification, but as a means of understanding historical dynamics of power, defence, and territorial organisation typical of the medieval period. Another significant theme is the construction and management of medieval spaces ($n = 3$), where players design fortifications, manage resources, and develop towns. This facilitates the structural analysis of medieval space and supports content related to architecture and engineering. Some games adopt an archaeological or museographic orientation ($n = 2$), focusing on the precise reconstruction of historical environments based on documented sources. Less common are games centred on everyday medieval life ($n = 2$), exploring agriculture, trade, professions, or family organisation. References to transport and navigation technologies ($n = 1$), particularly in 14th-century maritime contexts, also appear. The accumulation of treasures and resources ($n = 2$) functions as a reward mechanic in some titles, reflecting conventional commercial game logic that does not always align with critical educational aims. Lastly, while violence features as a gameplay mechanic in several games ($n = 3$), some studies highlight its pedagogical potential, encouraging reflection on historical causes rather than reproducing spectacle.

3.7 Female Representation and Participation in the Video Games

The review reveals a limited and often superficial presence of female characters in the medieval-themed video games analysed. In most cases, gender issues are not directly addressed ($n = 5$), nor is attention given to the representation of women within the narrative or gameplay dynamics. This omission contributes to an incomplete vision of the Middle Ages, ignoring the historical roles of women across social, religious, and political contexts. Only one study explicitly references a female historical figure—Joan of Arc—though without a gender-sensitive analysis. Another study mentions female characters in family contexts but lacks a critical exploration of their roles or symbolic representation. Some articles warn of gender stereotypes in commercial games, where women appear hypersexualised, wearing revealing clothing, with normative bodies, and confined to secondary or decorative functions. These portrayals reinforce traditional dynamics of invisibilisation or objectification, even in contexts where a more equitable historical reconstruction would be possible.

3.8 Pedagogical Uses of the Medieval Period in Educational Video Games

The reviewed studies show a predominant tendency to use the medieval period as central historical content within educational proposals ($n = 6$). In such cases, the Middle Ages are explicitly addressed as a thematic axis to work on topics like feudalism, the Crusades, daily life, or territorial expansion through simulations, storytelling, or digital reconstructions. Some studies ($n = 3$) take an applied or contextual approach, linking the medieval theme to broader topics such as heritage history, social structures, or visual culture. In fewer cases, the historical content is combined with playful or aesthetic elements ($n = 2$) or used solely for narrative or atmospheric purposes without deep educational intent ($n = 4$).

From a critical perspective, several studies stress the need for didactic planning and teacher mediation ($n = 3$), highlighting that the use of video games alone does not guarantee meaningful learning. There is also concern about the risk of superficial or uncritical interpretations ($n = 3$), especially when realistic aesthetics create an illusion of historical objectivity. Some works mention the lack of appropriate assessment strategies for multimodal environments ($n = 2$) and the reproduction of Eurocentric or heroic narratives ($n = 2$). Nevertheless, several studies emphasise the educational potential of video games for historical analysis, critical thinking, and cultural appropriation of the past ($n = 4$), provided they are embedded in structured, reflective pedagogical frameworks.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

The findings of this systematic review suggest that, although the educational use of medieval-themed video games has gained increasing interest, its implementation in formal learning contexts remains sporadic and fragmented. The reviewed studies reflect a diversity of approaches and educational levels yet reveal a lack of methodological systematisation and explicit curricular integration. This limitation restricts the potential of video games as learning spaces beyond their motivational or entertainment value (Prats & Marín, 2021; Marín-Suelves et al., 2022). In terms of representation, the selected games tend to reproduce a Eurocentric, male-dominated, and violence-centred vision of the Middle Ages. While this phenomenon has been noted in prior studies as a structural feature of the digital entertainment industry (Chapman, 2016; Escandell, 2023), few educational initiatives critically engage with these narratives. Most of the reviewed experiences accept such discourses as

aesthetic background, without fostering reflection on their symbolic or political dimensions. These patterns align with established critiques in neomedievalism and historical game studies, which consistently highlight the dominance of Eurocentric and masculinised narratives (Chapman, 2016; Escandell, 2023). Another significant issue is the scarce inclusion of gender perspectives. Games used in educational contexts often maintain traditional patterns that overlook women or assign them secondary roles, and the studies rarely question this or propose alternative classroom readings. This absence limits the potential of video games to promote democratic values—though it may also represent an opportunity to do so through critical engagement. This scarcity mirrors findings in feminist analyses of neomedievalism, which identify a persistent marginalisation or idealisation of women in contemporary medievalist media.

