

Attitudes of Primary School Students About the Role of Computer Video Games in Learning English: Case Study in North Macedonia

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Abstract

The majority of research on video games focuses on children and teenagers, though the age range of players has expanded. Most studies emphasize elementary school students, who are generally enthusiastic about gaming. Our research focused on this group across several elementary schools in the southeastern part of North Macedonia. The results demonstrate correlations and comparisons that align with current trends. Internet access plays a key role in gaming, with 86% of respondents having access, compared to 98% of Australian teenagers. Our findings reveal that 51% of students want to play video games, and 31% play daily. Additionally, 71% believe video games help in learning English, particularly by enhancing motivation, vocabulary, conversation, listening, and overall language skills. Furthermore, 51% of students view gaming as a fun activity shared with peers. Meanwhile, 98% stated they are not allowed to play video games in the classroom. Opinions remain divided on whether video games should be integrated into English language learning.

Keywords: Video games, basic schools, children, English language, modern tools

1. Introduction

Video games are a product of modern technologies that not only enter the big door in all spheres of modern life, but also are regarded as tools without which there is no progress in any society. This means that it is not a matter of privilege only for citizens in the developed countries, but it is a trend that simply must be followed worldwide. The spectrum of modern technologies is wide, and yet, the magnet for the youngest population, video games, is diverse. They attract especially the youngest children, the reason being primarily, video games provide for them fun fulfillment and makes them happy. But, is it just fun, or does that magnet also draw to something called education, which the children are not aware of, and yet they make a use of it (Günel and Top 2022, 333-350)? These events are a challenge for many primary school researchers to co-opt information on whether there are other effects in children from playing video games apart from the fun and personal satisfaction. This was our incentive for doing research in a section of the students' perception related to playing video games. The educational sphere is the most appealing for the greater number of the researchers, and the target is the learning or improvement of language skills, considering that the English language is widely

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used in world communication and mostly present in differently structured video games, thus the predominant part of the research, findings and information comes from that direction.

It is evident that nowadays the English language acts as a second language in non-English-speaking areas (Albaqami 2022, 238), and that is the reason the research moves in this direction. Video games are tools that enable children to interact with the virtual world, freely communicate, have fun and improve English language skills. In doing so, they feel free from emotional pressure and the obligation of formal education.

The children are unaware of the effects, but research shows that opportunities for engaging, interactive, and entertaining repetitive communication improves their English skills. Vocabulary development, detection of virtual characters, communication with game characters and online communication with friends positively impacts listening, speaking, reading and even writing. (Snigdha and Debnath 2024). How advanced this process is, depends on the integration of popular educational games in the teaching process in the schools. For the time being, it is more of a taboo topic with no legal regulation, although there are recommendations for video games to be part of English language learning programs.

2. Literature review

The appeal of video games and their practice by primary school students is a challenge for numerous researches to be completed and documentation to be gathered from international meetings. There are different approaches to the research, but the goals and findings are usually the same. Addressing the challenge is the main role of the video games in the acquisition of the English language in elementary school students. In that direction is our overview of the findings that support the attitude of children about the importance of video games in learning the English language.

According to Pim (2013, 15-42), video games are of great importance to students owing to the fact that they offer wide opportunities for entertainment, development and integration. The video games are structured with a large amount of animated, quality and rich multimedia audio-visual content that plays an important role in the learning process. Additionally, educational video games contain problem solving activities or puzzles that stimulate children's communication and cooperation among themselves. Interestingly, the finding reiterates that children naturally prioritize and fixate on winning the game rather than focusing on developing and improving their skills.

Alfirević (2015, 153-170) argues that the use of video games as a teaching technique empowers progressive learning and vocabulary enrichment (more words, more fluent use of the words, etc.). We should not forget that video games significantly increase the motivation to learn, as well as increasing the students' desire to participate in the activities throughout the study of a foreign language.

Game structures, system solutions and innovations provide opportunities for joint learning through group networking and online communication, connecting large groups of children and encouraging communication, collaboration and innovation. Individual communication is determined by the content of the game (Theodorsen 2015) and the inclination of each individual

player. This interactive communication encourages language practice and skill development in children from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Thorne, Black, and Sykes 2009, 802-821; Putri and Nasrullah 2023, 60-67).

