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THE USE OF DIGITAL GAMES IN EFL LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

Games in general have the effective role in motivating and engaging individuals because of the fun they encompass, thus, are considered as useful instruments from which players can learn language through interacting and communicating with others via using English. And because of the ongoing growth of technology, many innovations have been developed to be integrated in education, in general, and English language, in particular. This study is designed to stress the effectiveness of the use of digital games in language learning. It also investigates the language teachers' attitudes towards the use of digital games in their classrooms. A questionnaire has been constructed for this purpose. The study has revealed that the use of digital games as tools for learning English language is effective, motivating and engaging. Yet in order to apply such innovation, there are many challenges and obstacles that need to be solved and tackled.

Keywords: digital games, English Learning, teachers' attitudes

INTRODUCTION

The on growing technologies and their availability makes it easier to implement such approach into classrooms. Moreover, young generation cannot imagine their life without technological tools , on a daily basis such as mobile use. Accordingly, and because of the digital student that attends classrooms, this new strategy emerged to meet their needs and expectations (Watanabe-Crockett, 2019). The purpose of this new approach is to support the traditional teaching, the face to face formal learning with the use of technological application in informal settings, outside the traditional classroom. In this context, teachers must be much more aware of their students learning to potentialize it in the best effective way. The strategy is exploited as a support and practice of new English terms in faculties (Simon et al, 2019:216-217).

Games are one of the most effective components in EFL classroom. They include activities which have goals and rules and the same time fun. Hadfield (2002:1) describes games as "an activity with rules, goals and an element of fun".

As a result of rapid growth in the field of technology, such innovations and developments have made valuable contributions to the field of language teaching and learning which led to the use of technological games as instruments not only for fun but for language learning (Prensky, 2001, 146). The development of educational games and their use as tools for learning has brought new understanding to education by supporting students centered learning, enhance students' motivation and increase autonomy. while playing, learners will increase employing metacognitive strategies to solve problems and critical thinking (Cakici, 2016:79).

For these reasons, it is suggested for teachers to employ the use of digital games in their classrooms to achieve better learning and teaching and to try to cope with the challenges encountered them with applying such innovations.

This study aims to stress the effectiveness of the use of digital games in English language learning and to investigate language teachers' attitudes towards the use of such innovation in classrooms

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Digital-Game Based Learning

the term 'digital game based learning (DGBL) according to Prensky (2001:145) is "any marriage of educational content and computer games". This approach tries to use the learning and motivational potential of digital games to teach regular knowledge and competencies. The DGBL experiences have been defined as based on activities that have a digital game at their core, either as the main activity or as a stimulus for other related activities. Those activities can take place in a formal (school) or informal (home) learning environment (Schneider, 2013:5).

The strategy has its effectiveness in ELT classroom since it gives learners access to materials or experience to which they would otherwise not have access to.

Also it increases the amount of time they can spend engaging and practicing in the target language offering learner efficient and effective language learning experiences and facilitating real world task practice (IRMA, 2017: 838-839).

The use of digital tools not only provide opportunity to study language, but also to use language. Through the use of social media tools, learners can connect, collaborate, and problem solve with other learners (Cruz, 2018). For successful outcomes of such strategy, the design of an effective blended learning course is a question of paramount importance to ELT practitioners and researchers.

Digital games are substantial part of life in the 20th century. Most young individuals today play games, have grown up playing games socialize in and around games, have friends and family who play games, and even learn through games. Digital games have also invaded culture, as reference to digital games are continually found in pop songs, films, television shows etc. Even individuals who do not play digital games are affected by online websites apps and programs. Such games are considered a potential source of English language content since many games are in English and allow players to interact with others where English is commonly spoken (Jones, 2018:11).

In more recent years, there have been significant effort to apply the instructional design process to public education due to its importance as a process that includes the settings of goals, establishing learners' objectives, identifying critical learners' characteristics and abilities, developing and selecting tests, selecting texts and media and implementing, evaluating and revising your instruction to help students achieve the desired learning outcomes (Carr-Chellman, 2016:3). Due to the continues technological advancements and its applications in education, it is important to take into account the appropriate use of development in order to promote knowledge acquisition with a proper selection, delivery and construction of information involved in that technology. One of the new techniques used in methodology is 'gamification' which was integrated to increase engagement and motivation of learners. Learning is a dynamic process which depends on motivational factors and experiences to lead to a long term change in behaviors which made designer to take into consideration the accomplishment of effective instructional design. The gamification is a process of using game thinking and game machine to solve problems. Also it is the use game machine dynamics and framework to promote desires behavior and learning, motivate

action, and engage people (Ntalians et al, 2018:12).

Therefore, schools should enable students to completely engage themselves in their public social and economic environment. In order to participate, they need to become literate. The traditional literacies, reading and writing, are not sufficient enough to deal with the various forms of texts that have appeared through the advancement of new information and multimedia technologies. Recently, there is a need for social networking and use of online games which most of the mediums are written in English (Humburg, 2015:3).

There are a number of reasons why they should be used in the classroom and the most important ones are health benefits, maturation and experience. Research has shown that used correctly and in moderation, together with physical activities, they can actually be good for learners (Ibid:4).

From a broader perspective, research has shown that digital games, predominantly massively multiplayer online role playing games, afford opportunities for learners to practice personally meaningful, social, goal-oriented activities which help promote L2 acquisition. Gameplay has been linked to benefits to language learning from both psycholinguistic and constructivist

perspective to second language acquisition (Farber, 2020:4).

Language learning can occur in spaces where the focus is not explicitly on language learning. It has been pointed out that online games and fun communication can be valuable resources for language learners. In online games, learners have the chance to participate in an online activity that they enjoy while learning the target language incidentally as they listen to, read notes from, interact with fellow players. This activity provides something quite close to a naturalistic language learning environment.

