THE EFFECTS OF PLAYING ONLINE GAMES ON STIMULATING SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AMONG EFL STUDENTS IN SAUDI ARABIA

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the effects of playing online games on stimulating second language acquisition among EFL students in Saudi Arabia. The absolute number of participants represents 34 EFL students who voluntarily do an online questionnaire. Whereas three of these participants are chosen to be observed and interviewed voluntarily as well. Findings show that online games cause notable effects on stimulating second language acquisition. Especially, on the four skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. These effects vary from one EFL student to another, depending on playing time, types of games, and student's age and English level.

KEYWORDS: online games; language acquisition; EFL students; Saudi Arabia

1. INTRODUCTION

Today online games are mostly found in every house in the world, more than five hundred million people are playing online games [1]. However, in 2020 which is known as Corona Year. This remarkable year affects life aspects in terms of health, entertainment, and education. Governments are forced to quarantine, and a lot of local facilities shut down. Families are locked down in their houses for their safety, which means more free time. Youth and children consume their time playing online games and watching TV. Online games play a significant role in young people's lives. It is hard recently to find, for instance, a Saudi house that does not play or try online games.

Moreover, it is worth mentioning that most of the games in the industry are in English. That is because English is an international language, and most of the students worldwide are studying it as a foreign language. Furthermore, Wyngaert states that "Most games that are available on the market are in English, and for most gamers, this English is as a Foreign Language (EFL)" [2, p. 12]. From this concept, a plethora of research has been done to investigate the effectiveness of online games in second language acquisition. For example, Al- jifri and Elyas [3] conduct a study among five young males to explore the impact of online games on language acquisition. The instruments of the research are observation and interview. The finding shows that language acquisition via video games is a valid process because motivation represents an inner-born desire and is not gained from external incentives.

Video games represent an excellent example of producing positive environments which are full of motivation to adopt a foreign language. Without forgetting that pronunciation and vocabulary are the most beneficial zones in language learning [4]. Berns et al., think that online games might have a practical effect on students' writing and grammatical accuracy, as well as increase their communicative competence. Berns et al., attribute the results to online games because it encourages learners to communicate with their classmates [5]. Moreover, Iaremenko reports [6] that using online games foster student intrinsic motivation and assist learners to engage in the learning activity. Furthermore, games are beneficial in vocabulary learning. They promote learners' ability to memorize words, encourage student interaction, improve their communication skills, and reinforce students' motivation [7]

On the other hand, some argue that games do not upgrade to the level that helps students' second language acquisition. For example, DeHaan et al., made [8] a study to investigate the effect of interactivity with a music video game on second language vocabulary recall. Eighty undergraduates from a computer science university in rural Japan participated. The participants' first language is Japanese. They divide them into two groups' first team plays the game. The second group only watch the game. The finding shows that both the players and the watchers manage to recall vocabularies, however, the watchers are higher in results. Jacobs also as cited in [2, p. 24] "It is revealed that digit-language leads to interference in the use of EFL. As observed by myself in the classroom, many students often make the mistake of writing words down phonetically on tests, or in informal settings. Students will, for example, write down you as a u"

This paper introduced some papers on the effectiveness of online games in stimulating English as a second language. The significance of this study rises from that view. In other words, the significance of this study can contribute to the development of Saudi education thorough giving recommendations in terms of teaching English in schools and universities as a second language. The research goal is to explore the effects of playing online games on stimulating second language acquisition among EFL students in Saudi Arabia. By answering the research question: What are the effects of playing online games on stimulating second language acquisition among EFL students in Saudi Arabia?

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This section involves the theoretical background of language acquisition, online games, and the theoretical framework that is used in this paper. Language acquisition is the study that represents how children acquire their first language(s) [9]

Several theories over the years try to explore the process of language acquisition. There are three primary theories on language acquisition: Skinner's theory, Chomsky's theory, and Krashen's theory. According to Krashen's theory acquisition needs meaningful interaction in the target language. The main concern of learners is not with the form of their utterances but with the messages they are transforming and comprehension [10]. According to Krashen learning and acquisition are distinct from

one another. To elaborate on that, learning is associated with the classroom environment while acquisition accrues more in natural settings. Language acquisition considers the subconscious growth of language which contains place as a finding of interaction and input. While language learning is the outcome of direct rules and guidance of the language.

