

## **Videogames: A Superior Tool in Teacher's Kit**

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### **Abstract**

Language learners generally encounter a set of problems in the cumbersome journey of learning a new language. One of the most pivotal problems language learners have to get along with is the cultural differences between first language and second language. Scholars believe that for learning language aptly, practitioners should concentrate on the cultural aspects of L2 language. Unfortunately, the classroom has its own limitation. For instance, teachers do not have enough time to allocate to these cultural differences appropriately, they may not have enough knowledge regarding the culture of L2, or even sometimes they are biased and do not reflect these cultural differences appropriately. Recent studies show that there is a growing interest in language learners for understanding cultural differences realistically. One of the current tools available to operationalize this recent interest is videogames. Videogames can provide a virtual situation not only where students can attend to these cultural differences, but where they can participate in a given atmosphere and stay with it for a while. To gather data, six Iranian EFL language learners who were well acquainted with videogames were interviewed. The results of this study indicated that learners who benefited from videogames believed that videogames were a superior tool through which language learners could experience true cultural differences. Moreover, after participating in those cultural differences they can make unbiased decisions about the second language. What is more, languages learners feel these cultural differences subconsciously, which allows learners to tolerate L2 cultural differences more optimally than in the typical situation. The result also shows that videogames can be a new method for minimizing the cultural shock between two languages.

### **Introduction:**

Videogames have been identified with several cultural disadvantages, videogames, namely, addiction, increased aggression, medical and psychological issues. Nevertheless, investigations indicate that videogames have their own merits. Tellingly, videogames can promote learners' reaction-time, hand-eye coordination, and self-esteem. In a

parallel vein, they can enhance a learners' sense of curiosity and fun, as well as being a challenge. Intriguingly, one of the very unique aspects of videogames is causing learners to allocate more time for their learning experience owing to the "edutainment: of these games" (Griffiths, 2002) [3]. In recent years, designers have created far better games with a highly improved sound and graphics. What is more, the expansion and development of videogames goes further every day. For instance, today's games are immensely improved in comparison to "Pacman" a game that was produced three or four decades ago. Nonetheless, the fundamental traits of games have not changed drastically. Like several decades ago, games can be classified into simulation, role play, sports, puzzle, and adventure. Role play games can vary from playing the role of a pilot of an F-14 to leading the development of a civilized society (*Civilization, Age of Empires, Alpha Centauri*), players can also participate in fantasy role play (Final Fantasy VIII), (Squire, 2003) [10].

### **Literature review:**

#### **Game: Drill and Practice**

The computer generally has been used in the educational context as a supporting and facilitating tool for both the practice and drill of factual recall (Jonassen, 1988) [6]. Drill-based and practice-based games namely, *Alga-Blaster, Reader Rabbit*, or even *Knowledge Munchers* have been so widespread due to easy adaptability to traditional as well as didactic curriculum "enrichment exercises." One of the best kinds of drill and practice game is the "action" genre of videogames that can enormously enhance a learner's participation (Bowman 1982; Malone 1980) [1,7]. Few investigations have been conducted to find out whether the aforementioned games are effective or not. Nonetheless, there are some reasons that can support why a well-designed videogame leads to a far better learning than a non-computer based one (Clark, 1983) [2]. While drill-based and practice-based games can have a pivotal role in learning, and their atmosphere is like problem-based learning (Savery & Duffy , 1995) [9], i.e., using videogames to underpin students' inquiries about micro-words or being used as a calculation tool (Papert 1980; Reiber, 1996) [8] is more prevalent with the upcoming paradigm of instruction.

#### **Simulation and Strategy games:**

In contrast with games, which abstain from using actual world rules to use their own rules, simulation games are designed to be highly adaptable to reality (Heinich et al., 1996) [4]. Simulation games try to make a system that is similar to physical and social systems by taking advantage of another symbol system, like the computer interface.

Thiagarjan (1988) [11] made a distinction between high and low fidelity simulation. High-fidelity versions of simulations try to imitate every possible interaction of its model, while the low-fidelity ones attempt to imitate only the key traits of its model. Owing to the extravagant cost of high-fidelity version, it is mainly being used in actual activity that is either cost-prohibitive or too dangerous, namely, for training pilots. The military sometimes take advantage of these games by releasing them to the market as an entertainment or software (Herz, 1997) [5]. The high-fidelity version simulates every possible action players should do ,but the low-fidelity version has an edge over the high-fidelity one in terms of providing the main components of a system with a lower cost (Squire, 2003) [10].

### **CULTURAL LEARNING**

It is incumbent upon learners to learn cultural knowledge, since this knowledge in a far broader sense is synonymous to their pragmatic competence that must embrace interpretations, schemata, and scripts of a specific culture. Tschirner (2001) [13], maintains that” language is a cultural product. In the multicultural societies of the information age, intercultural understanding and appropriate cross-cultural behavior are likely to become essential skills for all humans.” (8). Hence, to learn cultural knowledge and its analytical reasoning can play a role very similar to the acquisition of functional competency. Learning cultural knowledge can be helped with video documents. Nonetheless, pictures and photos cannot be considered as a suitable aid for providing enough experience to find out an in depth knowledge of the culture of the target language. Tschirner (2001)[13] further ,asserts that “human action, mimic and gesture, etc. have to be seen if one wants to gain insights about the semiotic systems representative of another culture.” (8). Due to human interaction’s pace and also, its complexity, technological software and hardware that can decrease the communicative behavior of human being and is capable of concentrating on these various traits can be very helpful. By each repetition, a body of signs can be sorted out to catch a learner’s attention so that he can learn.

