

Improving English through Playing Video Games

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Abstract

Undoubtedly, technology has affected people's lives in diverse ways. In the field of English learning as a second language (ESL), the computer has played a pivotal role in mitigating the various challenges learners usually encounter in the process of acquiring the English language in an effective manner. In this literature review, the researcher addresses some of the challenges which often constitute difficulties for the learners. Among them are learning the following: Vocabulary, Listening, Speaking, Grammar rules, and Oral Communication. The aim of this literature is to make teachers of the English as a Second language attentive to the challenges they face in the classroom, especially when they teach in an environment where English is not the lingua franca.

Keywords: Acquisition of Vocabulary, Improving Listening, Speaking, Grammar and Oral Communication.

1. Introduction

As it has indisputably been recognized and accepted as the first global language in the world, teaching and learning English have become a requirement for learners at many educational institutions. However, teaching English particularly becomes more challenging when it is taught in environments where English language is not the native language of the learners. Therefore, in order to attain this objective, which is the acquisition of the English language, various approaches and methods need to be used. Some of these methods are formal, like the classroom activities carried out by both teachers and learners. They could also be informal like efforts exerted by the learner in-indoors and outdoors activities.

In order to effectively acquire the English language skills and increase the rate of their proficiency, learners need to overcome the challenges they face by learning vocabulary, improving listening, speaking, grammar rules and oral communication, which often constitute difficulties for them. By acknowledging these facts, learners will become more aware of the dire need for them to explore other extra curricula activities other than the classroom activities in an effort to ameliorate their English skills.

Playing video games has undeniably become one of the extra curricula activities that has proven to be an effective tool that learners engage in to improve their English language, either consciously or otherwise. Video games are generally viewed by many users as an entertaining activity that is not profoundly related to the commonly known classroom activities such as

teacher engaging learners in the process of learning a foreign language. In playing video games, learners often engage in an activity that does not only relieve them from the day-to-day stress of formal classroom activities, but it also gives them the joy, fun and pleasure found in the games. Subconsciously, and perhaps ironically, the fun and joy learners get from playing these video games culminates in improving their proficiency of the English language in diverse forms and ways.

1. Vocabulary

How playing video games influence vocabulary:

According to Hadin,Joacim, (2019), “ The video game industry is one the fastest growing markets in the world today .The fact that playing video games has become such a popular recreational among youths and adolescents has created a need for research investigating the effects of video game playing. Because of the role that the English language plays as a global lingua franca, most video games are released in English. Since most video games are released in English, many believe that the utilization of video games can help learners of English to improve their knowledge of how to utilize the English language. The aim of this study is to investigate whether playing video games does influence the English receptive vocabulary level of ESL learners”.

A. The researcher in the research paper titled: “Learning by gaming: Investigating the Influence of Playing Video Games on vocabulary level among Swedish ESL Learners”. In a study conducted by the University of Gale,(2019)(where the research was done) to investigate the effects of playing video games on the vocabulary level of ESL learners, a test was run between the two categories of students: those who play video games and those who do not. After the exam was analyzed, it was proven that the scores of learners who play video games were more significant.

1. This research underscores the fact that playing video games provides a range of opportunities for the ESL learners to improve their level of vocabulary, irrespective of the dialects utilized in the video games. Definitely, vocabulary constitutes a core element of any given language. Thus, if video game playing can facilitate the acquisition of vocabulary, which is a fundamental component of language, it should be taken into account. Consequently, ESL learners, who live in environments where English is not the vernacular, ought to be encouraged to play video games in an aim and effort to upgrade their level of vocabulary, which would, in turn, increase their proficiency in the English language.

B. In a study carried out by Clausen,Tobias Fjeldbo(2023)” The focus was on the correlations between different genres of video games and their receptive and productive English vocabulary. The study also delved into how the use of Metacognitive Learning Strategies impacted the students’ vocabulary. In short, it was proven that” the video gaming influenced the habits of consuming and producing English media content”. Most of the studies done so far have proved that there is a strong correlation between video gaming and the impact it has on the learners’ acquisition of vocabulary in particular and and on the overall language skills in general. What makes video games playing more effective is the fact that it is a combination of both

auditory and visual components in addition to the fact it gives joy and creates fun to the game player in an intriguing manner.

According to the author , “ The aim of the study was to find out if gaming carried out outside the classroom and school activities had positive influence on the students’ English learning. The study also tries to change the opinions on gaming as a valid learning method. It is important for students(to realize) that their hobbies are validated by the adults around , and by doing so,there might be an increase in motivation”. No doubt, this study further buttresses the importance of video gaming in terms of improvement of the learners’ language skills and the complexity of the skills learned.

C. In a study titled: “ The Impact of Video Games in the Acquisition of English Language. The Case of Saudi Youths”. Alawi A. Al-Jifri (2022) maintains that” games are effective tools when devised to explain vocabularies and they make it easier to remember their meanings. This paper deals with a literature of teaching English vocabulary to young learners using games”. A number of studies continue to buttress the significance and efficacy of video games when properly and purposefully used in an aim to improve the vocabulary of young learners. Video gaming has tremendously become popular among the Saudi youths; many of them spend hours playing the games. And as a result, their increased proficiency level is palpably felt by teachers as well as by their peers. This,in turn, makes it easier for teachers to conduct their ESL classes at ease.

