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VIDEO GAMES – A NEW SOURCE OF LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

With the development of computers and the introduction of information technology, humanity paved the way for new ways to improve itself in various social, natural, and scientific fields such as entertainment, engineering, and medical developments. Video games in the past, due to their lack of narratives and images, were no more than black and white moving objects on a screen. However, as games have become more complicated in terms of gameplay and story, they have also become spectacular sources of firstly passive, but subsequently increasingly active linguistic involvement. In recent decades, video games in the field of language learning have received a lot of attention. These games provide limitless opportunities for language acquisition. Games are interactive in the sense that there is a relationship between the player and the game itself. The game reacts to the player's activity, and the gamer reacts to the game. The games give the players the impression that their actions are co-decided and that the world they are in is co-created by them, not just by the game designers. Because each player's actions and decisions vary, so does the game's path. Students can be motivated to learn a language by using the appropriate tools and games if video games are interesting and rewarding. The game's instant feedback depending on the player's actions also aids with motivating.

The following study will focus on how effectively video games can be used inside or outside the classroom environment. The study focuses mainly on pupils from the 10th and 11th classes. Students already have experience with playing video games in some forms. Their play style and attitude can highlight on the positive and negative effects of video games being used inside or outside the classroom. The participants for the study were chosen randomly with the help of a hyperlink, and the proper questionnaire was forwarded to them. The sharing of the hyperlink was controlled by the researcher. The results indicate a positive effect of using video games on language development of students. However, it is important to emphasize the dangers of using not just only video games, but the internet itself as well.

Key words: *language acquisition, language learning, computer games, video games, new teaching methods, gamification.*

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ВІДЕОІГРИ – НОВЕ ДЖЕРЕЛО ВИВЧЕННЯ МОВИ

З розвитком комп'ютерів і впровадженням інформаційних технологій людство проклало шлях до нових методів самовдосконалення в різних соціальних, природничих і наукових сферах, таких як розваги, інженерія та медичні розробки. Відеоігри в минулому, через відсутність оповідань і зображень, були не більш ніж чорно-білими рухомими об'єктами на екрані. Однак, оскільки ігри ускладнюються з точки зору ігрового процесу та історії, вони також стають вражаючими джерелами спочатку пасивної, а згодом все більш активної мовної участі. В останні десятиліття відеоіграм у сфері вивчення мов приділяється велика увага. Ці ігри надають безмежні можливості для вивчення мови. Ігри є інтерактивними в тому сенсі, що між гравцем і самою грою існує зв'язок. Гра реагує на активність гравця, а гравець реагує на гру. Ігри створюють у гравців враження, що їхні дії вирішуються спільно і що світ, у якому вони перебувають, спільно створений ними, а не лише розробниками гри. Оскільки дії та рішення кожного гравця відрізняються, змінюється і шлях гри. Учні можна мотивувати вивчати мову за допомогою відповідних інструментів та ігор, якщо відеоігри цікаві та корисні. Миттєвий зворотній зв'язок гри залежно від дій гравця також допомагає мотивувати.

У наступному дослідженні буде зосереджено увагу на тому, наскільки ефективно можна використовувати відеоігри в класі чи поза ним. Дослідження орієнтовано переважно на учнів 10–11 класів. Студенти вже мають досвід гри у відеоігри в деяких формах. Їхній стиль гри та ставлення можуть підкреслити позитивні та негативні наслідки використання відеоігор у класі чи поза ним. Учасників для дослідження обирали випадковим чином за допомогою гіперпосилання, і їм надсилали відповідну анкету. Обмін посиланнями контролювався дослідником. Результати свідчать про позитивний вплив використання відеоігор на мовний розвиток учнів. Однак важливо підкреслити небезпеку використання не лише відеоігор, але й самого Інтернету.

Ключові слова: засвоєння мови, вивчення мови, комп'ютерні ігри, відеоігри, нові методи навчання, гейміфікація.

