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

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أثر ألعاب الفيديو عبر الإنترنت في اكتساب اللغة الإنجليزية

إعداد

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## المستخلص

أصبح الأطفال أكثر إتقاناً للغة الإنجليزية في العقود القليلة الماضية. أحد الأسباب الرئيسية لذلك؛ هو تأثير ألعاب الفيديو. يتعرض الطلاب لألعاب الفيديو بشكل كبير؛ مما يسمح لهم بتعلم اللغة الإنجليزية بمهارة. هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى تسليط الضوء على تأثير ألعاب الفيديو على تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية، التواصل، المفردات، والنطق. جمعت هذه الدراسة المفاهيمية بيانات من مصادر موثوقة مختلفة، بما في ذلك المجالات والكتب، لتطوير نموذج مفاهيمي. حيث تعتبر الألعاب مصدراً رائعاً لبيئة إيجابية ومحفزة، وهي أفضل طريقة لتبني لغة غير أصلية. اقترحت النتائج أن ألعاب الفيديو عبر الإنترنت يمكن أن تحسن تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية والتواصل. علاوة على ذلك، يمكن أن يحسن التعلم عبر ألعاب الفيديو مفردات ونطق اللاعبين. قدمت هذه الدراسة المفاهيمية إطاراً شاملاً لاكتساب اللغة الإنجليزية من خلال ألعاب الفيديو عبر الإنترنت؛ ومع ذلك، لا تزال هناك بعض القيود التي يمكن أن تأخذها الدراسات المستقبلية في الاعتبار؛ أولاً، يمكن اختبار النموذج المفاهيمي المقدم في هذه الدراسة بشكل تجريبي من قبل الدراسات المستقبلية. ثانياً، يمكن للدراسات المستقبلية توسيع النموذج بتسليط الضوء على الفوائد الأخرى لألعاب الفيديو عبر الإنترنت للمتعلمين الغير ناطقين باللغة الإنجليزية.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** اللغة الإنجليزية، التواصل، ألعاب الفيديو، التعلم القائم على الألعاب.

## **Abstract**

Children have become more proficient in English in the past few decades. One of the main reasons for this is the influence of video games. Nowadays, students are more exposed to video games which allows them to learn English proficiently. Therefore, this research aimed to highlight the impact of video games on English language learning, communication, vocabulary, and pronunciation. This conceptual study has gathered data from different valid sources, including journals and books, to develop a conceptual model. The games are a wonderful source of a positive and motivating atmosphere and are the best way to adopt a non-native language. The results proposed that online video games can improve English language learning and communication. Moreover, learning via video games can improve the vocabulary and pronunciation of gamers. This conceptual study has presented a comprehensive framework of English language acquisition via online video games. However, it still has different limitations that future studies can consider; first, the conceptual model presented by the research can be examined empirically by future studies. Secondly, future studies can extend the model by highlighting the other benefits of online video games for non-native English learners.

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

## **Research Type: Conceptual Research**

### **1. Introduction**

Online connectivity and technological improvement have changed people's behaviour and lives. Now, people prefer online interaction rather than physical one. Similarly, online learning is common nowadays, and online learning methods 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 has advanced to video games (Scolari & Contreras-Espinosa, 2019). The incredible strides in game consoles, computers, and fast internet connections have made online multiplayer video games more popular. These video games are critical in changing people's behavior and learning aptitude. Similarly, ESA (2017) highlighted that 53% of people who spend an average of six hours per week playing video games portray the same 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 online or offline (Takahashi, 2013).

Gee (2005) explained that good game designers and practical theoreticians make the games so 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. For the last five decades, educationists and researchers have been 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 have focused on learning via technology or computer-assisted mediums (Thorne et al., 2009). Similarly,

researchers, practitioners, and educationists have developed many new processes for technology-driven language learning, like Computer-Assisted Language Learning, 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 & 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 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, the first video games merely consisted of moving pictures. In the 1980s, no one thought that games would become a source of learning English, but gradually, games started to develop with the advancement of technology. They became more complex and informative regarding gameplay and 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 have been actively playing games, especially children. With the progress of technology,

games have become much more advanced as they can be compared with movies, cartoons, and books in narrative and storytelling. On-spot communication is the major aspect provided by the gaming industry, and this helps gamers to communicate, 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 English language acquisition (Rudis & Postic, 2017).