Mastering the skills of learning the English language is an excellent motive for children to play video games, providing a virtual environment in which players receive immediate feedback and rewards for effective vocabulary learning. Of course, there are more factors influencing the enrichment of vocabulary and the motivation of children, the recurrence of words in the game itself, the design and the strategies of the games have their meaning in the acquisition of individual language skills. Video games definitely offer a safe, virtual environment that initiates research and allows students engage with the language in dynamic and extraordinary ways (Fadilah et al. 2024, 1876-1885).

In addition to the traditional and educational content video games offer, they also allow a higher level of efficiency in practicing video games, which gamers categorize it effectively in association with advanced communication. It strengthens relationships, comparing game results, adapting to the language differences and raising the level of tolerance. The way gamers perceive these words and challenges is vital in understanding their social and communicative functions within the gaming community (Daradkeh et al. 2024).

The evidence that computer video games are a useful tool for learning the English language in elementary school children is presented by the findings from the research conducted by Denić (2023, 361) across several elementary schools in Serbia. Highlighting that children have access to the Internet via computers, mobile devices, etc. in school and at home, which is an imperative for playing games and learning a language. Emphasizing the finding that children would like to play educational games in school, he accentuates that it is good to start introducing the video games in the English language teaching process in the schools. Nevertheless, Ritter (2022, 29-41), bringing up the complex legislation regulating primary school curriculum, states that there are still no legislative conditions for the introduction of video games in English-language classrooms, despite their value.

The effects of playing video games on elementary school children were also examined by Seli and Santosa (2022, 56-67). Their findings show that playing video games positively affect English language learning in students with a wide range of skills. The progress in reading is especially emphasized, for which they emphasize that the children for better activity in the games, they additionally practice the inclusion of teaching guides that later gives them an advantage in the games. These practices make it easier for children to acquire freedom and correct listening, pronunciation, speaking and practical skills in learning the English language.

3. Methodology

The methodological researches within the framework of this paper are designed to meet the requirements of professionalism on the one hand and correspond to our research participant. Our participants are children from elementary schools in the southeastern part of the country from the city Strumica, who practice playing video games as an English language learning tool. Considering the age of the selected representative, the approach to the research is phased by the adoption of qualitative and quantitative methods. In the qualitative part, contacts were made

with the teachers from the respective schools and few of the parents in order to familiarize themselves with the purposes of the research and by all means, to ask for their permission. In the quantitative part, a survey was conducted through the Microsoft form application, with a total of 15 questions selected and stylistically adjusted to the age of the students. A total of 64 students took part in the survey that was successfully conducted, overall. The obtained results are subject to analysis and discussion within the framework of this paper.

We conclude the completion of the methodological phases by defining several hypotheses:

H.1. Elementary school students who are part of the research process want to play video games

H 2. Students think that playing video games is useful for learning English language

H 3. Video games should be included in learning English language

4. Results and discussion

The student's results obtained from the Microsoft forms application are visually presented in Table 1 - 15, followed by the corresponding comparability and discussions with similar findings in the region and world.

Responses	Respondents	Percentage	Total
Yes	54	86	63
No	2	3	
Sometimes	7	11	

Table 1. Do you have an access to a computer and internet?

From the appended Table 1, it can be seen that a very large proportion of the surveyed elementary school students, or 86% (54 respondents), have constant access to computers and the Internet. A small proportion of 11% (7 respondents) only sometimes have access, and an even smaller proportion or 3% (2 respondents) declared that they do not have access. These findings are competitive and encouraging for respondents from our country. Because, according to data from UNICEF in 2022, 75% of schoolchildren use the internet, increasing by about 4% each year. Over 90% of teenagers in Britain have access to the internet, and their peers in Australia have access to the internet, and this is almost 98%.

Responses	Respondents	Percentage	Total
Yes	32	51	63
No	13	21	
Sometimes	18	28	

Table 2. Do you want to play video games on the computer?

