

Impact of Online Video Games on the Acquisition of the English Language

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Abstract

Children have become more proficient in English in the past few decades. One of the main reasons is the influence of video games. Students are exposed to video games to a great extent which allows them to learn English proficiently. This research aimed to highlight the impact of video games on English language learning, communication, vocabulary, and pronunciation. This study is qualitative in nature and all the data was gathered from different valid sources including journals and books. The games are a wonderful source of positive and motivating atmosphere hence are the best way to adopt a non-native language. The results highlighted that online video games can improve English language learning and communication. Moreover, learning via video games can improve the vocabulary and pronunciation of gamers.

Keywords: English Language; Communication; Video Games; Game-Based Learning.

1. Introduction

Online connectivity and improvement in technology have changed the behavior and life of people. Now people prefer online interaction rather than a physical one. Similarly, online learning is common nowadays and ways of learning online are becoming advanced due to technological turbulence (Huda et al., 2018). The best way of learning is through communication and online communication can produce better results (Alawamleh et al., 2020). Previously, this communication was limited to texting and social media but now it's advanced to video games (Scolari and Contreras-Espinosa, 2019). The incredible strides in games consoles, computers, and fast internet connections have made online multiplayer video games more popular than ever before. These video games play a critical role in changing the behavior and learning aptitude of people. Similarly, ESA (2017) highlighted that 53% of people who spend average of six hours per week playing video games, portray the same video game content in their general life or

communication. Video games are now becoming more popular and according to one research, globally 44 % or seven hundred million people play a video either online or offline (Takahashi, 2013).

Gee (2005) explained that good game designers and practical theoreticians make the games in such a way that they enable the players to use their learning muscles unintentionally. The game developers or designers develop the games in such a way that players can feel out of the world experience. Therefore, video games are the most powerful learning machines. Since last five decades, educationists and researchers are keen to know the potential of technology in teaching language informally and formally. They highlighted that technological advancements like personal avatars, voice chats, network-based text, and goal-based interaction can influence the learning of ESL students (Cunningham, 2019). Many journals, conferences, and books are focusing on this subject of learning via technology or computer-assisted medium (Thorne, Black, and Sykes 2009). Similarly,

researchers, practitioners, and educationists have developed many new processes for technology-driven language learning like Computer-Assisted Language Learning which is termed CALL (Mei et al., 2018). This area of study has gained considerable attention, previously it was limited to blogs and general essays. According to Levy (1997), CALL is defined as “the search for and study of applications of the computer in language teaching and learning”. Now the CALL is more advanced and it includes learning through social media, blogs, podcasts, and virtual worlds which are most commonly used in online multiplayer video games (Newcombe and Brick, 2017). Reinders and Wattana (2011) observed that ESL students prefer to communicate in English when they enter into the virtual worlds of games like “Blizzard Entertainment’s 2004 computer hit World of Warcraft”.

English has become Lingua Franca in all matters of life and people from all around the world have been learning it as a way to open up new horizons in life (Mauranen, 2009). It has become our necessity to use English in everyday life in all matters of life, whether it’s the area of business, science, IT or any other matter. The need to use and learn English can be seen in all. People are learning it as a source to show their full potential, as well it is a source of entertainment and it has become the most important part of human life (Kongkerd, 2013). Especially, after WW2, its necessity and influence have been drastically felt. To fulfill this need for non-native speakers, need to learn English, several mediums are working but the main source, which has affected the most, was the development of video games, however, first video games were merely consisted of moving pictures. In the 1980s no one thought that games would become a source to learn English but gradually games started to develop, with the advancement of technology games became more complex and informative in terms of gameplay as well as other aspects, and the narrative was introduced which brought a huge revolution in the history of games. Hence games became a source of active language interaction. Since then more and more people are actively playing games, especially children and with the progress of technology, games have become much more advanced as they can be compared with movies,

cartoons, and books in terms of narrative and storytelling. On spot, communication is the major aspect provided by the gaming industry, and this helps gamers to communicate, as games are made in every country and their languages are different so the best option to run a game globally is to introduce English as it is an international language and understood by all with minimum effort. This step paves the way for the acquisition of the English language (Rudis and Postic, 2017).

