

Learning vocabulary through videogames

By

Mario Alexander Portilla Sánchez.

Advisor

Luz Marina Arias, M.A.

University of Nariño

Faculty of humanities

English and Spanish Teaching Program

San Juan de Pasto

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Resumen

Este trabajo de grado se centra en como el uso de videojuegos es útil para aprender vocabulario en Inglés. Este documento muestra la implementación de los videojuegos en clase teniendo en cuenta nuestro contexto y mostrando una propuesta didáctica para este fin. Aquí se intenta mostrar la confiabilidad de los videojuegos en el aprendizaje de vocabulario al exponer algunos estudios hechos alrededor del mundo que implementaron esta estrategia, los cuales obtuvieron buenos resultados cuando aplicaron los videojuegos en la clase de Inglés. En este estudio además, se menciona la importancia del vocabulario, se muestran algunas características de los videojuegos, su uso de forma apropiada y el planteamiento de cómo aplicarlos en clase.

Abstract

This paper focuses on how the use of videogames is helpful in learning vocabulary in English. It portrays the implementation of videogames in class making an allowance for our context and showing a didactic proposal for this aim. This paper targets to show the reliability of videogames in learning vocabulary by outlining some studies made around the world which implemented this strategy; these studies found good results when applying videogames in the English classroom. Furthermore, in this document the importance of vocabulary is mentioned. Also this dissertation shows some characteristics of videogames, the use of them in an appropriate way and the approach to apply them in class.

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Learning Vocabulary through Videogames.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Besides all the factors that form a language, such as, grammar, pronunciation, syntax, etc., one of the most important in learning a foreign language is vocabulary because through this, we have our first contact with the language. A language is first known by its vocabulary and without knowing any of it, it would be difficult to convey meaning, disabling us to express and understand what is to be communicated and what others want to communicate. Due to the importance of learning vocabulary, it is necessary to put into practice new alternatives and strategies that could help us learn new lexicon, but unfortunately sometimes it is learned as isolated words without any context, which is not the most appropriate way of learning. As Al Neyadi, 2007(as cited in Derakhshan & Khatir, 2015) says “vocabulary cannot be learnt in isolation”. In this way, the most effective strategies could be those that provide a context for learning and those which are able to provide vocabulary in a non-isolated way.

One of those strategies that could provide learners a different way of learning vocabulary is the use of video games. These provide extensive contexts and introduce learners into a story or background that could help acquire vocabulary in an easy and fast way, “Video games are potential sources of second language input” (Dehaan, Reed & Kuwada, 2010. pp. 74.)

2. JUSTIFICATION:

This research paper intends to bring insights of how video games are an important strategy for learning vocabulary, how they influence the cognition in learning and how they could be implemented in the acquisition of new vocabulary as they are attractive for students considering that the new generations of students are keen on new technologies. They are also

motivating, interactive and catch the student's attention; these are good elements in a learning strategy. The use of video games will also be important as they provide authentic language useful for the students in their real life. Derakshan and Khatir (2015) emphasize that those activities which involve learners thinking about the words, allow them to remember the target words more easily. That is why video games could be implemented in learning new vocabulary, vocabulary that would not be forgotten easily because of the way it was learnt; as Turgut and Irgin (2009) support that "a variety of second language acquisition theories and study results as well as current language teaching methodologies may support the use of videogames in ELT".

This paper includes what learning a new language is in terms of vocabulary, some strategies for learning vocabulary, the use of video games for learning new vocabulary, the characteristics of video games, the analysis of different studies related to this topic with their respective findings, and the presentation of a pedagogical implication that could be used for learning new vocabulary in our context.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW.

3.1 What is learning a language in terms of vocabulary?

When learning a new language, especially vocabulary learning, it is necessary to focus on how complex this process is, a process of conscious mental effort. Some authors affirm that the term vocabulary is "a disarmingly simple term for a complex multidimensional phenomenon" (Harley, 1996 as cited by Belisle, 2000. p.1.). It is difficult to know how our brain stores the lexicon to be used, as Lynch and Adams (2012) affirm, people do not store the vocabulary of their mother tongue as lists of words like in dictionaries, people store those words in complex network associations. Due to this, it is important that when we learn vocabulary, we should try

not to learn words in an isolated way yet learn them interrelating their meanings, or as a part of a framework or a network (Lynch & Adams 2012). Thus, in learning vocabulary we ought to put our mind to work so the learning process could have better results when applying the suggested strategy.