From the results shown in Table 2, it can be seen that a little over half of the respondents, 51% (32 respondents), answered that they want to play video games on the computer, which is far

below the European average. Over 90% of elementary school students would like to play video games. Close to that average, 83.3%, are the surveyed students from Zagreb (Markov 2020, 56). However, a certain compatibility is seen in the part where the respondents did not play video games. We found that 21% (13 respondents) did not play video games, while the Zagreb respondents were 12.2%.

Responses	Respondents	Percentage	Total
Every Day	22	35	63
Once or twice a week	20	32	
Once or twice monthly	21	33	

Table 3. How often do you play computer video games?

From the attached Table 3, it can be seen that the responses of the surveyed students are almost equally distributed with the frequency they play video games. The largest number, 35% (22 respondents), answered that they play video games every day. 32% (20 respondents) from one week to two weeks, and 33% (21 respondents) from two weeks to two months. Although the presented results are quite different, they are still in good correlation with similar findings in the region. Namely, students from several elementary schools in Zagreb say that about 39% of the respondents play video games every day, 31% play video games 2–3 times a week, and 30% pay monthly (Labaš, Marinčić, and Mujčinović 2019, 8-27). For emphasis, there is also data that up to 66% is the average of students who play 2-3 video games every day (Brčić 2020, 2669).

Responses	Respondents	Percentage	Total
Yes	45	71	63
No	1	2	
Maybe	17	27	

Table 4. Do you think that playing video games on the computer is useful for learning English?

From attached Table 4, it can be seen that the largest part, or 71% (45 respondents), declared that playing video games is useful for learning English. Approximately one third, 27% (17 respondents), stated that it could be useful, while only a minimal 2% (1 respondent) stated negatively. These values are undoubtedly consistent with the majority of findings across Europe and the correlations observed in the region. For instance, students from Zagreb report that 62.5% believe that playing computer video games is beneficial for learning (Labaš, Marinčić, and Mujčinović 2019, 8-27) and useful for learning the English language (Snigdhha and Debnath 2024).

Responses	Respondents	Percentage	Total
Yes	29	46	

No	13	21	63
Sometimes	21	33	

Table 5. Does playing video games increase the motivation for learning English?

The results of the conducted research shown in Table 5 show that the largest part of the surveyed children, 46% (29 respondents), stated that playing video games increased their motivation to learn English. A relatively high 33% (21 respondents) stated that sometimes their motivation increased, while a smaller number of respondents, 21%, stated negatively (13 respondents). Although the motivation depends on many factors, especially the inspiration from certain groups of educational video games, still more and more children from different countries emphasize the role of English language learning. These include (Günel and Top 2022, 333-350) for Turkish children, (Vázquez-Cano et al. 2023, 227-245) for Swedish children, (Lutak 2023, 43) for Croatian children, and others.

Responses	Respondents	Percentage	Total
Yes	44	70	
No	2	3	63
Maybe	17	27	

Table 6. Does playing computer games increases your vocabulary in English Language?

From Table 6 shown, it can be seen that the largest part of the respondents, 70% (44 respondents), declared that playing video games enriches their vocabulary in the English language. A significantly smaller part, 27% (17 respondents), declared that it could improve their vocabulary, and an insignificant 3% (2 respondents) expressed a negative opinion. These results are compatible with those found by Snigdha and Debnath (2024) for the decade of Bangladesh, where over 84% declared positively.

Responses	Respondents	Percentage	Total
Yes	44	71	
No	7	11	62
Maybe	11	18	

Table 7. Do you feel more at ease speaking English now that you've spent so much time playing and interacting with the game characters?

Table 7 shows that a large part of the surveyed children, 71% (44 respondents), declared that after playing for a long time and communicating with the game characters, they feel greater freedom in speaking English. Far less is the number and percentage of respondents, 11% (7 respondents), who responded negatively; one part, 18% (11 respondents), stated that they could feel freedom in speaking English.

Responses	Respondents	Percentage	Total
Yes	12	19	62
No	34	55	
Sometimes	16	26	

Table 8. Are you able to mimic computer video game characters' speech?

From the results shown in Table 8, it can be seen that the largest part of the respondents, 55% (34 respondents), did not imitate the speech of the characters from computer video games. A smaller part, 26% (16 respondents), answered that they do it sometimes; only 19% (12 respondents) said positively, i.e., that they imitate characters from video games. However, some of the region's findings indicate that children want to identify with some of the video game characters. For example, around 50% of children from Zagreb declared that they see themselves in some of the characters in the video games (Labaš, Marinčić, and Mujčinović 2019, 8-27).