Statement of the problem. Even though video games have become an active part of the lives of today's generation, the introduction and use of video games inside the classroom still haven't been applied properly. It is an area of education which needs improvement and more attention.

Research analysis. The research highlights on the benefits of using video games inside the classroom by giving special attention to the students. Since language learners are key elements of the research, their answers can serve as an idea of how video games can be implemented into lessons and how can teachers improve the students' linguistic skills more efficiently.

The purpose of the article is to identify the benefits of using video games inside and outside the language learning classroom.

Presentation of the main material. In recent years, it has become quite popular to use video games in- and outside of the classroom. Playing video games is very popular among students. We live in an era where it is easy to access any type of games quite easily. Mobile phones have applications which can easily give back the feeling of playing any kind of video games. Apart from mobile phones, tablet PCs and laptops can also function and run the newest games. As a result, learners can have access to these games whenever and wherever they want. However, before going into depth about the beneficial side of using video games inside the classroom, first it would be necessary to give the definition of video games.

According to Juul (2012), "a game is a rule-based system with a variable and quantifiable outcome,

where different outcomes are assigned to different values, the player exerts effort in order to influence the outcome, while the player feels emotionally attached to the outcome, and the consequences of the activity are negotiable” (Juul, 2012: 36).

If we study carefully the available literature, we can see that the *Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics* defines video games as an organized activity with specific rules, and giving a sense of competition among its users (Richards et. al, 1992).

As the definitions show, video gaming provides a variety of functions that are part of a system. In the centre of playing games we find the **gamer** him/herself. Every game requires different skills, methods and techniques which need to be learnt by the gamer in order to become master of the game. A game is designed to follow certain rules, tasks, and achievements.

Video games can be categorized into the following groups (Turow, 2011):

- action games;
- adventure games;
- casual games;
- simulation games;
- strategy games;
- sport games;
- edutainment games.

Fast-paced gameplay with a focus on mobility, combat, hand-eye coordination, and reaction time characterizes **action games**. *Praey for the Gods*, *Resident Evil 3*, *Gears 5* are just a few popular action games in 2023.

Adventure games portray the story of its protagonist(s) on a literal adventure. A plot-driven adventure video game is a typical example. This assists to draw the player’s attention to the single task of his or her adventure. The most played adventure games in 2023 are *Shadows of Doubt*, *My Friendly Neighborhood*, and *Sherlock Holmes: The Awakened*.

Adventure games also have a form which is known as casual games. Casual games can be **puzzle games, hidden object games, arcade games, strategy games** or even **card or board games**.

Simulation games are virtual games which “simulate” a real-life scenario. Gamers have to play in a virtual world where they need to complete different tasks, most of them are based on real-life situations. **Strategy games** are all about thinking and making the gamers using their brains. We can talk about real-time or turn-based strategy games. Strategy is a component featured in many non-strategy games, referring to any situation in which you must consider a tactic.

Sport games – a sport game is a video game genre that simulates the practice of sports. Most sports

have been recreated with a game, including team sports, track and field, extreme sports and combat sports. Some games emphasize actually playing the sport (such as the *Madden NFL* series), whilst others emphasize strategy and sport management.

Edutainment games – edutainment video games (a portmanteau of *education* and *entertainment*) are video games that have an educational goal as part of the game’s mechanics, but using an entertaining form of gameplay, sometimes using licensed video game characters. Typical edutainment games teach the player such skills as typing, math, linguistics, geography, and history, among others, but can also be used to develop social skills such as teamwork and sharing information. If video games are well-designed and serve educational purposes, the games can be an effective tool for teachers.

Based on the study of Godwin-Jones (2014), video games have a good impact on students’ social and cognitive development, including a positive impact on academic achievement, cognitive skills, motivation, attention, and concentration. Different abilities of the learners are required to be used while playing and learning the game itself. Apart from getting the gaming experience, students have the opportunity to acquire a language too. Developing different skills and cognitive strategies are good motivation factors for learning. If the video games are used in the proper way, they could serve the purpose of enjoyable, straightforward, adaptive and gratifying educational tools.