One distinct advantage is that it reduces learners' reliance on the teacher while allowing them to negotiate meaning through interaction that forces them to modify their output, as well as improving learners' self-perceived competence while lowering anxiety and allowing them to transfer the language that they practice to oral use (Dressman & Sadler, 2020: 428).

Instructional Design of Gamification

Gamification must be designed to influence a specific attitude or behavior, and it varies depending on the nature of the behavior or attitude. The effectiveness of instructional design will be affected by this target attitude or behavior (Kapp, et al, 2014:167). The gamified instructional

design specifies which aspects of games should be adapted for use in gamification. The theory of gamified instructional design is based on the work of Bedwell (2012), who empirically derived a taxonomy of a game element in a serious game relevant to learning. According to the theory, human interaction includes action language, assessment, conflict and challenge, control, environment, and gamification (Reiners & Wood, 2015:167). As a result, each instructional design should include the following elements:

1-Learner-centric gamification is just another way to help students achieve their goals. In e-learning, games for the sake of games make no sense. The content should entertain and educate the player at the same time.

2-Very applicable. The content is relevant and bridges simulated scenarios with real-world applications.

3-Content is king, not technology. Don't get carried away with the abundance of gamification tools and capabilities that authoring software provides.

4-Enriching. No one should ever try to take the fun out of the game, but increasing knowledge retention is more important (Winstead, 2019).

Challenges to the Use of Digital Games

In recent years, there has been a significant increase in interest in using digital games for language learning. This takes into account the explosive growth of multiplayer online gaming as well as the proliferation of mobile games for smart phones. It also reflects educators' growing recognition of the importance of extramural, informal learning, as well as their interest in finding ways to connect learning to students' real lives (Jones, 2018: 9).

Many attempts have been made to incorporate games into second language pedagogy, but few have reported on the successful implementation of games in actual teaching contexts. Similarly, discussions about the logistics of using games in classrooms, assessment criteria, or teacher roles in such settings are frequently lacking (Farber, 2020: 4).

There are several practical and pedagogical barriers to incorporating gaming into instructed language learning. Among these issues are how to choose or create games, how to find opportunities for language learning within game play, and how to incorporate game play and its associated activities into the curriculum (Jones, 2018:9).

METHODS

Sample

the sample of the study are 20 English language teachers working in different learning contexts, primary, intermediate and college level. They are asked to respond to a questionnaire constructed to investigate their attitudes concerning the use of digital games in classroom. The questionnaire forms are sent to teachers via emails and other electronic means.

Data Collection Instrument

The instrument used to collect data is a questionnaire constructed to find out English language teachers' attitudes towards the use of digital games in classrooms. The questionnaire consists of 10 items with 5 options ranging from (I strongly agree- I strongly disagree). The items refer to the effectiveness of such innovation in learning language and at the same time clarify some practical obstacles encountering its implementation in classroom contexts.

Application

The questionnaires about language teachers' attitudes towards the use of digital games in classroom, have been distributed to teachers via emails and other available applications. The teacher after less than a week have responded and sent their responses back.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The results of the study shows that 60% of language teachers show positive attitude towards using digital games in classrooms, while 40% of them have negative attitudes. In addition, 80% of the have revealed that there are a variety of challenges in applying such new experience in their teaching contexts.

According to the study results, it has been revealed that although teacher agree that games are such effective and motivating factor to engage students from various ages, but still such an innovation is to a large extent difficult to implement in our teaching environment due to a variety of factors such as the lack of equipment in schools, teachers' training to use such techniques, students' awareness of the role of games as tools for learning and not only fun, the time factor, financial factors etc.

In spite of this fact, it is important to stress the fact that the use of digital games could be employed informally for learning purposes. That is, it is possible to use games as tools for learning in informal settings such as home and still it is effective instruments from which users can learn how to communicate in addition to learn large number of vocabularies which are of great relevance to their lives.

CONCLUSION

This study is concerned with shedding light on the use of digital games as tools for language learning. As discussed earlier, because of the growth in technology, it has led to individuals engaging in digital games which most of the have English as their medium. Consequently, the use of games shows great improvement in learners language competence such as vocabulary, ways of interacting and communicating with others. In spite of their effectiveness in informal contexts, it has been proved that their implementation in classroom is accompanied by various challenges and obstacles such as training, time, funds, institutional factors. The questionnaire conducted in this study revealed that teachers do have positive attitudes towards the use of digital games, but they see that there are many factors that impede the actual use of the inside their classrooms.

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APPENDIX

The following is the Questionnaire sent to English Language Teachers to investigate their attitudes concerning the use of digital games in EFL learning.

Items	I strongly agree	I agree	I disagree	I strongly disagree
1.The use of digital games is effective in learning English.				
2.Digital games are motivating tools for learners.				
3.Digital games can be used in out-of-class time, thus are useful tools.				

4.They are easy to implement because learners are already used to such innovations.				
5.In addition to learning words, they enhance learners' creativity and solve-problem skills.				
6.Digital games can encourage collaborative work since many games are multiplayer games.				
Challenges faced by English Teachers				
7.Digital games, though effective, are difficult to implement in our classrooms.				
8.Teachers lack the training experience to deal with is innovation.				
9.In our institutions we lack the facilities to implement such new technology, such as laboratories, headphones speakers etc.				
10.Teachers cannot be available for the extended hours that the game play involves.				
11.It is difficult to integrate gaming into the curriculum.				
12.English language teachers are not proficient enough to use technological instruments in classroom				
13.There are not sufficient training courses and workshops concerned with the use of new technologies in language classrooms				