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| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Enhancing Teachers' Competency In Using Video Games To Boost Students' English Vocabulary And Learning Motivation

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| ABSTRACT

In Vietnam, a significant number of university and college students are avid gamers, leading the author to recognize the potential of video games in motivating them to learn English. However, there is limited research on teachers' perspectives in this area. Hence, the author decides to conduct action research to explore how teachers can enhance their skills to effectively incorporate video games into their classes. This study involved 16 teachers and 24 students from the author's school. The teachers were surveyed through interviews and questionnaires, while the students were tasked with playing a selected video game. Combining the teachers' feedback with the author's observations of student progress yielded satisfactory results. The findings demonstrated that there was a substantial change in the students' vocabulary learning performance and increased motivation between the pre- and post-tests. The results of this study suggest that using video games in English classrooms can improve students' motivation and glossary achievements among Vietnamese university students.

1. Introduction

The term "Technology in language teaching" garners significant attention from researchers, with modern technology playing a crucial role in creating learning environments. Without some form of technology, the learning environment may be considered "limited and artificial" (Chun, Kern, and Smith, 2016). Previous studies have emphasized the importance and benefits of integrating video games into foreign language teaching and learning. They are recognized as a valuable tool for enhancing students' vocabulary acquisition and motivating them to study English (Alyaz & Genc, 2016; Ebrahimzadeh & Alavi, 2017; Reinders, 2012; Soyoof & Jokar, 2014; Vadhat & Behbahani, 2013). Consequently, the author undertook action research to identify the skills teachers require to effectively integrate video games into their lessons. The integration of video games into educational settings is a novel concept globally, lacking empirical support. In Vietnam, societal perceptions of video games often hinder policymakers and educators from incorporating them into lessons. Existing research indicates that video games have a significant impact on young people, facilitating vocabulary acquisition and language skill improvement. Vocabulary acquisition is crucial in second language learning, yet many learners struggle with it, resorting to rote memorization. Despite governmental efforts to reform English language education in Vietnam, issues persist, particularly among university students who exhibit limited interest and proficiency in English. Teachers play a pivotal role in students' language learning experiences, yet many lack the skills to effectively utilize video games as teaching aids. The writer aims to investigate how video games can motivate university students to study English and how teachers can harness this technology to enhance language learning.

2. Literature Review
2.1 Vocabulary Acquisition Strategies
Wilkins (1972) emphasized the fundamental role of vocabulary in language learning, stating that "without grammar, very little can be conveyed; without vocabulary, nothing can be conveyed" (as cited in Alqahtani, 2015; Lessard-Clouston, 2013; Min, 2013). Vocabulary serves as the cornerstone of language acquisition, facilitating communication and language proficiency. Even with a strong grasp of grammatical structures, learners struggle to express themselves without a sufficient vocabulary repertoire (Alqahtani, 2015). In Vietnam, students typically commence English studies in Grade Six, accumulating seven years of experience from their university. Despite their familiarity with grammatical structures, students encounter difficulties in English communication primarily due to limited vocabulary. While they recognize vocabulary deficiency as a major hurdle, they lack effective strategies for improvement. Vocabulary also significantly influences other language skills, including reading, listening, writing, and speaking (Min, 2013). Courses allocate considerable time to vocabulary instruction as it underpins students' performance in language tests (Schmitt, 1999, as cited in Alqahtani, 2015). Consequently, improved vocabulary performance correlates with higher overall marks, reflecting students' language proficiency. Various techniques have been proposed to facilitate vocabulary learning and teaching. Common strategies in Vietnam include dictionary use for meaning and pronunciation acquisition, albeit with limitations in pronunciation clarity and contextual understanding (Min, 2013). Contextual guessing emerges as an effective strategy, particularly when encountering unfamiliar words in texts or conversations (Walter, 2006, as cited in Teng, 2014). Visual illustrations, encompassing real objects, pictures, gestures, and facial expressions, aid in reinforcing word meanings but may struggle with abstract or complex concepts. Additional strategies such as word form deductions, linking to prior knowledge, and organizing vocabulary journals enhance vocabulary retention (Cook, 2016; Alqahtani, 2015; Min, 2013). Teachers should consider students' preferred learning styles and adapt their instruction accordingly to optimize learning outcomes.