Johnson (2010) defines one of the primary reasons why researchers began to explore the usefulness of this new area of technology. The researcher clarifies that a language learning game must be able to distinguish between all of the possible variabilities in the language to provide useful feedback.

Previous studies on the benefits of video games. Video games have become an inseparable element of children’s and adults’ leisure activities, and they have become their virtual world where they find themselves taking on the roles of different identities and learning new skills (Shaffer et al., 2005).

Individuals who play these games need to solve riddles, defeat enemies, advance to new levels, and complete the game in the end. Gee (2005) claims that learning through an enjoyable way is more successful than simply memorizing things and not practicing them.

A recent study on this topic indicated that video gamers tend to be distracted from learning vocabulary while playing a music video game. 80 female adult undergraduates were divided into groups of two, with one playing the game and the other watching. It was discovered that those who continued to watch the game learned more new words than the players

who were subjected to a possible cognitive load while playing the game (deHaan & Kono, 2010).

H. Reinders and S. Wattana concluded that when it comes down to reaching the goal in a specific game, language will be secondary, due to the fact that in time the gamer will master the game itself and these language barriers can be easily overcome. For effective language learning, a learner must be able to produce “comprehensible output”, as well as receive “comprehensible input” in the target language (Reinders & Wattana, 2012).

Most video games give many opportunities to master the language as well, because communication is quite common in these games with other gamers. The previously mentioned study provides a well-supported strategy in which language learners could use video games to improve their proficiency.

Based on the article of da Silva (2014), there are two categories of skills that video games can help you develop:

- receptive skills (reading and listening);
- expressive skills (writing and speaking).

Piirainen-Marsh and Tainio (2009) conducted research into one potential aspect of video games as a language learning tool. The study focused on gamers’ spoken interaction with the characters of the game. According to the findings, video games are particularly adaptable resources, and a socially shared experience gives further competency on the players’ second language. They suggest that being able to replicate the speech of game characters allows the user to incorporate the words uttered into his/her own vocabulary and later utilize those same linguistic resources outside of a gaming context (Piirainen-Marsh & Tainio, 2009).

Data collection and the questionnaire. The participants were chosen at random to collect data for the study. Each participant received a link to the online survey. The researcher had complete control over the sharing of the hyperlink. The questionnaire was con-

ducted in English, and it was divided into 7 components. The first two parts requested information about the participants’ demographic and educational background. The concept of gaming was investigated in the following one. These questions were followed by the effectiveness of video games and whether students can implement the learned skills into the classroom environment. The following question was a multiple choice question, where they had the opportunity to choose from given alternatives. Finally, the questionnaire gathered information about the skills mastered in gaming. All questions were mandatory. The results are presented below by sections.

Results. The results are based on the responses of 52 students. The first part will look into their demographic background. Out of the participants, 18 (34.6%) were boys and 34 (65.4%) were girls. These findings can be used as the foundation for another study to examine the gender distribution in greater depth and demonstrate the connection between genders and playing video games.

Table 1

Gender of participants

	Number of participants	%
Boys	18	34.6%
Girls	34	65.4%

The second question reveals the participants’ distribution based on age groups. We can see from the information provided that students’ ages vary between 15 and 17 years, so students are already familiar with English or have had some interaction with it in school or online.

The following section will examine the participants’ gaming habits. The purpose of this section was to determine how many of the respondent students play games in English. Only 3 students (5.8%) stated that they had no prior experience with digital games in English. The vast majority of respondents, 49 students (94.2%), had some level of gaming experience.