The main focus of this research is to explore the impact of video games on the acquisition of language but before moving further it is necessary to know what is acquisition? “Language Acquisition is a process by which humans acquire the capacity to perceive and comprehend language, as well as to produce and use words to communicate.” Doring says, that a “low effective” atmosphere is best for learning as it developed confidence in children to adopt a language (2002). Clark says, that a non-threatening environment helps in presenting information and it has the potential to enhance the critical thinking process, this environment is created by video games and cartoons as they catch the attention of the learners (2002). (Shaffer, Halverson, Squire & Gee) try to reconsider the notion that games are just a source of entertainment, hence it is a common stereotype all around the world that games are just a source of entertainment. They say in their research that the case with games is different nowadays because games of today provide us with all the necessary things which are needed, like, better gameplay, realistic imagery, enforcing storylines, and better interaction at the social level. When these all elements mix they play a vital role in acquiring different sorts of knowledge. One major aspect of knowledge which we get through games is the learning of a language and this research solemnly rotates around that.

Many studies tried to provide the reasons behind learning. However, still, only a few studies focused on developing a comprehensive model to know the English language learning behavior of the people who play video games frequently. The model has highlighted how general/offline video games and multiplayer video games can influence the English language learning of non-native

language gamers. Therefore, the study will answer the following research questions to achieve the desired objectives:

Q1: What is the effect of video games on the English language of a person?

Q2: Is there English any effect of video games in developing English communication skills?

Q3: Which English language component is affected more by video games?

Q4: What is the effect of video games on knowledge enhancement?

There are some studies on this matter but not all the outcomes are significant that's why there is a need for more research to prove. The interest of most researchers is currently on the impact of video games on acquisition but the key focus of this research is on the components which are affected by games e.g. pronunciation and vocabulary along with spot-on communication.

2. Literature Review

Over the last few decades, some researchers are working to identify the effect of video games on the acquisition of different languages, especially the English language. Different researches have come on the stage in which researchers try to analyze

the influence. Research which was conducted by “Reinders and Wattana” and the results which they concluded in their article, “Learn English or die: The effects of the digital games on interaction and willingness to communicate in a foreign language” tell us about a few studies on the given matter. They mentioned a few studies in their research, the first study was mentioned by them conducted in 2010, in which DeHaan, Reed, and Kuwada tried to note the difference in the rate of vocabulary between two groups i.e. one who actively played the game and other who just watched the game being played. However the result of their research was quite interesting, it was found that those participants who just watched the game showed higher results than others, who played the game. The next study which they discuss was on the practicing of language which was conducted by Chen and Johnson in 2004. In their research, they used a commercial role-playing game and concluded that the game promoted a state of flow and motivation as well.

In this research, we conducted a deep analysis of several studies conducted to show the acquisition of the English language with the help of video games. This analysis enabled the study to provide a literature-based view for identifying, investigating, and highlighting the actual process of language acquisition. Table 1, given below, has shown the studies which have focused on language acquisition by video games.

Table 1: Previous studies on Game and Language Acquisition

SR #	Language	Category	Study
1	English	Adventure	(Chen and Yang, 2013)
2	English	Video	(Anderson et al., 2008)
3		Online Video Games	(Horowitz, 2019)
4	English and Generic	Multiplayer	(Rankin et al., 2009; Lee and Pass, 2014)

Source: Author/ Authors

2.1. Multiplayer/ Online/ Video Games and

English Language Acquisition

R. G. da Silva in his article, “Video games as an

opportunity for informal English language learning: Theoretical Consideration” discusses that two aspects of language skills are cultivated through video games, i.e. receptive and expressive skills. He says that games help language learners to enhance their proficiency. Learning of a language is confined by the setting in which we are learning and schools in this case are not suitable as they limit the breadth of language use, while online gaming gives us a better opportunity to learn as its area is broad as compared to schools. That’s why online gaming is a better source to learn, acquire, and practicing a second language. This was the result of research conducted by “Throne, Black, and Skyes in 2014”. A research was conducted by Chik in 2014 in China, on the Chinese undergraduate students, in which he used moderate level English in his data instruments. He collected the data of 153 students and concluded that video games increased the learning ability and gave learners several ways to exercise the second language whether they are playing a game or not.

It has been observed that consumers perceived video games as an interactive and engaging source of entertainment which enables scholars to investigate the effects of video games on users (Kirriemuir and McFarlane, 2004). Many researchers proposed that video games assist users to improve their EFL listening (Kabata and Yang, 2002). In view of Kabata and Yang, audio lessons coupled with visual input and feedback offered by video games can help users improve their listening abilities (Hu and Chang, 2007). Moreover, numerous scholars believe that integrating games into traditional classroom settings can promote higher-level student learning and thinking skills (Sandford et al., 2006), and be particularly useful in the development of future professionals (Prensky, 2001). Regardless of the little research in this domain, recent studies have evolved the role of language teachers in-game learning contexts to assess the significance of video games in the classroom setting for the language learning of students (Gee, 2003; Sorensen and Meyer, 2007; Mayrath et al., 2007). An adequate instructor’s direction on the importance of video games can help students acquire higher-level thinking skills through simulation and also offer possibilities for

language study and gaining expertise from professionals in various semiotic areas (Hu and Chang, 2007). Therefore, multiplayer or general online video games can influence English language learning. On the basis of the discussion given above, it can be proposed that:

P₁: Video games can impact the English language learning of non-native English-speaking gamers.

