

Chapter 33

The Opinions and Attitudes of the Foreign Language Learners and Teachers Related to the Traditional and Digital Games: Age and Gender Differences

Levent Uzun
Uludag University, Turkey

M. Tugba Yildiz Ekin
Uludag University, Turkey

Erdogan Kartal
Uludag University, Turkey

ABSTRACT

The present study aimed at investigating the differences between the teachers and the ‘new generation’ of learners, their opinions about which language skills would benefit more from games, and the nuances of the two genders (male and female), while also revealing the profiles and tendencies of different age groups in relation to their fascination with playing traditional or digital games. The subjects were 131 foreign language learners or teachers from five different age groups, ranging between 7 and 50. The data were collected and analysed through both qualitative and quantitative constructions. Results suggested that female subjects were mostly in favour of traditional games, and liked to play educational games more than their male counterparts, while also it was revealed that from among the six language skills, vocabulary seemed to have the potential to benefit most considerably from games.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-6042-7.ch033

INTRODUCTION

There has been a considerable discussion in the literature on the advantages of the information and communication technologies (ICT) in modern life (e.g. Collins & Halversont, 2010; Säljö, 2010; Kukulska-Hulme, 2009; Thorpe & Edmundst, 2011; Hammond, Reynolds, & Ingram, 2011; Wong & Looi, 2010), the contribution of the Internet and other artefacts in education and cultural awareness development (e.g. Thorne, 2003; Lu, Yang, Peng, & Chou, 2004; Thorne & Payne, 2005; Bretag, 2006; Kaluza & Golik, 2008; Wang & Coleman, 2009; Chu & Tsai, 2009), the effect of playing games on learning (e.g. Neville, Shelton, & McInnis, 2009; Hong, Cheng, Hwang, Lee, & Chang, 2009; Gee, 2003; Becker, 2007; Neville, 2009; Prensky, 2003; Rankin, Gold, & Gooch, 2006; Kickmeier-Rust & Albert, 2010; Barab, Thomas, Dodge, Carteaux, & Tuzun, 2005; Nash & Williamson Shaffer, 2011), and the implementation and principles of designing good digital games, virtual and online learning environments (e.g. Brox, Evertsen, Heggelund, & Andreassen, 2006; Squire, Giovanetto, Devane, & Durga, 2005; Squire, 2006; Gu, Gu, & Laffeyt, 2011; Rosas, Nussbaum, Cumsille, Marianov, Correa, Flores, Grau, Lagos, Lopez, Lopez, Rodriguez, & Salinas, 2003; Gee, 2004; Ravenscroft & McAlister, 2006; Gros, 2007; Moreno-Ger, Burgos, Martinez-Ortiz, Sierra, & Fernandez-Manjon, 2008; Franciosi, 2011; Kiili, 2005). The literature has accumulated a significant amount of and attention catching information and data on these matters, especially in the last decade. However, it should be noted that the literature would provide those who are specifically interested in the field of foreign/second language (FL/SL) learning and teaching with very little concrete and usable evidence or material in relation to learner and teacher profiles, gender factors, and age differences, or foreign language skills developing materials. So, it seems that there is need for research on the differences between the teachers and the 'new generation' learners of for-

eign languages, their opinions about using games in education, and the nuances of the two genders (male and female) in relation to their fascination with playing traditional and digital games, and their tendencies in preferring one with or without deliberate purpose of learning or developing a certain language skill. In the present study the following terms will be used interchangeably throughout the manuscript:

- Digital games (DGs), computer games (CGs), video games (VGs) to refer to the games that are different from the traditional games such as board or card games, and any printed game that involves mostly kinaesthetic action rather than any digital, virtual, online, computer, etc. technology based equipments or environments;
- Additionally, throughout the current manuscript we use the term 'educational games' to refer to the games that deliberately aim at teaching a FL, or designed and prepared to improve some specific information, skill and/or behaviour related to the FL area such as vocabulary, listening, writing, etc.

In the following, the background literature related to FL/SL learning/teaching and games in education is going to be examined and discussed briefly. Also, the views about teacher and student profiles as well as conflicts and incompatibilities are going to be reported.

BACKGROUND LITERATURE IN RELATION TO GAMES IN FL/ SL LEARNING/TEACHING

The literature offers limited sources of FL teaching materials, and very little information on how to design, integrate, and apply games especially in FL courses. Ersöz (2000) asserted that well-chosen games would be precious as they provide students with a break while also allowing them to practice

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