The following two questions asked about the benefits of using video games inside the classroom and in what form can they be beneficial. 84.6% of the respondents (44 students) believe that they have learnt something new while playing video games. 76.9% of the learners (40 students) answered positively that these new words/expressions are beneficial for them inside the classroom. It is important to stress that video games most often prioritize language skills which are related to reading and listening. However, online video games also build on active language skills, and

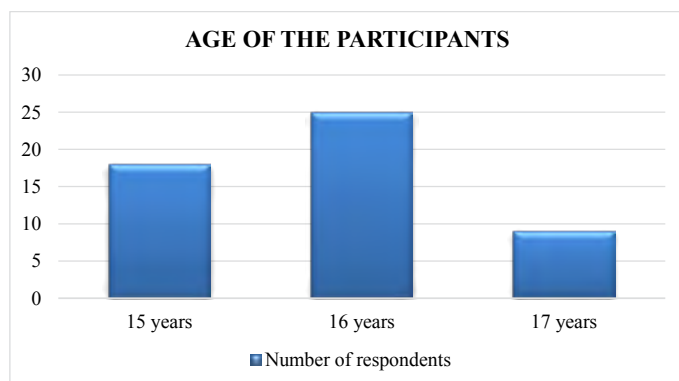


Fig. 1. Age distribution of the participant students

both speaking and writing are essential components in these games.

The next question asked information about the similarity of the vocabulary used in games and inside the classroom. 44.2% of the respondents (23 students) stated that most words and expressions are used both in games and inside the classroom. This lower number might be due to the fact that genres of video games vary and classroom topics are not always identical with the current video game trends.

The last question asked respondents to list specific linguistic skills that they had needed while playing. As the results show, reading comprehension skills (25 students; 48.1%) and listening comprehension skills (15 students; 28.8%) are the two most widely

developed skills while playing video games. 9.6% of the answerers (5 students) named conversation skills and 13.5% (7 students) chose writing skills as the most commonly used skills. It is interesting to observe that the most prevalent skills are passive language skills (reading and listening). On the other hand, active language skills (speaking and writing) appear to be less employed by gamers.

However, we must acknowledge that the application of these abilities is greatly dependent on the game. Gamers must talk to one another in online games, active and passive skills are both required, whereas offline games are largely dependent on passive language skills only, with the emphasis on reading and listening.

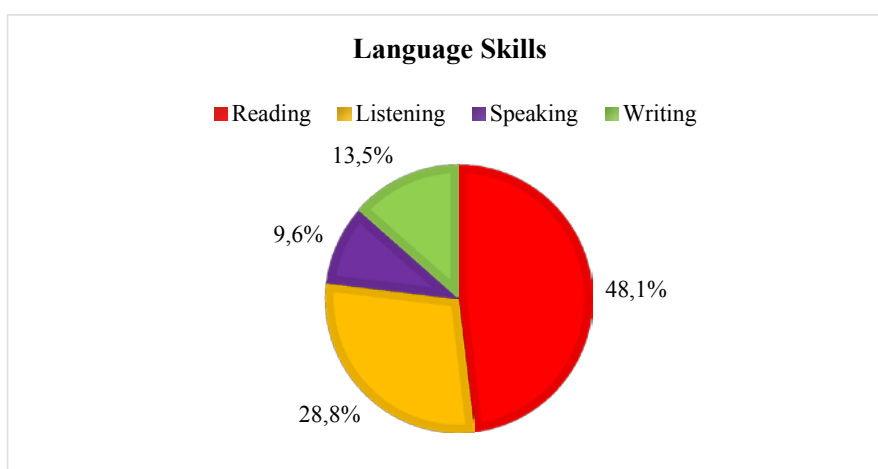


Fig. 2. Required skills while playing video games

Conclusions. The current study investigated whether video games have advantages for English learning or not. The study focused mainly on school graduates. According to the findings, 84.6% of respondents believe that playing video games taught them something new and helped them become better language learners. Participants were able to name several language skills that they had acquired or developed while playing video games. As the results show, 48.1% of the gamers use reading skills, 28.8% develop listening skills, 13.5% used writing skills

and only 9.6% developed their speaking skills while playing. Based on these numbers, we can see that most students use passive language skills. Active language skills are mostly related to online games or to certain games which are based on communication. From the collected data, it can be seen that video games are popular and have a future in language teaching. By introducing this new form of education, lessons can be made more interactive, interesting and would allow teachers to develop new skills with newer techniques.

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