2.2 Motivation's Impact on Learning
Motivation, which drives and sustains human behavior, is pivotal in language teaching (Salvin, 2001; Woolfolk, 1998, as mentioned in Rehman et al., 2014; Schunk, Meece, & Pintrich, 2013). Learners with strong motivation tend to perform better than those lacking motivation (Vibulphol, 2016), highlighting its crucial role in language learning success. Motivation can compensate for deficiencies in EFL settings (Anjomshoa & Sadighi, 2015). It can be categorized as intrinsic or extrinsic, with some learners being internally driven by interest and enjoyment, while others are motivated externally by rewards or punishments (Deci & Ryan, 1985, as noted in Ciampa, 2013). To enhance intrinsic motivation, teachers must consider factors such as challenge, curiosity, and control (Malone & Lapper, 1987, as cited in Ciampa, 2013). Offering choices and stimulating curiosity through sensory stimuli can foster autonomy and intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985, as cited in Ciampa, 2013; Pintrich, 2002, as mentioned in Su & Cheng, 2014). Additionally, external factors like cooperation, competition, and recognition play a significant role in boosting learners' morale and extrinsic motivation (Ciampa, 2013). In second language learning, motivation can be instrumental or integrative, driven by practical reasons or a desire to understand language and culture (Gardner & Lambert, 1972, as cited in Flores, 2015). Teachers must employ diverse motivational strategies tailored to learners' needs and contexts. While intrinsic motivation is often preferred, external rewards can be effective, especially in less enjoyable activities (Anjomshoa & Sadighi, 2015). Teachers must adapt their motivational approaches to different age groups and preferences, using challenging tasks for adults and enjoyable activities for younger learners.

2.3 Integration of Video Games in Language Teaching
In recent decades, digital video games (referred to as DVGs) have become ubiquitous in the lives of both young people and adults (Sáez-López et al., 2015; Turkay et al., 2014). Commercially successful DVGs possess characteristics that can be beneficial for language learners (Woo, 2014). Numerous studies have highlighted the advantages of using DVGs in education, particularly in foreign language learning (Alyaz & Genc, 2016; Ebrahimzadeh & Alavi, 2017; Reinders, 2012; Soyoof & Jokar, 2014; Vadhat & Behbahani, 2013). One significant advantage is the ability of DVGs to enhance learners' motivation, as they often incorporate intrinsic and extrinsic motivational components (Malone & Lapper, 1987, as cited in Ciampa, 2013). DVGs offer customizable difficulty levels, allowing players to choose challenges that maintain their interest (Reinders, 2012). Games like The Witcher series and Minecraft provide players with autonomy and creativity, fostering self-study behaviors essential for language learning (Reinders, 2012). Multiplayer online games promote collaboration and healthy competition among players, while the anonymity of DVGs reduces anxiety and boosts self-confidence (Soyoof & Jokar, 2014). Interactivity within DVGs facilitates vocabulary acquisition, especially in simulation games like The Sims series, where players engage in conversations and complete tasks requiring language use (Vadhat & Behbahani, 2013). Immediate feedback in DVGs aids vocabulary learning, allowing teachers to tailor lessons to address learners' difficulties (Vadhat & Behbahani, 2013). Moreover, DVGs enhance problem-solving skills, meaningful communication, higher-order thinking, social skills, and resilience (Reinders, 2012; Soyoof & Jokar, 2014; Sáez-López et al., 2015; Turkay et al., 2014). Despite these benefits, research on teachers' perspectives regarding DVGs in the classroom is limited (Alyaz & Genc, 2016), with some teachers hesitant to incorporate video games due to generational differences, technological unfamiliarity, or concerns about negative effects (Alyaz & Genc, 2016; Sáez-López et al., 2015). To address this, training programs for pre-service teachers are recommended to familiarize them with DVGs before implementation in classrooms

(Alyaz & Genc, 2016). With advancements in technology, mobile gaming, virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), and motion-control devices offer additional possibilities for integrating games into language education.