2.2. Multiplayer/ Online/ Video Games and English Communication

The literature shows that many scholars have emphasized the significance of video games in the educational context. They endorsed the idea of Piaget (1962) that games are crucial for learning new skills. In recent times, various studies, projects, organizations, and books have come into existence that describes new uses for game-based learning (Squire, 2008). According to Schlimme (2002), interactive adventure games allow users to discuss various scenarios and outcomes which in turn improve their spatial abilities, reading and spelling skills, and critical thinking abilities. It is argued that many simulation video games comprise unfamiliar or uncommon words that are necessary to understand the game’s dynamics, thus improving user’s vocabulary. Therefore, in order to improve the communication skills of Arabic language learners, Johnson et al., (2004) proposed *Tactical Language Training System* software that provides integrated training in culture and spoken foreign language. It was widely said that the software would also help lower-level confidence learners enhance communication skills in various difficult languages. In their study, Shaffer, Squire, Halverson, and Gee (2005) debated the psychological aspects of video games. They brief that the virtual world has made it possible for players to develop real understanding, effective social practices, shared values, and get an epistemological view of the content. Similarly, a study by DeHaan (2005) explores the importance of video games in acquiring the listening and reading skills of Japanese language learners. The outcome of his study reveals that video games plays an essential role in the acquisition of a language. Further, DeHaan’s study discloses that video game repetition, contextual clues,

controllability, and consecutively presented aural and textual language, all play a positive role in language learning. In the psychological context, Ang and Zaphiris (2006) reported that video games facilitate language learners in a variety of ways including behavioral and constructive manners. Thus, they can develop better communication among gamers and also improve their overall English language communication. So, the following proposition can be developed:

P₂: Video games can impact the communication in the English language.

2.3. Multiplayer/ Online/ Video Games and English language components

In recent times, digital video games are becoming increasingly popular, attracting researchers to explore their educational potential. In their study, a number of scholars have highlighted the significance of video games for education (Gee, 2003, 2007; Prensky, 2001). In addition, numerous studies have recently been conducted to illustrate the positive effects of video games on learning a foreign language. In this regard, a study of deHaan (2005a), investigates the learning of the Japanese language by playing a baseball video game. He argued that the usefulness of various video games in learning a foreign language is surprising to many language instructors. In his study, Steven Krashen, a well-renowned scholar, has pointed to extensive reading as one of the key determinants that facilitates the acquisition of various language skills and vocabulary (Cho & Krashen, 1994; Constantino, Lee, Cho, & Krashen, 1997; Krashen, 1994, 1996, 2004; Mason & Krashen, 1997). However, it has been found that students are more interested in interactive adventure games than extensive reading. Therefore, we can say that game instruction and the dialogues performed by game characters provide a serious learning environment for learners. This new learning environment is far more effective than traditional language classrooms and facilitates students with more opportunities (e.g. the presentation of new vocabulary items) to understand and learn in an engaging manner.

An experiment was conducted on Japanese female EFL students by Peterson in 2011, he

observed the students after exposing them to a massively multiplayer online role-playing game. Four of the students were new while the other three were relatively experienced. He concluded that the new students find it difficult to communicate and to give second language commands as compared to experienced ones but after a while, their difficulty was eased as they were involved in the game. When we play an online game or any other video game, we are free from outer influence, we don't have any pressure and there is no one to judge or evaluate us in this environment, we freely engage ourselves in the use of foreign language. Posts, 2014 p. 3-4, concluded that due to the non-threatening and free atmosphere of games they are the best source to learn a foreign language as they are highly motivated and have entertainment value as well. (DeHaan and Singaravelu in 2008) concluded in their research that, video games have become an enormous instrument in the language learning phase as they have proved useful in this matter. The results which they both got were quite remarkable, they concluded that while playing games we hear certain words and in this way our vocabulary increases, these words are recalled by the gamers after the game as well and vocabulary development through video games is more effective than using textbooks. Last but not least study shows that learning English grammar through games is more beneficial than old conventional methods. Thus, it can be proposed that:

P₃: Video games can impact the different English language components.

The literature given above highlighted that influence of video games on English language learning and development of English language communication. Moreover, it has highlighted that video games can improve the different English language components like vocabulary and communication. Based on this extensive discussion, the study proposed a comprehensive model (See, figure 1).