Responses	Respondents	Percentage	Total
Yes	12	19	62
No	34	55	
Sometimes	16	26	

Table 9. Does playing video games help you become more proficient in the language?

Table 9 shows that the largest part of the surveyed children, or 55% (34 respondents), responded negatively to the question; that is, they said that they do not feel the improvement of their language skills playing video games. A good part of the respondents, 26% (16 respondents), stated that they only feel improvement occasionally (probably depending on the game they are playing), and even 19% (12 respondents) answered positively, feeling an improvement in their language skills through playing video games. These results are in part non-correlative because a large part of what was found in the framework of this effort is the opposite, and the overall trend among children is that language skills improve through playing video games, especially in speech, vocabulary, etc. (UNICEF 2024).

Responses	Respondents	Percentage	Total
Speaking	30	48	63
Listening	13	21	
Reading	11	17	
Writing	9	14	

Table 10. In which parts can you note better English language acquisition while playing video games?

From the attached Table 10, it can be seen that the majority of the respondents, 48% (30 respondents), declared that the biggest improvement in the language was in pronunciation, followed by listening with 21% (13 respondents), reading with 17% (11 respondents), and writing with 14% (9 respondents) the least. The results are real and correlative because the content of the video games is mainly speaking and manipulative, and the reflexes of children are mainly speaking and listening. Correlations are found for children from Bangladesh, where the greatest language improvements as a result of playing video games are seen in pronunciation of 33.33%, then in listening 19.44%, in reading 22.22%, and in writing 26.11% (Snigdha and Debnath 2024).

Responses	Respondents	Percentage	Total
Instruction from the game	10	16	64 from the games
Direct Interaction with face	5	8	
Talking with friends	19	30	
Combination	29	46	

Table 11. Which parts of video games have a positive effect on improving the language?

From Table 11 shown, it can be seen that the largest part of the surveyed children, or 46 (29 respondents), declared that it is the combined variant most often, depending on the structure of the game being played. The attitude of children when there is a conversation with friends during the game is explained. In this case, 30% (19 respondents) are clearly determined that conversations with friends have a positive influence on language improvement, 16% (10 respondents) think that the positive influence comes from video game instructions, while only 8% (5 respondents) think that direct interactions with game characters have a positive influence on language.

Responses	Respondents	Percentage	Total
Yes	1	2	63
No	62	98	

Table 12. Are you allowed to play video games at school?

From Table 12, it can be seen that as many as 98% (62 respondents) of the surveyed children stated negatively. They are not allowed to play games at school. Only an insignificant 2% (one respondent) reported positively. This result is not at all unexpected for students from North Macedonia, because video games are not at all represented in the curriculum; thus, there is no legal regulation for their practice. This is a trend in the region as well, and of course much wider, because the research shows that there is a need for the legalization of some video games in the teaching process and children, especially characteristic educational video games.

Responses	Respondents	Percentage	Total
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Yes	21	33	
No	23	37	63
Maybe	19	30	

Table 13. Do you think that video games should be part of teaching in English?

From the attached Table 13, it can be seen that the results of the surveyed children are significantly different for all three positions. However, the largest part, 37% (23 respondents), answered negatively, that is, that video games should not be part of English language teaching. Slightly fewer of them, 33% (31 respondents), answered positively, as well as 30% (19 respondents) who said that video games should be part of the English language teaching. This last one is in the context of the research and findings (IGLS 2024), where the introduction of educational video games in teaching in schools is recommended. To be noted, (Vujisić 2023, 75) mentions that the introduction of educational video games in the teaching process in schools gives greater results than the convective methods, while Denić (2023, 361-365) states that all the children surveyed in a primary school in Serbia are in favor of introducing video games in the teaching of the English language.

Responses	Respondents	Percentage	Total
Yes	32	51	
No	15	24	63
Sometimes	16	25	

Table 14. Do you want to play video games just for fun?