2. Listening

The impact of video games playing on listening

Universally, listening is considered the first skill in terms of language acquisition and in terms of comprehension of the spoken language. Thus, here comes the significance of listening as a language skill. When playing video games, the first skill that gets impacted is listening. No wonder, therefore, the skill that learners usually master first is listening.

In a research done by Dina Rafidiyah,Muhammad Adhitama and Denny Wianto (20200, they maintain that “ The best way to learn a language is to immerse yourself into it. One way to immerse into English is by playing video games as one of the innovative ways to master English.This media enables the gamers to get exposed to the target language since they play it for long times, and it can help them to learn English”. The researchers ran this experimentation on a number of learners who confirmed in in-depth interviews that video games playing did not only help hem to improve their English skills; rather,it tremendously motivated them to make every effort possible to master English via playing video games. In addition to that, the researchers went even further to entertain the idea of making video games playing as an integral part of the classroom activities.

By the same token, listening ability can be at its best when playing video games, because the gamer is mentally and physically immersed into the game. This total immersion into the video games, in turn, provides the gamer with a great opportunity to absorb and internalize the segments of the target language such as : phonetics,the tone, the intonation and the dialectical aspects of the same language. Also, video games enable the game player to distinguish the

various accents produced by the speakers; and mimicking speakers of the target language, in turn, reinforces and facilitates the acquisition process of the spoken language.

3. Speaking

The impact of video gaming on speaking

Speaking, as a productive skill, stands out as one of the most important skills (if not the most important) among the language skills. Speaking has at all times been the first form of human communication. Other forms of communication, such as body or sign languages, can only be used when verbal or oral communication is not possible owing to one factor or another. Video games playing has become prevalent and widespread among various age groups. This fact is a result of the palpable effects felt and seen on the output of the language of players of video games.

Hernande-Cherrez, Elsa; Hidalgo-Camacho Cynthia; Escobar-Llanganate, Paulin (2021) had the following to say after conducting a study on some secondary school students. “The current work was based on a project that aimed to enhance the English-speaking skill in tenth graders of a public high school in Ambato, a city of the Andean Region of Ecuador. The population involved 145 students who were surveyed to detect their communication games in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom”. They said students were given a test before playing the video games. Later, they were given a post test after they had engaged in video gaming for a reasonable amount of time. “After measuring the effects of the post-test, it was noted that students using the games in the classroom found them beneficial for their learning. Likewise, it was evident that communication games contributed significantly to the students’ oral production, which showed an increased level of vocabulary, more accuracy, more fluency, and a more relaxed interaction with their peers and teachers after the intervention”.

The above study has revealed two very important beneficial and useful aspects of video games playing:

1. It has demonstrated beyond any reasonable doubt the significance of video games in terms of the opportunity they provide for learners of the English language, either as a second or foreign language. These video games now indirectly serve as meaningful supplementary support to the ESL classroom activities. Furthermore, they facilitate the students’ acquisition process of English in an atmosphere of tranquility and fun. Psychologically, the games players feel free and unstressed while entertaining themselves through the games, which take them to an imaginary world. Interestingly, they subconsciously and gradually master the English skills needed in an effortless manner, because, for learners, video gaming is an activity done in their leisure time, which is absolutely theirs.

4. Oral Communication

How video games improve oral communication

Since the dawn of history, oral communication has been a fundamental basis for mutual understanding among the human species. Due to the great number of languages spoken around the world, it became a necessity for people to learn each other’s language for better common

understanding and for ease of communication. However, the fact that, owing to certain factors which do not need to be mentioned here, some languages won prominence and emerged forcefully to be the medium of communication on the world stage among nations. Among the languages that stood out to be a compelling global means of communication is the English language. Because of its dominance in a variety of fields such as: science, technology, business, the film industry, to name but a few, it has become the first international language. This being a palpable reality in our today's world, the English language has been an integral part of curricula in schools, colleges, universities worldwide. Thus, as the need to cope with the unfolding events in the world and to cope with the ongoing innovations in the field of technology, the acquisition of the English language has become the need of the hour. Now, in order to facilitate the acquisition process of English, technology has made available the art of video games in an aim to serve as a means that can informally supplement the daily activities in the classroom. These video games, which are basically and primarily designed for entertainment and a way to reduce stress, have enormously and indirectly contributed to the acquisition process of the conventional language skills in a meaningful fashion. One of the language skills which video games playing has effectively and positively affected is the oral communication of the games players. With the emergence of this technological innovation, many users have tremendously benefited from it, especially learners of English.