3.2 Some strategies for learning vocabulary.

Considering how learning was conceived in the past and how the world has evolved and most importantly education, it is a necessity that we make use of all the benefits that are in the world today in order to take advantage of these new conceptions for our learning. The new conception of teaching and learning, a conception that enables students to become autonomous and transforms teachers in mediators of learning, and the shift of how people can learn through new technologies has led us to the point where learning can be possible in many ways. In this order of ideas, the advances in technology provide a large variety of new ways of learning, and in this case, creative ways of learning new vocabulary. Consequently, there is a huge number of strategies that could be used for learning new vocabulary by implementing technology. Dalton and Grisham (2010) suggest three groups of strategies for learning vocabulary using technology:

- Word learning strategies: these strategies “focus on explicit teaching of vocabulary and helping students become independent word learners” (p.308).
- Strategic vocabulary learning and reading: the second group “focus on students being able to develop their strategic learning repertoire as they customize their own collection of supports” (p. 314).
- Incidental vocabulary learning: this final group emphasize on “strategies that help increase students’ reading and, indirectly, their vocabulary learning” (p.313).

Videogames are part of the first group, that is, word learning strategies, so they can be used as a means for learning new lexicon. In the next section there will be mentioned how video games could be used as a tool for learning vocabulary.

3.3 Learning vocabulary through videogames.

Presumably there is no better way to learn new vocabulary than being immersed into a context of learning. Videogames bring that context by providing a learning environment created in the cybernetic world which makes learners become masters of their learning (Shafer et al. 2005, as cited in Vahdat and Behbahani, 2013). Equally important, video games could also permit language learners to be exposed to the target language in a continuous way, by natural repetition which generates more opportunities for acquisition (Gass and Selinker, 2001, as cited in Turgut & Irgin, 2009). Simultaneously, video games allow learners to enhance the acquisition of language in learners, as if a student plays a video game to learn, they will balance play and learning (Dehaan, 2005, as cited in Vahdat and Behbahani, 2013).

3.4 Characteristics and types of video games.

There is a large number of video games that could be found in many places, however, the most recognized are: console video games, arcade video games and online video games. In order to clarify the concepts above, a short definition of each will be presented. In the first place, a console video game, according to Sfetcu (2014), “is a form of interactive multimedia used for entertainment. The game consists of manipulable images generated by a video game console and displayed on a television or a similar device, the game is controlled using a handheld device” p.211. In the second place, an arcade game is an entertainment machine that is usually operated by a coin, they can commonly be found in restaurants, bars, and principally amusement arcades

(World Heritage Encyclopedia 2014). Thirdly, online games can be defined as the video games that are played through an internet network. Online games are omnipresent on the majority of contemporary gaming platforms, just to name a few, computers and mobile devices such as cellphones or tablets. (Adams, 2014). All of these have different purposes, for instance, some video games are designed as a tool for learning and others are just designed as entertainment games; nonetheless, all of them could provide an extraordinary amount of input that is useful in the acquisition of new vocabulary. In addition, Chang, Hsu and Chao, (2008) affirm that there is a great variety of genres of video games that include numerous topics, stories and different features. At some point all of them could be helpful for a specific learning. As a consequence of this, it is important that we choose the appropriate video games for a specific public, Revuelta and Antequera (2012). That is why there are some regulation codes which can serve as a guide for this purpose given by some organizations such as the Pan European Game Information, PEGI, and the Entertainment Software Rating Board, ESRB. In order to show how video games are rated by the regulation codes mentioned above, the following images are provided. They are respectively the PEGI and the ESRB.