The theoretical framework is Krashen's theory. Krashen's language acquisition theory has five hypotheses: two of these hypotheses are employed to analyze the observation and the interview results of this study (the acquisition/learning hypothesis and the input hypothesis). Because these hypotheses are the closest to this research.

Online Games can be played over a network which allows two or more players in many locations to participate and play together. There are numerous kinds of online games: adventure, sports, wars, cooking, and intelligent games. Moreover, Online games include impressive features which grasp the players' minds. One of those features is the way of communication: verbally or by typing. The player has the choice to play on a privet set with his/her friends or to play on an open set. Plus, the playing style could be solo, duo, or multiple. Lastly, several games allow the player to select the geographic zone s/he wants to play in, for example, the Middle East. Besides, the design of the game gamers gives absolute priority to sound and picture quality. Simple language is required to complete missions. Because the player is looking forward to playing and competing with another player. Music inside the game should arrange and move depending on the mood of the mission, for example, in the game Dark Soul.

When the price of the game is expensive, not many players will be capable of buying or downloading the game. So, the price of the game must be affordable. In addition to that, online gamers are constantly searching for famous games in the industry. What makes an online game famous is the game company's reputation among other gamers, for instance, RockStar. This American company has sold the best games like, Grand Theft and Red Dead. Additionally, multiple companies ask some notable gamers to promote the game. Those notable gamers have YouTube channels where they upload several episodes dedicated to this game. One of the most famous online gamers on YouTube is PewDiePie. He is a youthful Swedish man and he communicates with his followers in English. PewDiePie has 107 million subscribers on his YouTube channel. Many foreign players around the world watch his English episode about their favorite games. Other remarkable game companies arrange global contests like Phase Klein in the game Call of Duty. Players must be excellent in English to enter this competition, which is one of the key conditions. In order to uniform the language between the foreign players.

3. METHODS

Thirty-four EFL learners from multiple schools in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Those participants voluntarily do an online questionnaire. Whereas three of these participants intentionally are selected to be observed and interviewed. The chosen participants are two girls and a boy. Their ages are 12, 14, and 17 years old, respectively. They are government school students. There are three fundamental

reasons beyond selecting those three EFL learners. First, they represent various educational stages (i.e., primary, intermediate, and secondary). Second, large observation is not available because of the current situation in the Kingdome (COVID-19) education has shifted to e-learning and schools are closed. Third, the researcher lives in the same environment as those selected ones.

Due to the current situation, Covid-19 an online questionnaire is conducting. It consists of 13 questions. The researcher designs an Arabic questionnaire to make it suitable for the participants' comprehension. However, item numbers (3, 4, 5, 6, and 7) are borrowed and translated from Poštić & Rudis's questionnaire [4]. Furthermore, an interview is also done in Arabic for the three participants. The questionnaire results are examined mathematically by the application SurveyMonkey. Whereas the observation and the interview are tested by Krashen language acquisition theory.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
4.1. The questionnaire results
Thirty- four EFL learners between males and females have answered the online questionnaire. The first question is about the student's educational stage. Those learners vary in their educational stage. To demonstrate, 48% are intermediate students, followed by 40% for secondary students. Primary students merely represent 13%, while three participants skipped this question. In Figure 2. Shows that 53% of EFL students believe that learning English is essential for online games. While 9% think vice versa.

Skipped: 0   Answered: 34

نعم	53%	18
لا	9%	3
احياناً	38%	13
لا اعلم	0%	0

Figure 2: Do you think learning English is essential for online games?

In Figure 3. Seventy-four percent agree that online games are helpful when it comes to learning English, and 6 % think it is not.

Skipped: 0 Answered: 34

🟩	نعم	74%	25
🟦	لا	6%	2
🟨	أحياناً	18%	6
🟦	لا أعلم	3%	1

Figure 3: Do you think online games help to learn the English language?

In Figure 4. Half of the participants assume that online games assist them with their English skills. Followed by 18 % who think that online games improve their speaking. While vocabulary gains 15%, and 9 % select reading skills. One student select reading and writing.