From attached Table 14, it can be seen that more than half of the respondents, 51% (32 respondents), declared that video games are fun. 24% (15 respondents) answered negatively, while 25% (16 respondents) declared that some people think video games are fun. Of course, there is a wide range of playing video games when it comes to entertainment almost everywhere in the world. However, it is interesting to find that 36.2% of teenagers in Croatia play video games for fun, while the percentage is high at 76.7%, and respondents who think that the challenge of playing video games makes them fun games. (Labaš, Marinčić, and Mujčinović 2019, 8-27)

Responses	Respondents	Percentage	Total
Yes	28	44	
No	16	26	63
Sometimes	19	30	

Table 15. Do you use video games to learn English in your free time?

From the attached Table 15, it can be seen that the largest part of the respondents, or 44% (28 respondents), positively stated that they would use video games to learn English in their free

time. 26% (16 respondents) said negatively, while 30% (19 respondents) said they would sometimes use video games to learn English in their free time. These findings are correlative with similar ones in the region and much more widely because access to sophisticated tools such as, for example, smartphones, on which there is a possibility to install video games, gives children the opportunity to play and learn language at any time.

5. Findings

The results of the conducted research, as well as the analysis made within the framework of this paper, open a wide range of knowledge related to the standpoint of elementary school students regarding the importance of video games in learning the English language. The data collected from our study strongly suggest that video games serve not only as a recreational activity for children but also as an effective medium for acquiring and improving linguistic skills. These findings align with a growing body of research that highlights the cognitive and educational benefits of video games, particularly in second-language acquisition.

Altogether, our findings emphasize the correlation between video games and English language learning in the targeted schools, positioning these students as competitive with their peers from the region and globally. The accessibility of video games, combined with their interactive and immersive nature, provides a unique opportunity for language learners to engage in an environment where English is naturally used. Unlike traditional classroom settings, video games introduce children to language in a contextualized and dynamic manner, making learning more engaging and spontaneous. Through dialogues, instructions, missions, and challenges in the game, students are exposed to a wide range of vocabulary, sentence structures, and conversational phrases that they might not encounter in conventional English lessons.

The importance of video games in learning the English language for children is confirmed in several segments of our research and findings. However, to ensure a thorough analysis, we evaluated the results based on three established hypotheses within the framework of our methodological approach.

Our comprehension from extensive theoretical and practical research shows that playing video games among elementary school children is not just a casual activity but a significant trend. With increasing access to digital technology, including personal computers, smartphones, and gaming consoles, children are spending more time interacting with digital media. In the specific case of our survey, when students were asked the question, "Do you want to play video games?", more than half of the respondents answered positively. Furthermore, if we consider the responses of those who answered, "Sometimes," the percentage becomes even higher, indicating that the majority of children actively engage with video games. This finding is consistent with international studies showing a steady increase in children's engagement with video games as part of their daily routines.

If we analyze these results in the context of Hypothesis H.1, which states, "Students from elementary schools who are part of the research process like to play video games," we can confirm with certainty that the hypothesis is acknowledged. This insight is crucial because it establishes that video games are already an integral part of students' lives. The fact that children

willingly participate in gaming activities suggests that integrating these tools into the educational process could be an effective way to enhance language acquisition.

However, playing video games is not only a tool for entertainment and personal satisfaction. Numerous findings indicate that video games also serve an educational purpose, particularly in terms of language learning. Given that English is the dominant language in most video games, students are naturally exposed to new words, phrases, and expressions while playing. Our research strongly supports this claim, as evidenced by responses to the question: "Do you think that playing video games on the computer is useful for learning the English language?"

This leads us to Hypothesis H.2, which posits, "Students think that playing video games is useful for learning English." The results obtained from the research show that 71% of respondents provided affirmative feedback. This overwhelming majority highlights the direct educational benefits of video games, reinforcing the idea that exposure to English in a natural and enjoyable setting significantly enhances language proficiency. Consequently, we can conclude with confidence that Hypothesis H.2 is accepted.

The next critical aspect of our study involves the debate regarding the inclusion of video games in formal educational settings. There is a growing discussion among researchers and educators about whether video games should be incorporated into the official curriculum as an English language learning tool. The argument in favor of this approach is supported by the increasing number of studies demonstrating the positive impact of video games on motivation, engagement, and skill acquisition. Many educational institutions worldwide have started experimenting with the integration of educational video games to support language learning, recognizing their potential to facilitate immersive learning experiences.