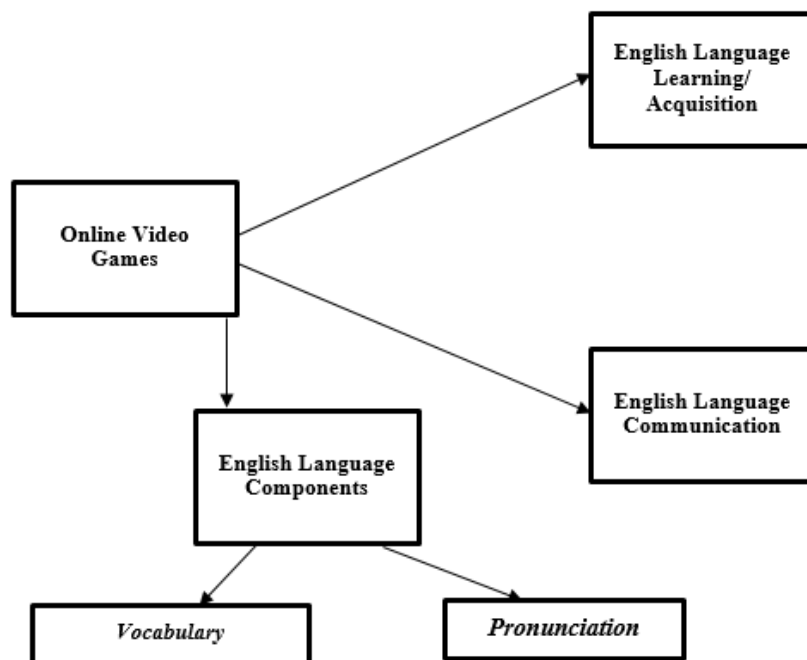


Figure 1: Proposed Model

3. Methodology

A qualitative survey method is a proposed solution to find better results. In this research, we will focus on the qualitative aspects of the survey. Different forms of qualitative survey methods are there and among them, conceptual research is more beneficial. Thus, this study is conceptual research which is different from empirical research. Empirical research is defined by Simon (1969) as “that which obtains knowledge from first-hand observations or experimentation as well as the re-examination of data collected by others” (p. 6). Whereas, Gilson and Goldberg (2015) explained that conceptual papers highlight new proposed relationships between variables or constructs. Such research highlight logical and complete arguments about these relations rather than preferring to investigate them empirically. Moreover, Leuzinger-Bohleber and Fischmann (2006) said about conceptual research that it “is not defined by a method but by a topic” (p. 1375).

In order to maintain the validity and reliability of this research, the collected data was taken from reliable resources. Furthermore, the data for this research was gathered from literature, and such data is also called secondary data. Therefore, the collected data was linked with the literature aspect to justify every proposition of the research. Figure 2, given below show the process of data collection.



Figure 2: Data collection process

4. Implications

This study has highlighted the broad area of game-based learning. It has revealed how non-native English speakers and especially gamers from Saudi Arabia can learn the English language from online video games. Therefore, it has shown the reasons how the games can enable them to learn the language. This research contributed a lot to extending the limited literature on game-based learning, especially English language learning and communication. However, it isn't easy to highlight the components of the English language which are improved by video games. Thus, this study has provided the model to evaluate the multiple factors which can be tested empirically by studies in the future. The research has diverted the attention of educationists, sociologists, and game developers towards realizing the importance of game-based learning. The educationists and game builders can work together to develop such games which can help in improving every possible component of the English language.

5. Conclusion

By exposing ourselves to games, we are allowing ourselves to interact, communicate and use the English language. Video games impact

our language learning behavior in certain ways, they allow us to use various phrases and statements in our everyday life, and they make our pronunciation better and build up our courage to do spot-on communication. Pronunciations, vocabulary, use of certain phrases, and communication are the main factors that are influenced by playing video games. When children play games, they learn new words and their communication gets better, which is the main reason that children nowadays are more proficient in English in schools.

English is now considered the national language and it's very difficult for Arab people or students to learn this language. Therefore, this research has highlighted that online video games can play an efficient role in learning the English language and improving English communication. On the basis of the literature-based discussion, this study has also revealed that games can help in improving English vocabulary and pronunciation.

6. Limitation and Recommendations

The research has highlighted that English learning, communication, pronunciation, and vocabulary can be improved by these online video games. First of all, it has not highlighted the general or offline video games. Secondly, it has

only focused on the English language. Thirdly, the research has proposed a model which can be

tested empirically in the context of any country.

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