

## Video Games in a University Foreign Language Education Environment

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## **Purpose Statement**

The literature and the review that follows were chosen as examples to support the fact that video games have a purpose in supporting foreign language education in a university setting. This view is not without merit, Krashen's hypothesis of an Affective Filter, which states that there are multiple factors in play when learning a language some of which include anxiety and motivation. These particular factors I believe can be minimized by the use of video games for learning. Video games can help in lowering the level of anxiety a student might have towards language learning as well as increase the motivation a student might have if they have a variety of game titles that are entertaining.

## **Video games in our culture**

The first main topic that the literature had in common was stating that video games are thoroughly ingrained in our culture. The 1995 study referenced in deHann (2005) was that of the 816 students between the age ranges of eleven and sixteen 75% of them played between thirty minutes to one hour of video games per day. This figure is not very astounding, but the more astounding change in demographics occurred in the research by deHann (2010) where it states that as of 2008 65% of all Americans play videogames. This was a significantly higher than would have expected. This would mean that a large portion of the American population and quite possibly an even higher percentage of young Americans play video games. This would mean that a student would not necessarily be turned off by the idea of having to play a foreign language video game in their language class room as either time spent in a Language Lab or at

home as “homework.” The reason for this is that students would be generally acquainted with a video game interface and would not need to struggle too much to become familiar with a new interface or layout.

The reason that the interface is a potential issue was another theme that appeared in two of the other articles that also support of video games in the classroom. The first was in the 1996 article by Cuban, in which he suggests that for technology or through extension a game that is attempted to be integrated is, that the machine or the interface should be simple enough to learn. An easy to use and intuitive interface is vital for the very reasons that deHaan (2010) brings up; having players deal with the actual game play and new vocabulary results in players being able to recall a significantly fewer number of in game vocabulary a person simply watching the game. deHaan states that it’s the extraneous cognitive load that a player is attempting to process that leads to the inability to recall the same amount of vocabulary that a student simply watching the game can.

### **Communicative Language Learning**

While deHaan was the only one to mention a downside to using video games for language education, which was that students recall less vocabulary if they are playing the game when compared to those that simply watch. The article does state that this could have been the result of the limited use of the game as well the actual game title. DeHaan, though also brings up the point that I found in the other articles relating to video games and language education, which is that, the language learners attitude towards the language being learned actually improved when compared to just a game

viewer especially when the game had tools to communicate with native speakers to complete in game quests. This theme of communicating with native speakers is also mirrored by Boyd (2007) when she seeks to find out why the youth love social networking. One of the main points that Boyd makes is that social networks allow the youth to engage in a public social life. Social networks are not the only means to engage in a public social life. Video games particularly massive multiplayer online (MMO) games where a student or player can socialize with other players online provide this same experience. This activity can also easily be directed towards language learning by selecting games that allow players to interact with native speakers of the language being learned. In addition to the social aspect MMO games would allow players to also continue to experiment with their online identities in the target language as Suler (2004) states as one of the reasons players also play online MMO games.

Communication and online interactive is once again brought up by Tao (2009) in a study conducted in Taiwan. Tao found that video games increase a student's motivation towards the particular topic as well as increasing the opportunity students have to interact with others. This is a prime example as to why video games are an ideal medium to have university language students interact with others in the target language as well as providing an ability to form or find a community in the target language. Communities are after all one of the key components that the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages finds important.

Video Games would provide the student the ability to repeat what is being covered in class as well as learning new material and structures. Marsh (2009) is in agreement with the held view in language education, that repetition and imitation are

essential to both first and second language acquisition. Simply repeating what is heard in the target language provided the learners with the ability to process that heard statement and perhaps remember the statement for later use. In this aspect video games provide plenty of repetition. Nearly all games are created with native speakers in mind (deHaan, 2009) which would provide the language learner with authentic material. Video games provide the learner with the ability to both passively and actively work on listening comprehension (deHaan, 2009) since most games provide the player with some sort of aural monologue or instructions as well as reading comprehension since often the audio portions in the monologue are also written if not then the interface is in the target language which would allow the student to constantly repeat the words and begin to recognize what actions the words have.

### **Language production through video games**

The pedagogical aspects for language learning are tremendous when using foreign language video games. The reason that a university language learner would be ideally suited to using games as a supplementary language input are that many already play games as the authors from the previous articles have provided. The reason that would function better as supplementary aids is that the average schedule of a language instructor is already quite full trying to provide students with all the language and cultural material needed to have students reached the required proficiency towards the end of the course as well as to have them at the appropriate level to continue onto the next level language course. Tao (2009) states that in addition to providing all of these benefits to a student the downside is that integrating video games

into the classroom is not sustainable. The reason for this was stated as being that the teacher needs to know both the roles that a teacher would have in integrating the game in the class as well as the role that the student needs to take in the game if it were to be integrated as part of the curriculum. While often the games can potentially have similar objectives to those in the classroom (Hirumi, 2008) there is still a lot of prep work that needs to be accomplished to integrate a game into a university course and the time that a game is played while in the course is time that cannot be used to directly cover essential topics. For this reason, as a language instructor, I would argue that video games having a far more useful role as supplementary material or perhaps as homework where students need to accomplish certain tasks that relate to the grammatical structures and vocabulary being learned and then take a screen capture to turn in or present to the class.

Neville (2010) points out that video games often provide the language learners with a narrative that requires them to make sense of what is happening in the game or what will be happening, which would provide a virtual world in which the monologue is provided with a “real” context for which a student to associate a new word. This virtual world in the video game can often be associated with real life and allows the students to become familiar with in game narrative which can be often used in real life as well as objects that can be manipulated in game which the student might also have access to in real life (Neville, 2010). This transference of virtual objects with real world objects would give the language learner to learn vocabulary and structures much more easily if the student repeats the phrases or names even passively if it’s done repeatedly, as often occurs in games. This concept of repetition appears multiple times in the articles as

stated above due to the nature of video games. Objects in games repeat whether in the game interface or during actual game play, this repetition is essentially the same concept behind flash cards for learning vocabulary.

### **Summary**

For these reasons, I find that video games are an excellent supplementary material for language learners. If multiple titles in different languages and genres are made available in a language lab, it would provide a student with the supplementary material required to learn a language much more richly than could be accomplished with out. The game available in a lab setting would also help offset the cost that is involved if a student where to buy the games as a class requirement, as well as give the student an additional possible motivation to learn a language.

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