Skipped: 0 Answered: 34

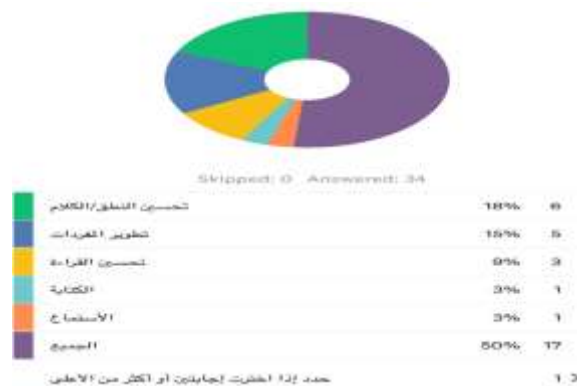|			
🟩	تحسين النطق/الكلام	18%	6
🟦	تطوير المفردات	15%	5
🟨	تحسين القراءة	9%	3
🟦	الكتابة	3%	1
🟧	الأستماع	3%	1
🟪	الجميع	50%	17
	حدد إذا اخترت إجابتين أو أكثر من أعلى		1 >

Figure 4: How do online games help to Learn English?

In Figure 5. Around 60% play adventure games, and 24% play action games. Where 9% play football games and others play investigation and smart games.
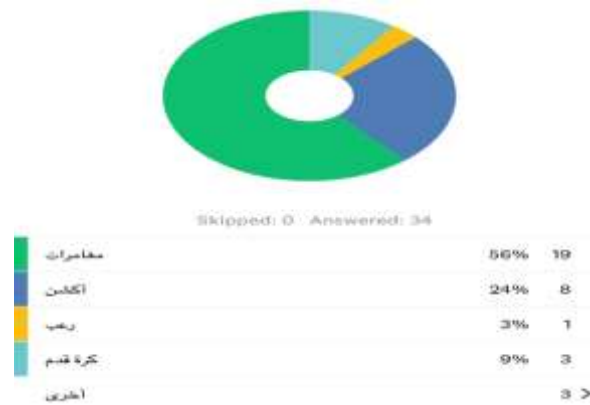
مغامرات	56%	19
أكشن	24%	8
رعب	3%	1
كرة قدم	9%	3
أخرى		3 >

Skipped: 0   Answered: 34

Figure 5: What types of online games do you play?

In Figure 6. Fifty percent spend one hour to three hours playing online games. While only 9% spend more than six hours.

ساعة	35%	12
ساعة إلى ثلاث ساعات	50%	17
٣ ساعات إلى ٦ ساعات	6%	2
أكثر من ٦ ساعات	9%	3

Skipped: 0   Answered: 34

Figure 6: How much time do you spend on online games?

In Figure 7. Thirty-five percent admit that they sometimes speak similarly to a character in a video game. While 15% say no.

Skipped: 0   Answered: 34

نعم		18%	6
لا		15%	5
احيانأ		35%	12
لم أنتبه لهذا الأمر		32%	11

Figure 7: Have you ever noticed that, while speaking English, you speak similarly to a character in a video game?

In Figure 8. Twenty-six percent of the participants look for the word meaning on the internet and likewise, use a translator. Whereas 6% choose to ignore the word.

Skipped: 0   Answered: 34

أبحث عن المعنى في الأنترنت		26%	9
أستخدم المترجم		26%	9
أسأل من له خبرة		18%	6
أخمن المعنى من سياق الجملة		24%	8
أتجاهل الكلمة		6%	2

Figure 8: What do you do when you come across a difficult word?

In Figure 9. 29% think that yes poor English negatively affects the game mood. Whereas 26% think it is not.

نعم		29%	10
لا		26%	9
أحياناً		32%	11
لا أعلم		12%	4

Figure 9: Do you think poor English negatively affects the game mode?

In Figure 10. Forty-one percent of the EFL students say no. However, 9% say yes.

نعم		9%	3
لا		41%	14
أحياناً		38%	13
لا أعلم		12%	4

Figure 10: Do you think playing online games in English is easier than playing in Arabic?

In Figure 11. More than 70 % say yes, that the features and the design of online games help them to develop their English and 3% state no

نعم		74%	25
لا		3%	1
أحياناً		18%	6
لا أعلم		6%	2

Figure 11: Do you think designing online games and the special features they present from excellent graphic, nice music, exciting missions, and the ability to communicate verbally or writing enhance the player`s English language development?

In Figure 12. Near 70 % think developing English is important to communicate with foreign players to organize the playing style or just for cognitive contact, whereas 3 % say no.

نعم	68%	23
لا	3%	1
أحياناً	24%	8
لا أعلم	6%	2

Figure 12: Do you think developing English is important to communicate with foreign players to organize the playing style or just for cognitive contact?

In Figure 13 Forty-four declare that their English somehow has improved, followed by 41% say yes. While 9% say no.