### **Methodology:**

The participants of this study were Six Iranian EFL language learners who have had experience with videogames. Their proficiency level ranged from elementary to intermediate based upon Oxford Placement Test (2007). They were all male and their age ranged from 16 to 23. They all have played videogames in different genres for at least three years. They were all interviewed to find out how effective videogames can be for teaching culture.

### **Data analysis:**

#### **Advantages of learning culture through videogames:**

One of the most crucial strategies that can improve students’ language learning is being attuned to their knowledge of the target language culture. Nonetheless, there are some restrictions in classrooms. Additionally, it is virtually impossible to learn a language without its culture. In addition, even if learners do learn a language, the learner often is not capable of getting along with the different contexts in the target language.

**Reza:** “I like to learn the L2 culture through videogames. There are many reasons why I would like to learn it via videogames; one of them is the quality of videogames in offering L2 culture, videogames provide a virtual world that is very similar to L2 culture. I believe that it is impossible to teach culture in classrooms, since culture is far more complicated than few pictures and a general oral description.”

By noticing to above-mentioned sentences, it can be inferred that videogames can provide a very similar situation to the real L2 culture. What is more, videogames use the most current technology for teaching a new culture, which can encourage students to learn more efficiently, because it is very interesting. In addition, culture is more complex than few pictures, and it is very hard for students to become acquainted with L2 culture by benefiting from classroom atmosphere.

**Sadegh:** “In my opinion, it is ridiculous for me to teach culture within the classroom context. There are limitations in classrooms. For instance, the majority of cultural differences cannot even be mentioned in a classroom, because the norms of different societies vary according to their beliefs, but videogames do not have such limitations.”

Based upon what mentioned by Sadegh, it can be concluded that even mentioning some of the cultural differences within classroom context is prohibited. Besides, the norms for one culture can be considered strange or ridiculous for another culture owing to the different perspectives.

**Mehdi:** “As far as I know, the classroom has its own limitations, but, learning language via videogames is very amusing and intriguing. In addition, videogames offer a culture as it is, and simply put, they are not biased. Additionally, videogames facilitate the process of students’ participation because of their edutainment nature. ”

Based upon what was mentioned by Mehdi, it can be understood that learning a language using videogames is interesting because of the atmosphere they provide for learning. In addition, the edutainment nature of videogames stimulates learners to participate more in cultural learning. Moreover, videogames present the L2 culture in unbiased manner. What is more, according to flow theory, the optimal environment for the maximum participation is offered by videogames, in which students are sustained between boredom and enthusiasm. In addition, the edutainment essence of videogames promotes students’ participation.

**Hadi:** “In my experience, videogames are the best way for learning new materials, history, and culture. One of the benefits that can be ascribed to videogames is teaching material implicitly, or put it in a nut shell, videogames provide a situation where students can experience learning, which in my opinion, has a more relationship to my mind, and due to their discovery-based traits, videogames can create an atmosphere where learners can experience not only the most basic feature of a culture but its most detailed ingredients. “

According to what mentioned by Hadi, videogames can make learning possible when typical educational contexts cannot due to time and budget restrictions. What is more, in SLA principles (second language acquisition), scholars emphasize the importance of implicit learning for learning languages successfully. In addition, the idea of learning culture implicitly offers room for language learners to first learn the general characteristics of one culture, and in the next phase, learn the L2 culture in a detail.

**Navid:** “I believe that videogames are a useful tool for learning a new language as well as a culture. One of the rare features that most videogames are imbued with is the motivation they provide for language learner both intrinsically and extrinsically. In my own experience, accomplishing each phase of a game can promote a learner’s self-confidence that can help them for being successful in other spheres of their lives. “

From what Navid stated above, it can be extrapolated that videogames provide motivation either intrinsically or extrinsically or even both. Scholars in the realms of motivation have ascertained that if learning is a car, then motivation is as influential as an engine or fuel for movement. Moreover, some other ingredients for successful learning can be observed in videogames, namely self-confidence, which plays a crucial role in learning as well as daily life.

**Ali:** “I like videogames, and I believe that they can be considered as a way for teaching new materials, especially culture; one of the unique aspects of videogames is learning subconsciously, which can ease learning the target language culture. Also, videogames are story-based, which facilitates remembering cultural details.”

From what Ali mentioned, it can be inferred that the subconscious trait of videogames can entice language learners to embrace the target language culture, though, there are differences between L1 and L2 culture, owing to different norms every society has for itself. Besides, the story-based essence of these games allows language learners to make a connection between different instructions from the most general to the most specific. In effect, videogames help language learners remember the cultural norms of a particular society for a longer period of time.

### **Conclusion:**

It is argued that learning a new language is actually learning a new culture. Without learning the culture of a particular language, language learners are not capable of communicating successfully. The data analysis of this study indicates that, in the view of students, videogames can provide a situation where they can engage in learning a culture of a new language enthusiastically. Due to the complexity of culture, it is not possible to teach a new culture only by pictures. Videogames offer different high quality video and multimedia. Moreover, they allow language learners to attend to the new culture virtually and feel the L2 culture. Videogames through their intriguing atmosphere can persuade language learners to maximum participation. Additionally, it is believed that videogames can teach the L2 culture in an unbiased way. Furthermore, since videogames teach the L2 culture subconsciously, the influence of students' first language ego is minimized. Finally, from the students' perspective, videogames can enhance other learning principles, including motivation and self-confidence.

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