

The Effect of Subtitles of Videogames on Vocabulary Learning

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Abstract

In the last 25 years ago and emerge of new technologies and machines, learning in all aspects of life faced major changes, Language learning was no exception. In recent era multiple tools were introduced to employ and expand learner's vocabulary knowledge, one of these tools are videogames which are known for leisure, but learners can exploit them in order to learn new words. This qualitative study investigates the effect of subtitles in videogames on vocabulary learning, with 20 (male) university students as participants. The study employed interviews to collect data from students' experiences and attitudes towards using subtitle in videogames and its impact on their vocabulary learning process. Interviews' results showed that using subtitles in videogames could increase learner's motivation, focus, and awareness of new words of foreign language. In conclusion playing videogames and using subtitles have the potential to benefit learners as a digital and supplementary tool to learn new vocabulary effectively.

Key words: Vocabulary learning, Videogames, Subtitle

1. Introduction:

For the past ۲۵ years with emerge of digital technologies world has developed rapidly. With changes in all aspect of life there has been a significant shift in the field of education from a conventional teacher centered approach to a student centered, that highlights a more participatory role for learners. This transition signifies a change from the traditional method of passive learning through listening to a more active approach where students learn through active engagement (Garris, Ahlers, and Driskell 2002). In recent years using technology in language learning is considered as a vital component in acquiring and utilizing language materials. New technologies such as computers, internet, and smartphones revolutionized learning process (Parsayi and Soyoof 2018).

Computers have changed people's lives, and video games have been part of that revolution. Researchers from diverse fields such as psychology and education have taken notice of the video game phenomenon, exploring its

potential as a valuable tool for progress in learning. The majority of the research has turned in advantageous results(Rasti and Vahdat 2013).

1.1 Vocabulary learning:

based on Cambridge dictionary vocabulary can be defined as all the words known and used by a particular person. Vocabulary plays a vital role in every language as it acts as a fundamental element. Each language has its own distinct collection of words, which greatly influences its overall structure and growth(Nie 2017).Language learners acknowledge the importance of vocabulary; however, many learners struggle with memorizing word lists in isolation, which can result in feelings of frustration. When it comes to learning a new foreign language, the opportunities for exposure to the language, practicing it, and engaging with others are restricted. Nevertheless, in order to enhance one's vocabulary, it is crucial to employ effective learning techniques that are both motivating and efficient(Ghalebi, Sadighi, and Bagheri 2020). Many factors could affect vocabulary learning ranging from learner's intrinsic motivations, technologies, accessible materials(Turkay et al. 2014).Many research studies have shown that the use of video games greatly improves learners' understanding of new concepts and their capacity to remember information(Chen, Hsu, and Chen 2023).

1.1.1 vocabulary learning strategies:

Letchumanan et al. (2016) describes vocabulary learning strategies as “the learning style of individual learners that they utilize to enhance learning in an effective way”.

1.1.1.1 memory strategies:

In order to improve the retention of a word, there are several techniques that can be utilized. These include establishing connections with prior knowledge, utilizing visual imagery, and categorizing the word.(Useini 2022)

1.1.1.2 cognitive strategies:

Letchumanan et al. (2016) describes cognitive strategies as “techniques that directly affect incoming language information”

1.2. Videogames and vocabulary learning:

A video game consists of a sequence of interactions where a player takes on the perspective of the character or characters they control(Paul Gee 2008). Video games serve as simulations that create interactive learning environments where individuals are given functional roles to accomplish tasks with the information provided(Janebi Enayat and Haghighatpasand 2019). Paul Gee (2008) established some benefit for videogames such as encouraging active engagement, fostering productivity, and minimizing any negative impacts on learners. video games have evolved from being just a form of entertainment to becoming a medium for immersive learning experiences. Within virtual worlds, players are exposed to a wide range of linguistic content, including character dialogues, instructional text, and environmental descriptions. A large body of research focused on facilitating vocabulary learning via technology(Chen, Hsu, and Chen 2023), many researchers highlight the importance of using computer games as a branch of technology to improve vocabulary skills(Bado and Franklin 2014) as they are widely popular among people of all ages and have the ability to promote a positive approach to learning(Miller and Hegelheimer 2006).

1.3. Subtitles:

In videogames like other media subtitles refer to the text displayed on the screen that accompanies spoken dialogue, sound effects, and other audio elements. It is claimed that audiovisual materials, when accompanied by captions or subtitles, can function as a powerful educational resource in various ways(Danan 2004; Karakaş et al. 2012).

Subtitles are essential in video games as they help players comprehend audio content by providing a visual aid(Janebi Enayat and Haghighatpasand 2019)

Kusumawati (2019) considers following benefits for subtitles:

- (1) their use bridges the gap between reading and listening skills.
- (2) Students can learn how to pronounce many words, consciously and unconsciously.
- (3) Subtitles allow learners to follow the plot easily.
- (4) Learners can develop word recognition skills.
- (5) Subtitles can reinforce the understanding of English context-bound expression, and helps learners to acquire new vocabulary and idioms.