3. Methodology
3.1 Research Design
After reviewing relevant literature and consulting with fellow researchers, the writer opts for an action research design, considering it the most suitable approach to address the research questions effectively (Lomax, 2007, as cited in Bell, 2010). Action research is chosen primarily to take proactive steps in resolving specific issues and finding solutions to identified problems (Creswell, 2012). The writer identifies vocabulary and motivation as key obstacles hindering Vietnamese university students' English learning progress and recognizes the potential of digital video games (DVGs) in addressing these challenges. Through action research, the writer aims to investigate the skills and qualifications English teachers require to integrate DVGs into their lessons successfully and analyze the implementation process.

Another reason for selecting action research is its participatory nature, allowing the writer to actively engage in the research process rather than being a passive observer (McNiff, 2017). Action research involves systematic and reflective procedures conducted by practitioner-researchers within their teaching context to enhance teaching and learning quality (Cresswell, 2010; Kuo, 2015; Vula & Saqipi, 2015). The writer intends to use action research to reflect on teaching practices, innovate teaching methods, and gain confidence in adopting new approaches.

It's important to note that action research is viewed as a cyclical and iterative process rather than a linear one (Cresswell, 2012; Smith, 2017). The writer aligns with Mill's (2011) dialectic action research spiral model, where each step—identifying focus areas, data collection, analysis, interpretation, and action planning—interconnects and influences one another. However, the writer anticipates challenges in gaining approval from fellow teachers and the administration to participate in the project, given societal perceptions of video games as time-wasting and unsuitable for educational purposes. Additionally, communication with students is crucial to ensure they understand the purpose of using video games as a tool for English language learning.

3.2 The sample population
In this study, the focus is on enhancing the quality of vocabulary teaching and motivational techniques for university lecturers, with the primary teaching environment being the writer's own university classes. While the writer also teaches at language centers, the university setting allows for more flexibility in syllabus design and provides longer class durations, typically ranging from 45 to 60 periods per course. Initially intending to involve two classes of different proficiency levels totaling 60 to 70 students, the writer scaled down the research to one class due to time constraints and logistical considerations. The participants were first-year university students chosen to offer them a fresh learning experience in English, irrespective of their varying language proficiency levels.

3.3 Data collection techniques and instrument development
The data collection methods employed include classroom observations, student journals, interviews with two fellow teachers, and survey questionnaires distributed to 30 teachers via email and social media platforms. The primary focus was on observing students' progress and engagement with video games, along with gathering insights from fellow teachers regarding their vocabulary teaching methods, motivational techniques, and perceptions of integrating DVGs into their classes. The chosen video game for the study was "Romance of Three Kingdoms XI," which was selected for its simple commands and language and is suitable for players of all levels. The game's captivating storyline and character designs were considered conducive to English vocabulary learning.

Throughout the study, students were asked to play the video game for a maximum of two hours per day, with their progress and engagement levels documented in journals. Interviews with fellow teachers were conducted late at night through Skype and Facebook Messenger to accommodate their schedules, while survey questionnaires were distributed electronically to expedite data collection. However, despite initial swift responses, the response rate for the questionnaires declined over time, resulting in only two interview transcripts and 14 filled questionnaires at the time of writing the report. Despite these challenges, the writer remains optimistic about delivering meaningful results from the data collected.

4. Results and Discussion
Six weeks into the research endeavor, the writer reflects on the findings gathered from interviews and surveys conducted with fellow teachers regarding the incorporation of Digital Video Games (DVGs) in language lessons. Most surveyed teachers catered to young learners, secondary or high school students, and university students, with some commonalities observed among their students and the writer's own. Teachers identified several factors hindering students' vocabulary acquisition, including a lack of practice outside the classroom and the teaching of vocabulary out of context. They highlighted the effectiveness of visually