نعم	41%	14
لا	9%	3
نوعاً ما	44%	15
لا أعلم	6%	2

Figure 13: Do you think your English has improved after online games?

4.2. The observation results

The observed participants are coded according to their first letter and age as M17, J14, and N12 in order to protect their privacy. The researcher is familiar with the participants' English level. Because she has worked as an English teacher, and she used to teach them English. Plus, the research observes their participation in their EFL online classes and looks at their quiz grades in English classes.

Table1: observation results

Participants	Observation results			
	Time	Communication	Kind of games	English level
M17	5 hours	Orally	-football -war	Very good
J14	3 hours	Orally	-beauty -cooking -investigation	Excellent
N12	2 hours	writing	-war -investigation	Good

The analysis of the observation is tested based on the acquisition/learning hypothesis. Acquiring a second language is possible in this atmosphere. In other words, it is not guided or controlled with instructions like a classroom. Indeed, this atmosphere is rich with interaction in the target language (English). That is because most of the games which are played by gamers are fully designed in English for example Call of Duty. The participants contact verbally in English with other gamers by saying some statements such hold your position, teams please I need help. Even if the observed player contacts an Arab player, the English language is still an apparent figure in their communication. For instance, when M17 plays Call of Duty with his friends he depends on code-switching in his oral communication like عطوه headshot i.e., give him a headshot. The same applies to J14. However, N12 prefers writing. N12 prefers typing when she is playing Among Us. She would write sentences like, I'm not the killer it is blue I swear, or hi I am from Saudi Arabia nice to meet you.

The interview questions are taken from the questionnaire. Those questions are (3, 4, 8, 9, and 11). The interview is analyzed based on the input hypothesis i+1. According to Krashen, the input is a message that students can understand. For this to happen the input must be slightly above the student's current level. This hypothesis appears clearly in the participants' answers. To elaborate, all participants state positively that online games help them with their English. Indeed, in gaining new words, correct pronunciation, and spelling. M17 mentions that when he comes across a known word, he tries to guess its meaning from the context. The same applies to J14 and N12 who try to determine the meaning of the word from the context but when they could not, they use an e-dictionary for example, Google Translator. They believe that game design is also important, and it motivates them to improve their English. So, (i) is the participant's current level and when s/he faces a new language challenge. S/he tries to overcome it. After success, s/he will gain new knowledge (+1). They also admit by watching foreign you-tubers gamers like Ninja they gain some new vocabulary and know how to pronounce some words correctly. These answers to the interview are similar to the questionnaire results. To demonstrate, more than 70% of EFL learners think that online games assist them with their English skills. The game design also enhances the players to develop their English. Thanks to excellent graphics, nice music, and communication options.

From the obtained results it is possible to declare that more than 50% of EFL learners think learning English is significant in online games. Seventy-four percent believe online games help them to expand their English skills like reading, writing, etc. That is logical because 50% of them play from one hour to three hours per day. Furthermore, around 70 % believe that English must be improved to play successfully in a game or to contact foreign players. Moreover, 35 % admit they sometimes imitate some characters' speaking styles. While the majority of EFL students choose not to turn their back when they face unfamiliar terms. That is equally noted in the observed participants. The players tend to perform better in the game and to be the best players. This desire motivates the players to improve their English for the sake to contact foreign players or to arrange the game. Therefore, it is possible to state that the participants in this study confirm that their English has enhanced thanks to online games. The effects on stimulating second language acquisition of the four skills are notable but it varies from one EFL learner to another according to the results. The researcher attributes this to playing time, the kinds of games, and the student's age and English level. The results are in line with other similar studies [3], [4]. Lastly, it seems that YouTube comes hand in hand with online games as a helping tool for language acquisition. This requires further investigation in future studies.

5. Conclusion and prospects for future research

To conclude, this paper aims to explore the effects of playing online games on stimulating second language acquisition among EFL students in Saudi Arabia. The results show that online games can stimulate second language acquisition among EFL students in Saudi Arabia. The participants admit that online games enhance their vocabulary and speaking skills. Besides, YouTube appears to come hand in hand with online games in developing English among EFL students in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The researcher recommends that the Ministry of Education include more educational apps in English classes that teachers and students can get benefit from, and make the students present and talk about their favorite online games in class. Moreover, for future papers increase the size of the sample and focus for instance on one online game and its impact on language acquisition among EFL learners.

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