Nonetheless, the issue remains complex due to the lack of formal regulations regarding the use of video games in schools. In our research, we specifically asked students, "Do you think that video games should be part of English language teaching?" This question directly aligns with our third hypothesis, H.3, which states, "Video games should be part of English language teaching as a key educational moment in learning English." The responses to this question reveal divided opinions: one-third of respondents (33%) agreed that video games should be incorporated into English language teaching, while the remaining two-thirds were almost equally split between "No" and "Maybe."

This finding suggests that while a significant number of students recognize the potential benefits of using video games in education, there is still skepticism or uncertainty regarding their full integration into the curriculum. One possible explanation is the traditional perception of video games as a source of distraction rather than an educational tool. Additionally, concerns about screen time, the potential for addiction, and the need for proper instructional design may contribute to the hesitation in accepting video games as a formal part of the learning process.

With these findings in mind, we conclude that Hypothesis H.3 is only partially accepted. However, it is reasonable to expect that this trend will evolve positively in the coming years. As more educators and policymakers acknowledge the role of video games in enhancing language skills, we anticipate greater acceptance and structured implementation of game-based learning methodologies. Educational video games, particularly those designed with

pedagogical objectives, have undeniable contributions to English language learning. Future research should focus on developing frameworks for integrating video games into school curricula in a way that balances entertainment with structured learning outcomes.

In summary, our research underscores the significant role video games play in learning the English language among elementary school students. While there are still debates about their full incorporation into formal education, the evidence clearly demonstrates their positive impact on language acquisition, motivation, and engagement. As digital learning tools continue to evolve, it is essential for educators and institutions to explore innovative ways to harness the educational potential of video games for the benefit of students worldwide.

6. Conclusion

The results of the research and the analysis made within the framework of this paper unquestionably point to the fact that the use of video games in learning the English language is significant and has positive effects on children in primary schools, who were our target. Playing video games among elementary school children is a growing trend, as evidenced by the results obtained from our research, which are in correlation with similar studies conducted in other regions and worldwide. The evidence that more than half of the respondents stated they like to play video games speaks for itself about the effects of gaming, especially in learning the English language.

The achievement of language skills as a result of playing video games is of great importance, as the knowledge gained through this process is actively applied by children, predominantly in communication with their friends or in learning English during their free time. This indicates that the surveyed children have a strong inclination toward incorporating video games as an auxiliary tool for language acquisition. The research results confirm that playing video games positively influences the development of listening, speaking, and vocabulary skills, which are critical components in mastering a new language. Through exposure to different linguistic contexts, children unconsciously internalize vocabulary and grammatical structures, making language learning an engaging and interactive experience.

Despite these positive effects, research also reveals a restrictive trend in our country regarding the use of video games in the school environment. A striking 98% of the surveyed students declared that they are not allowed to play video games at school, while a significant one-third of the respondents expressed a desire for video games to be included in the school curriculum. This suggests that there is an ongoing debate regarding the potential integration of video games into formal education. While there are numerous international studies that highlight the benefits of video games in the educational process, their successful incorporation depends on multiple factors, including the willingness and readiness of educators to embrace such innovative teaching methods.

Moreover, the role of teachers in this process cannot be overlooked. Educators serve as a crucial link in facilitating the educational potential of video games. Proper guidance and structured integration of video games into the curriculum could enhance student engagement and provide an alternative means of language learning that aligns with the digital preferences of modern learners. Therefore, future discussions should focus on developing structured frameworks that

allow video games to be utilized as effective learning tools in schools, ensuring that they complement traditional teaching methods rather than replace them.

Finally, it is important to consider future research directions that explore the long-term impact of video games on English language acquisition. While the present study has established a correlation between video games and language learning, further studies could delve into comparative analyses between students who use video games as a learning aid and those who rely solely on traditional methods. Understanding these dynamics will provide deeper insights into the full potential of video games as a pedagogical resource. In conclusion, while the current research underscores the significance of video games in language learning, further steps must be taken to explore how they can be effectively incorporated into educational frameworks to maximize their benefits for students.

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