	<p>EARLY CHILDHOOD Titles rated EC (Early Childhood) have content that may be suitable for ages 3 and older. Contains no material that parents would find inappropriate.</p>
	<p>EVERYONE Titles rated E (Everyone) have content that may be suitable for ages 6 and older. Titles in this category may contain minimal cartoon, fantasy or mild violence and/or infrequent use of mild language.</p>
	<p>EVERYONE 10+ Titles rated E 10+ (Everyone 10 and older) have content that may be suitable for ages 10 and older. Titles in this category may contain more cartoon, fantasy or mild violence, mild language and/or minimal suggestive themes.</p>
	<p>TEEN Titles rated T (Teen) have content that may be suitable for ages 13 and older. Titles in this category may contain violence, suggestive themes, crude humor, minimal blood, simulated gambling, and/or infrequent use of strong language.</p>
	<p>MATURE Titles rated M (Mature) have content that may be suitable for persons ages 17 and older. Titles in this category may contain intense violence, blood and gore, sexual content and/or strong language.</p>
	<p>ADULTS ONLY Titles rated AO (Adults Only) have content that should only be played by persons 18 years and older. Titles in this category may include prolonged scenes of intense violence and/or graphic sexual content and nudity.</p>
	<p>RATING PENDING Titles listed as RP (Rating Pending) have been submitted to the ESRB and are awaiting final rating. (This symbol appears only in advertising prior to a game's release.)</p>

Images retrieved from: <http://www.pegi.info/es/index/>, and, <http://www.esrb.org/index-js.jsp>.

3.5 Related studies.

As a supportive aspect of this research paper, it is important to outline three studies developed in different parts of the world that demonstrated the reliability of video games in learning vocabulary.

The first study, *The Effect of Digital Games on Iranian Children's Vocabulary Retention in Foreign Language Acquisition*, was conducted by Laleh Aghlara and Nasrin Hadidi Tamjid in 2011. The study focused on determining how a video game could be helpful in the retention of vocabulary of Iranian students in the acquisition of English. This study was developed with 40 girls aged six to seven which were divided in two groups. They used computers with the video game installed in them. They collect the data during 45 days. One group was taught some vocabulary using the video game and the other group was taught the same vocabulary using traditional methods. After applying some tests they drew conclusions and based on the results they concluded that the use of the video game was a significant success in the children and that video games have positive effects in learning new vocabulary. The study also showed that the students who played the video game were more motivated than students that did not play. Students who played the video game were not aware that they were actually learning a second language in contrast to the students who were taught traditionally. A final factor detected was that the stress of the learning process was reduced significantly using this strategy. To conclude this analysis, the study showed no limitations.

The second study, *The Effect of Interactivity With a Music Video Game on Second Language Vocabulary Recall*, conducted by, Jonathan deHaan, W. Michael Reed and Katsuko Kuwada in 2010. The participants of this study were 80 students from a computer science

university in Japan, ages 18 – 24. They were Japanese speakers. They were divided in two groups. The first group of the students played the video game and other students just watched how the videogame was played. For this study they used a SONY Play Station 2 video game console connected to a T.V set for playing the game. The students in the group that watched how the game was played were bored about repeating the same stage of the game over and over again. In contrast, the group that played the game was excited about keep playing and learning new vocabulary. At the end, the study showed some limitations that are important to be mentioned. In first place, the low number of female participants in the study, 15 out of 80, and the use of a self-report questionnaire that was used for the cognitive load in students which did not have consistency.

The last study, *The Effect of Using a Digital Computer Game (SIMS) on Children's Incidental English Vocabulary Learning*, was conducted by Nasrin Noroozloo, Seyyed Dariush Ahmadi and Ali Gholami Mehrad in 2015. The study was developed in order to know if a computer game was effective in learning incidental vocabulary. The participants of the study were 60 female Iranian EFL learners whose mother tongue was Persian. The instruments used were a computer video game and some test of vocabulary. The students were divided in two groups; one group played the game and the other received classes in the classroom about the target vocabulary. Some words were selected and while the students played the game they came across with the words to be learnt. After evaluating the results of the tests applied to the students, the results were positive since they showed that using the video game produced a significant influence in the learning of the vocabulary chosen. The findings of this study showed that the students learned new words and improved their vocabulary after playing with this video game.