This research mainly focuses on exploring video games' impact on language acquisition. However, 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 (2002) mentioned that a "low effective" atmosphere is best for learning as it develops confidence in children to adopt a language (2002). Clark (2002) argued that a non-threatening environment helps in presenting information, and it has the potential to enhance the critical thinking process, video games and cartoons create this environment as they catch the attention of the learners. Shaffer et al. (2005) tried 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 elements mix, they play a vital role in acquiring different sorts of knowledge. One major aspect of knowledge we get through games is learning a language, and this research solemnly rotates around that.

Many studies have tried to provide the reasons behind learning. However, only a few studies still focused on developing a comprehensive model to know the English language learning

behavior of 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: How does video games affect English language acquisition by non-native English learners?
- 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 of 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.

## **1. Literature Review**

Over the last few decades, some researchers have been working to identify the effect of video games on the acquisition of different languages, especially English. Moreover, many studies have focused on it. Reinders & Wattana (2011) aimed to determine the effects of digital games on willingness and interaction to communicate in a foreign language. They mentioned different studies in their research. The first study mentioned by them was done by DeHaan et al. (2010) who tried to note the difference in the rate of vocabulary between two groups, i.e. one who actively played the game and the 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 it. Furthermore, Chen and Johnson (2004) used a commercial role-playing game and



concluded that it also promotes flow and motivation. The current study has done a deep analysis of several studies to show English language acquisition with the help of video games. This analysis enabled the study to provide a literature-based view for identifying, investigating, and highlighting the actual language acquisition process. Table 1, given below, shows the studies 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	English	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

Da Silva (2014) mentioned, "Video games as an opportunity for informal English language learning: Theoretical Consideration". Moreover, they discuss that two aspects of language skills are cultivated through video games, i.e. receptive and expressive skills. Further, he argued that games help language learners to enhance their proficiency. Learning a language is confined by the setting we are learning, and schools, in this case, are not suitable as they limit the breadth of language use. At the same time, online gaming gives us a better opportunity to learn as its area is broad compared to schools. That's why online gaming is a better source to learn, acquire, and practice a second language. Chik (2014) researched Chinese undergraduate students, using moderate-level

English in his data instruments. He collected the data from 153 students and concluded that video games increased their learning ability and gave learners several ways to exercise the second language whether they were playing a game or not.

Consumers perceive video games as an interactive and engaging source of entertainment, enabling scholars to investigate the effects of video games on users (Kirriemuir & McFarlane, 2004). Many researchers proposed that video games assist users in improving their EFL listening (Kabata & Yang, 2002). Audio lessons, visual input, and feedback offered by video games can help users improve their listening abilities (Hu & Chang, 2007). Moreover, numerous scholars believe integrating games into traditional classroom settings can promote higher-level student learning and thinking skills (Sandford et al., 2006) and be particularly useful in developing 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 & 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, offer possibilities for language study, and gain expertise from professionals in various semiotic areas (Hu & Chang, 2007). Therefore, multiplayer or general online video games can influence English language learning. Based on 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 describe new uses for game-based learning (Squire, 2008). According to Schlimme (2002), interactive adventure games allow users to discuss various scenarios and outcomes, improving their spatial, reading, spelling, and critical thinking abilities. It is argued that many simulation video games comprise unfamiliar or uncommon words necessary to understand the game's dynamics, thus improving the 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 languages. It was widely said that the software would also help lower-level confidence learners enhance communication skills in various difficult languages. Shaffer et al. (2005) debated the psychological aspects of video games. The brief that the virtual world has made it possible for players to develop real understanding, effective social practices, and shared values, and get an epistemological view of the content. Similarly, a study by DeHaan (2005) explores the importance of video games in acquiring Japanese language learners' listening and reading skills. The outcome of his study reveals that video games play an essential role in language acquisition. 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 & Zaphiris (2006) reported that video games facilitate language learners in various ways, including behavioral and constructive manners. Thus, they can develop

better communication among gamers and improve their overall English language communication. So, the following proposition can be developed:

**P<sub>2</sub>:** Video games can impact communication in the English language.

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

Digital video games have become increasingly popular, attracting researchers to explore their educational potential. Many studies 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 by DeHaan (2005a) investigates Japanese language learning 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 facilitate the acquisition of various language skills and vocabulary (Cho & Krashen, 1994; Constantino et al., 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 provides students with more opportunities (e.g. the presentation of new vocabulary items) to understand and learn engagingly.

An experiment was conducted on Japanese female EFL students by Peterson (2011), he observed the students after exposing them to a massively multiplayer online role-playing

game. Four students were new, while the other three were relatively experienced. He concluded that the new students find it difficult to communicate and give second language commands compared to experienced ones. However, 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. DeHaan and Singaravelu (2008) concluded in their research that video games have become an enormous instrument in the language learning phase as they have proved useful. The results 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:

**P<sub>3</sub>:** Video games can impact the different English language components.

The literature above highlighted video games' influence on English language learning and the 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).

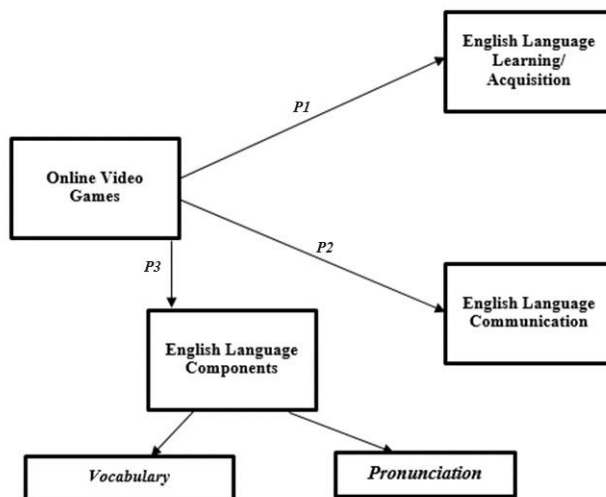


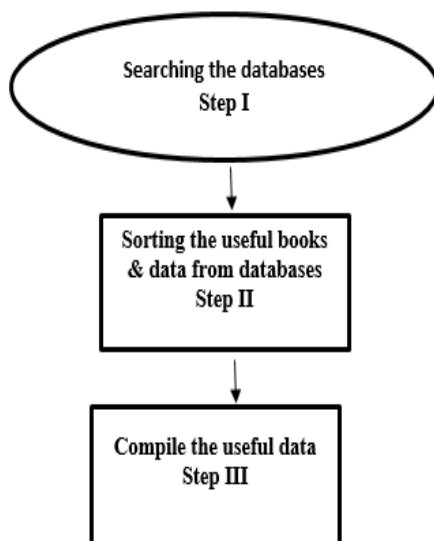
Figure 1: Proposed Model

### 3. Methodology

Conceptual research is the most beneficial among other qualitative survey methods. Therefore, this study is conceptual research and significantly differs 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 & Goldberg (2015) explained that conceptual papers highlight new proposed relationships between variables or constructs. Such research highlights 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).

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, also called secondary data. Therefore, the collected data was linked with the literature to

justify every research proposition. Figure 2 shows 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, especially gamers from Saudi Arabia, can learn English from online video games. Therefore, it has shown how the games can enable them to learn the language. This research extended 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 games that can help improve every possible English language component.

## 5- Conclusion

Exposure to online video games enables us to interact, communicate and use English. Video games impact our language learning behavior in certain ways; they allow us to use various phrases and statements in our everyday life, 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. Children learn new words when playing games, and their communication improves, so 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 be efficient in learning English and improving English communication. Based on the literature-based discussion, this study has also revealed that games can help improve English vocabulary and pronunciation

## 6-Limitations and Recommendations

The research has highlighted that these online video games can improve English learning, communication, pronunciation, and vocabulary. First, 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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