2. Statement of problem

there is an obstacle in front of EFL learners which is lack of adequate situations and opportunities to learn a foreign language and implement it properly. Current research attempts to determine if subtitles in video games as a simulation setting have an effect on EFL learner's vocabulary development, focusing on how these interactive experiences contribute to language learning and comprehension of in-game content.

3. Research hypothesis

The utilization of subtitles in video games does not result in significant difference in vocabulary acquisition when compared to players who do not use them.

4. Research question:

To what extent utilizing subtitles in videogames does affect EFL learners' vocabulary learning?

5. Methodology

in this research a qualitative research design was employed via interviews to explore research question.

5.1. Participants

20 intermediate level EFL students (male) were recruited for this study. Participants were chosen using purposive sampling with the aim of choosing students who had experience both in language learning and playing videogames. The age range of participants was from 20 to 24 years.

5.2. Instruments

To optimize interview sessions, the interviews were conducted in a semi-structured form with the students individually in university campus. An android smartphone was used as recording device.

5.3. Data collection

The participants were interview via audio recording. The interviews lasted 10-15 minutes in 2 sessions. The interviews were conducted semi structured in order in order to record experiences and attitudes toward research question.

5.4. Data analysis

The interviews were conducted by recording and subsequently transcribing the spoken dialogues into written English language.

6. Results

Question1: how much vocabulary do you need to use another language?

Participant 1: in my opinion a language learner at least should know about 1000 words to understand it first then use it.

Participant 2: if you know around 500 words and can use it actively I would say its enough for beginning

Participant 3: I think 900 words are enough to hold a basic conversation.

Question2: is it possible to improve vocabulary learning by playing videogames?

Participant 1: yes. It is a fun and entertaining way to learn new words and use them in real life.

Participant 2: it depends whether language learner is willing to play video games or not.

Participant 3: of course. I learned a lot of new word by playing games with a rich story.

Result: based on participants responses video game could be a motivating tool for learning new language.

Question 3: which one of these game genres would you choose to play as an EFL learner? A) racing B) sports C) adventure

Result: All participants chose c) adventure

Question 4: what are your reasons for your choice in the previous question?

Participant 1: I'm an adventure fan. There's usually a compelling story which lasts until the end of the game that keeps me engaged and focused on choices I make along the way.

Participant 2: I chose adventure because in adventure games sometimes I have the ability to change the outcomes by following different path or choosing a different dialogue.

Participant 3: As an EFL learner I find it useful to play adventure games since they provide a simulation of an English environment with many dialogues and choices that could affect the ending story.

Result: participants showed interest in adventure games and their appealing journey

Question5: is it better to play video game with subtitles or without, regarding language learning?

Participant 1: I prefer to play games with subtitles because at the end of chapter I may have to make a choice and I want to understand every word spoken. If I don't follow and understand subtitles, I might lose important clues.

Participant 2: I always leave subtitles on, there's a lot of words and dialogues exchanged between main characters and NPCs that I want to remember and use in real life.

Participant 3: it's better to play with subtitles on, you most of the time get to see a visual representation of what is being said in subtitles. in this way I memorize new words better.

Result: based on participants' answers using subtitles help to visualize and learn new materials

Question 6: what differentiates subtitles in video games from subtitles in other media like movies for you, regarding vocabulary learning?

Participant 1: subtitles in games unlike other media are interactive we are not there to just observe, you might have to choose from presented options in games to progress and you want a certain outcome so you have to pay attention to dialogues and words in subtitles to select desired option or follow a certain rule to get to finish line.

Participant 2: we should pay attention to words said orally and written in subtitles to do the tasks which the game asks from us. I think we value words that are helpful to overcome tangible obstacles, in other media we are passive and cannot impact anything.

Participant 3: I believe one feature of games is repetition in a way that often time won't be boring and makes you aware of your actions. We don't like to listen to the same dialogue or subtitle over and over in a media like a tv program. But in games we are eager to progress so seeing and thinking about a repeated subtitle won't bother us.

Result: participants considered videogame's subtitles as an interactive tool to experiment with language materials.

7. Discussion:

One issue in an environment where English is learned as a foreign language is lack of authentic contexts and situations to practice the new language. Video games provide a situation to interact with the new language and its materials. Exploiting subtitles of video games can be considered as a helpful tool to enhance learning a new language specifically vocabulary learning where learners and players have to understand the given words and options in order to progress through game. Teachers in EFL classrooms could encourage students to use different tools like, subtitles in video games as an option to improve and use the foreign language in their homeland. videogames are attractive to learners especially youth, because of many factors like their visuals, narratives, and gameplay. Current study was conducted in a small scale including 20 male participants in order to generalize the findings it is suggested to conduct the research with more subjects and using quantitative data.

8. Conclusion:

To summarize, the utilization of subtitles in video games could be considered as a functional tool in vocabulary acquisition and language learning. Subtitles provide players with written support for verbal dialogues, sound effects, and other audio elements, thereby enhancing comprehension and facilitating vocabulary growth. Through exposure to game-specific terminology and language in a contextualized environment, players are able to enrich their vocabulary and improve their language skills while engaging in immersive gaming experiences.

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