4. DIDACTIC PROPOSAL.

In this part, a didactic proposal will be suggested as a way of using video games for learning new English vocabulary. It is necessary to say that it depends on what we want our students to learn. With this, we will have the opportunity to use a different game depending on the circumstances, for instance, we could find different games for our student to learn nouns, verbs, adjectives, expressions, idioms, etc. At the end, it depends on the creativity of the teacher and how each game is used. When using this strategy there will be no limits because every time our students play, they will learn at least one new word.

4.1 Type of video games:

In this part I will mention the videogames that can be implemented during class. The suggested video games are Gta San Andreas and Bully. Both are very popular games which can be used for vocabulary learning purposes. These video games can be found in the most common consoles platforms such as Play station 2, 3 and 4, Xbox 360, Xbox one; it can also be downloaded to computers and to smart phones making the game easy to obtain and use.

4.2 Use of video games as a linguistic resource:

When children play the game they are exposed to the visual framework, plot, and characteristics of it. Because Gta San Andreas is an open world game, the main character of it, controlled by the players, may go to the places offered in it and starts identifying the words they will use for interacting in the game. For example, if they go to the clothing shop, all the articles found there have the words in English, as soon as the character selects the items, they will realize of the vocabulary for dressing it up. The following images of the clothing store are presented in order to illustrate what was said above.



The other game is Bully which is very similar to Gta San Andreas. It is sited in a school environment involving a lot of vocabulary related to it. As the main character of the game is a student, he must go to different classes in the school; one of those is the English class. In this class the gamer should form words in English with the given letters, as many words the gamer forms, the higher the score he gets. If the gamer cannot achieve a minimum score he will fail the course. To exemplify this, the following pictures are provided.



4.3 Implementation of video games in class:

During an English class the teacher can set a time for students to play the video game; this can be implemented in any institution public or private since these games can be downloaded in any computer or smart phone, also the teacher can take them to the institution in a video game console which could work in any TV set. After giving the students the instructions of how to play the game and some previous activities as work sheets of the target vocabulary, they will be ready to play. The score is given by the teacher.

As an example, a short activity will be presented here in order to apply how video games could help learn new vocabulary. The activity focuses on learning vocabulary for clothing. The words that are going to be learned are the following: cap, hat, bandana, glasses, watch, chain, t-shirt, polo shirt, shirt, pants, jeans, shorts, cowboy boots, flip-flops, sandals. For our students to learn this vocabulary they will be playing the video game *Gta San Andreas* in which they will control the character and will take him to a clothes store in order to buy new clothes. As they are buying the clothes, they will have to select which garment they will buy, in this part as they select the garment from a list, the character will use the garment and they will realize which garment it is. That is to say, if they select “cowboy hat” on the list, the character will wear a cowboy hat. This will happen with all the options and the students will learn what the meaning of each word is.

4.4 Suggested follow-up activities after applying this strategy in class:

There could be many follow-up activities that the teacher might use after applying these strategies in class. One of those may possibly be giving the students a work sheet with instructions to follow for a specific garment they have to buy and dress the character with. The

students will have to buy some upper and lower body garments as well as some accessories, for example:

Go for shopping some clothes and dress the character with:

- A cowboy hat
- A black t shirt
- Sweat pants
- Flip-flops
- A golden chain

These activities could be brought to class after playing the videogame for a couple of times and can be a good tool for evaluating if the students learnt the target vocabulary.

5. CONCLUSION.

This paper focused on the use of video games as a tool for learning new vocabulary. It is intended to show that nowadays, with all the applications, technology, devices, etc., it is important to take advantage of them as innovative strategies for teaching languages, enhancing the attention of students through means appealing for them. It was significant to present other studies developed in different parts of the world that got good results in the implementation of video games. That is way I put into consideration this didactic proposal for the implementation of this ground-breaking strategy in the English language classroom. It is essential to say that as every other study and strategy, it could have limitations but they could be overcome with time and with the study of different perspectives. It is also imperative to express that this would be an extraordinary way of learning when it is used appropriately and is implemented without prejudice. With this in mind, the potential of this tool could never cease to surprise.

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