appealing materials like pictures and flashcards in enhancing vocabulary learning, echoing findings from previous research. Additionally, some teachers utilized gestures and facial expressions to explain abstract words, emphasizing the importance of multimodal instruction. However, only a minority of teachers mentioned using games for vocabulary teaching, often opting for educational games with simplistic gameplay and objectives. Vocabulary retention emerged as a significant challenge, with students struggling to remember even basic words shortly after learning them. Regarding assessment methods, teachers employed varied approaches, with some integrating vocabulary assessment into other skills evaluations, while others tested vocabulary separately through translation or picture-based tests. The writer emphasized the importance of assessing vocabulary in context rather than in isolation, aligning with the communicative approach to language teaching. Motivation among students was another prevalent concern, with teachers describing students as shy, reserved, or easily demotivated. They highlighted the need for diverse motivational strategies, both intrinsic and extrinsic, to engage students effectively. Despite acknowledging the potential benefits of DVGs in language learning, most teachers expressed skepticism and reluctance to incorporate them into their lessons. Concerns included fears of addiction, distraction, classroom management issues, and potential negative content in games. However, teachers recognized the visual and contextual richness of DVGs for vocabulary acquisition. The writer suggests several guidelines for teachers interested in integrating DVGs into their lessons, emphasizing the role of teachers as moderators and the need for responsible gaming practices. Additionally, teachers should carefully vet games for appropriateness and actively participate in gaming activities to facilitate student engagement and language acquisition. Overall, while the initial findings suggest the potential benefits of DVGs in language education, further research is needed to validate these claims and address the challenges identified.

5. Conclusion

The integration of video games into language teaching represents a topic of both promise and controversy, offering potential benefits across various educational contexts. Hopefully, this study was undertaken to investigate if video games might drive university students to study English vocabulary more effectively and how teachers can use this technology to improve language learning. Despite the limited scope of the current study, the writer was able to glean some insights into this subject matter. Over the course of six weeks, positive changes in students' motivation to learn English were observed, as evidenced by their enthusiasm and engagement in class activities. According to the research, video games have a considerable impact on young people's vocabulary learning and language ability enhancement. Furthermore, teachers play an important part in students' language learning experiences, yet many lack the ability to successfully use video games as teaching tools.

However, a notable limitation arose as students tended to focus more on discussing game-related topics rather than the predetermined lesson content. Several challenges were encountered throughout the research process, including the writer's transition to a new workplace, difficulties in time management, scheduling conflicts with teachers for interviews, and a low response rate to the questionnaires. Despite these obstacles, the writer takes pride in the outcomes achieved, which offer relatable and applicable insights for teachers in Vietnam. Moving forward, further exploration of this topic is warranted to address its complexities and potential benefits in greater depth.

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Appendix
Progress notes

	Proficiency	Attitude
Period 1	- Prior to introducing video games, students made spelling errors and relied on dictionaries for translations. 　• Using pictures and flashcards yielded some success, as students could infer meanings. 　• However, with videos, students tended to forget words and merely watched the content. - When video games were introduced, students exhibited unfamiliarity with the approach. - Some students doubted the educational value of games, viewing them primarily as sources of entertainment.	- Before video games: Students lacked motivation, easily distracted. - Students liked pictures and videos. - Some students enjoyed the introduction of video games, while others resisted. - Participating students were very eager to play.
Period 2	- Continued playing the game for 2 hours daily after class. - Made fewer mistakes, but not completely error-free. - Started distinguishing meanings in various contexts, such as understanding the difference between "charge your phone" and "cavalry charge".	- Reduced engagement in personal activities, although some still used their phones. - Increased time spent discussing the plot of the game during breaks. - Became more confident in asking questions.
Period 3	- Students show notable progress with minimal spelling errors, though pronunciation remains challenging. - Speech becomes more natural with intonation, although 5 or 6 students continue to face difficulties. - The writer assigns reading exercises, yielding positive outcomes with approximately 80% of students.	- Increased smiles and reduced yawning observed among students. - Students engage more in conversations with peers and show less concern about making mistakes. - Students refrain from personal distractions and follow teacher instructions diligently. - Conversations predominantly revolve around the game.
Period 4	- Spelling and pronunciation errors significantly reduced. - Demonstrated ability to use words appropriately in various contexts. - Majority of students score above 8 in reading exercises, with only three exceptions. - Increased usage of English during communication. - Persistent difficulties with challenging and lengthy words remain.	- Students display cheerful expressions, smiling and showing no signs of yawning. - Confidence in speaking with the writer and classmates. - Embrace mistakes as a natural part of the learning process without fear.