Moreover, although video games are recognised for sparking interest in history and enabling experiential learning, only a few studies embed them within structured didactic sequences aimed at developing historical thinking. Dimensions such as multiperspectivity, source analysis, and historiographical debate are rarely addressed, reinforcing a superficial use of digital media. This echoes concerns raised in History Didactics, where the integration of digital media frequently remains disconnected from the explicit development of historical thinking skills (López Gómez et al., 2023; González-Fernández & Jiménez-Pérez, 2023)

This limitation highlights the need to develop robust pedagogical models, grounded in learning theory and aligned with specific competences, as advocated by Prats & Marín (2021) and López Gómez et al. (2023). The framework proposed responds directly to these gaps. Rather than reproducing categories already present in the literature, it emerges from an interpretative synthesis of the recurring limitations identified across the studies—namely the lack of curricular structuring, the absence of critical engagement with representations, and the insufficient incorporation of gender-aware perspectives. Figure 5 synthesises this proposal through a visual framework that articulates eight key dimensions for the critical educational application of medieval-themed video games. Each segment of the diagram includes two levels: a key element for the critical selection of the game, and a practical recommendation for its didactic integration.

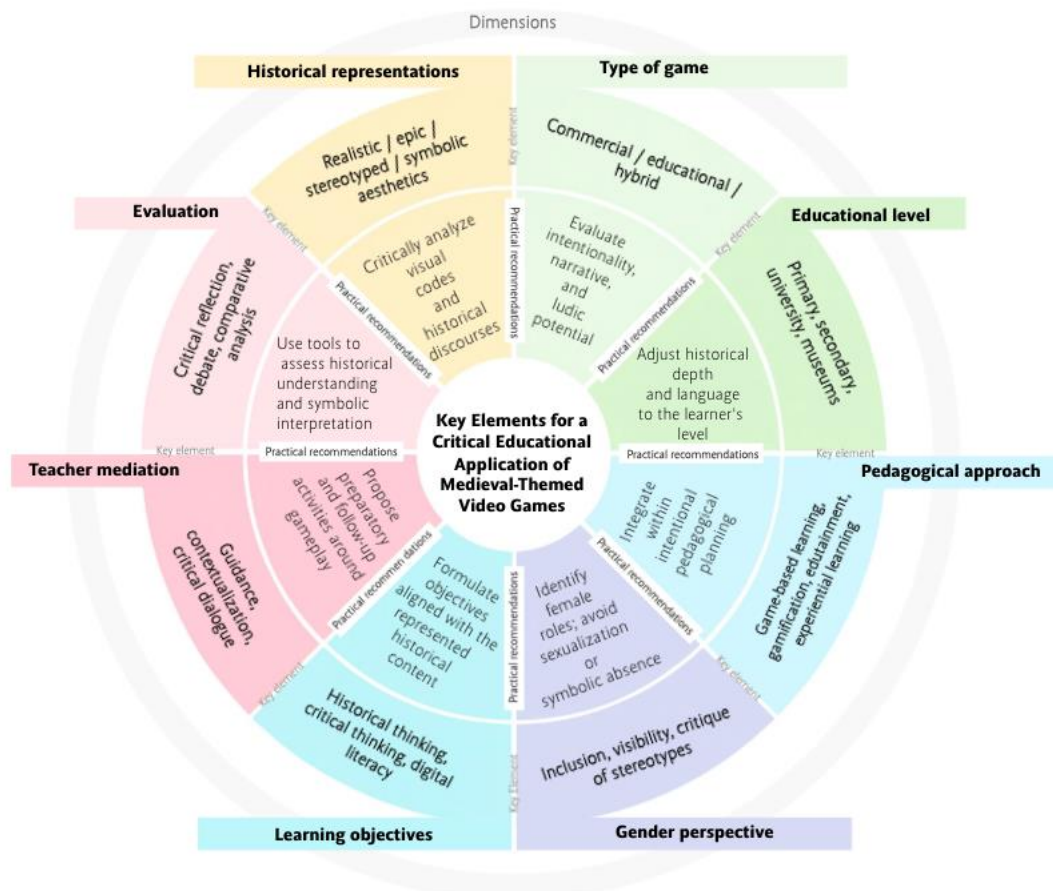


Figure 5: Key elements for the critical educational application of medieval-themed video games

This review offers a panoramic overview of the current state of research on the use of medieval-themed video games in education, enabling the identification of key trends, gaps, and areas for further development. Across the studies, there is a clear need to design pedagogical proposals that move beyond the superficial or merely motivational use of these resources. This requires a critical reading of the historical narratives conveyed by video games. Equally important is the incorporation of inclusive and gender-sensitive perspectives, which can help to challenge dominant discourses about the past and open spaces for new forms of historical representation and reflection. Advancing in these directions would support the consolidation of video games as a truly educational tool, aimed at fostering a critical and culturally aware citizenship.

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