A.Ghaffour Mohamed Toufik; Sarnou, Hanane(2021) did a study to decipher the worth and significance of video game on youngsters and adults in Algeria, and this is what they had to say: “The purpose of the study was to learn more about the diverse effects of video games on EFL learners at the extent to which video games can be applied as a new technique in an academic setting”. To go about this, they had to select different age groups and gave them the opportunity to play video games for a certain period of time. However, eventually, they ran some in-depth interviews with the participants in the program and their findings were as follows: “The results revealed that video games became beneficial and useful for learners of English as a foreign language. They help improve communication skills and intercultural communication skills in educational settings”.

B.The study above has also proven that video games playing may become an integral part of curricula at schools, colleges and universities worldwide. This could be a possibility because of the significance and efficacy video games playing has manifested in a number of studies carried out in different parts of the world. Additionally, the need and urge for the smooth acquisition of the English language is on the rise and the pressure on the ESL instructors is mounting. Consequently, this undeniable fact may dictate to institutions where learning English is a requirement to allow video games playing to be an essential part of their curricula.

5. Grammar

The impact of video games playing on grammar

Penny Ur said that: “Grammar is sometimes defined as the way words are put together to make correct sentences”.

Grammar is the system that controls language in terms of expression of ideas in a sensible manner taking into account time factors such as: the past, present and future tenses. Because of

the significant and essential role that grammar plays in language acquisition, many grammar books have been written in an aim and effort to facilitate the communication process for learners in general, be they native or foreigners.

In a study titled: “ Using Digital Games for Enhancing ELF Grammar and Vocabulary in Higher Education(2020), Luz Castillo-Guesta says: “ The purpose of this study is to analyze the use of digital games to enhance English as a Foreign Language(EFL) grammar and vocabulary in the English major of Universidad Technica Particular de Loja,in Southern Ecuador. A total of 68 students from BI level,according to the Common European Frame-work Reference for Languages(CEFR) participated in this study. All the participants were enrolled in two different classes of a Communicative Grammar course. A mixed-method approach rubrics were applied as instruments. Digital games were implemented throughout an academic term of 5 months in which students received permanent feedback. The results show that digital games were useful to improve learners’ grammar in aspects concerning the use of modals,gerunds,and infinitives; also,students showed an improvement in the vocabulary knowledge , especially in topics related to jobs and education”.

A. The above study has indisputably buttressed the importance and significance of digital/video games with regards to the smooth acquisition of all the English language skills. Grammar, no doubt, is a fundamental part of language learning. For natives, grammar is learned naturally without much effort; but when it comes to learning English as a second or foreign language, a variety of methods and techniques need to be utilized in order to ease and facilitate the acquisition process. ESL/EFL teachers are aware of the strenuous efforts they exert in their grammar classes. Thus, to have a supplementary method that could serve as an aid to the English class is a most-welcomed idea. A variety of studies have proven that the use of video games can help ESL learners to indirectly and effectively improve their English skills via games meant to primarily be entertaining, away from stress and the most-often boring classroom activities.

B. In a study titled: “ Video games and the ESL Classroom”(2007),the author says: “ This paper looks at ways how video games can be integrated into the ESL classroom. It gives teachers ideas on how to use this new technology as part of the ESL curriculum,and addresses some points that might be of concern to the educator implementing them as teaching tools”. The number of those academics who advocate the use of video games in the classroom is growing , and they justify their ideas and views by citing the significant role video games are playing in sharpening the English skills of the video games players, as compared to those who do not engage in the games. This is in addition to the efficacy of video games when used as teaching tools. Day by day, ESL trainers are discovering and proving the added value which video games playing can add to the ESL classroom activities. They enhance the communication skills of the games players, and their use and understanding of the English grammar continues to improve each time they get engaged into the games.

C. In the same study,however, academics do strongly advise that not every video games can be useful to the classroom, because some of them can be detrimental to the morals of the learners in a number of aspects. “ Not all video can be considered classroom-safe. A lot of video games, while excellent games in their right, may be too violent or void of content to be used in the ESL classroom. There is ,however, one genre of video games that is ideal for the ESL classroom: Role

Playing Games''. Definitely, role playing is one of the classroom activities that enhance and reinforce the English language skills of learners, which, in turn, ease their oral communication skills. As it has been proven and continues to be proven, video games provide learners a rare opportunity to improve their overall English skills while enjoying the games. The gaming often occurs in an atmosphere of relaxation and high spirit, where the gamers are mentally and physically imbued to the point that they detest any distraction of any sort.

2. Conclusion:

This literature review has, from all angles, affirmed the usefulness of video games with regards to the numerous advantages that learners of the English language have via video gaming. A number of studies have proven that video games can be an effective tool that facilitates the acquisition process of the various language skills for learners. Students worldwide have benefited from video gaming in terms of the improvement of their overall language skills.

Because of the efficacy that video games have proven as a facilitator to learning English, some academics are now of the view that video gaming should be adopted as an integral part of the curriculum. They justify this idea because studies in some parts of the world have shown how useful and effective video games can be in the classroom. In general, video games playing is on its way to becoming a classroom activity in the near future. Managers of the ESL departments should start entertaining the idea of having video games as an integral part of the activities in the English class.

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