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« Language and Communication »

Investigating the Potential of Online Video Games in Enhancing EFL Learners'
Communication Abilities

Case Study: First year Licence Students of English & First year Master Students of Language
& Communication at Abdelhamid Ibn Badis University, Mostaganem

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Dedication

As this thesis marks the end of a chapter in my life, it is a pleasure to acknowledge the debts that I incurred in the making of this research work, and thank the people whom I do not take for granted.

To my parents, Mohamed & Nadia. Thank you for instilling in me the value of education and hard work. Thank you for your constant love and support. My mom, who has unconditionally believed in me, supported me, and encouraged me throughout both my educational and daily life, I owe a debt of gratitude that cannot be repaid. Her resolute words of wisdom have often meant the difference between continuing the educational path and quitting. Today, I get the larger picture you always tried to portray to me.

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Abstract

The Information Age has paved immense pathways for the emergence of technology, which led to eventually a complete digitalization of our communities. An ideal example of this advent is the continued growth of online video games (OVG) worldwide between young adults and adults. In parallel with this growth, scholars around the world have investigated the potential of online video games to influence users as well as the factual impact of these online platforms on the different abilities and competences of individuals. To this end, our primary endeavour was to apply the same principles and investigation to the Algerian EFL learners in the given context. The initiatory purpose was to understand and know the different effects of OVGs on EFL learners at the extent to which OVGs can be utilized in academic settings. Moreover, this study attempted to investigate how age and gender as variables can affect in affecting the final results of OVGs on EFL learners' communication abilities as well as their intercultural communicative competence. To carry out this research, we used a mixed-methods approach to collect relevant data for the present research. As for the instruments we utilized in the data collection process, they were a learners' web-questionnaire, interviews, and an in-game observation. The results revealed that OVGs are beneficial in enhancing the EFL learners' communication abilities, intercultural communicative competence, and other cognitive skills. However, there must be a list of conditions checked, notably, the EFL learners' willingness to be immersed and communicate within the online video game.

Key words: online video games, enhancing, communication abilities, intercultural communicative competence.

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General Introduction

The digital revolution, has in many instances, changed our communities, wherein technology has become critical to the functioning of the society. This suggests that most areas, as well as lines of action, were affected by the digitization; consequently, many professions of today require an extensive amount of digital literacy.

Consistently, with the escalating prevalence of diverse technologies, human beings were offered several utilities, which would hopefully facilitate their ways of communication, and consequently, optimal communication means. Namely, the arrival of the digital media, provided mankind with platforms which allow individuals from different geographical locations to communicate and interact with one another, which has eventually, entirely changed the humankind's common and traditional conception of the notion of communication. As for today, online video games are one of the most popular, arguably the most popular, digital media platforms in society, wherein users have the opportunity to communicate and interact with other users online whilst have fun.

In the light of what is said, many researchers shed light on the development of the advent of new platforms and dynamic games to understand the factual consequences the human brain face when immersed and exposed to such realistic and thrilling activities stimulated by the use of these online games. At first, a series of research were presented by concerned scholars who polarized the negative effects of playing video games. For instance, Anderson's (1986) study suggested the potential of online gaming in stimulating aggressive behaviour. However, a few years later, empirical studies regarding the potential positive effects of online video games began to immerse. As for the past two decades, the positive impact of online video games became well-known and well spread. At first, there were many researchers work to prove the positive effects of online gaming on the cognitive skills, and then the communication abilities as well. Eventually, after a series of empirical works, several concerned scholars have deduced, with the aid of the literature as well, and then argued that there are very limited or almost non-existent negative effects of video games.

The digital revolution has, eventually, consolidated the role of online video games in enhancing the users' English communication abilities. Seeing that most of the online video games are released in English due to the nature of the language as being a lingua franca, -use of English as a common means of communication for non-native English speakers – the use of the English language within the game to communicate becomes a must to achieve the desired goals and win matches. For that reason, many scholars as well as researchers around the globe, deduced that this substantial amount of interaction between individuals in online games, not

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only with distinct levels of English, from different countries and cultural backgrounds, leads to an influence between users, which eventually results in the development of the English skills, as well as the development of intercultural communicative competence. Consequently, the researchers in the concerned fields, still up to today, endeavour to fully understand how the process of altering the different English skills through online video games occur.

In this regard and to confirm or not what is said, this study attempts to investigate how the English language can be acquired as a foreign language in online video games by some students, in both English and medicine departments, at Abdelhamid Ibn Badis university. In other words, this research work aims to investigate the potential of online video games in enhancing students' communication abilities in English as a foreign language advanced learners, and to what extent online games platforms can enhance their intercultural communicative competence. Thus, to investigate these issues, three research questions were formulated:

- 1- What are the effects of online video games on EFL learners?
- 2- How could online video games be beneficial in enhancing the learners' communication abilities as well as their intercultural communicative competence?
- 3- To what extent do age and gender factors affect the benefits of online video games on the EFL learners and their communication abilities?

Reflecting upon these research questions, we hypothesize the following:

- 1- Online Video Games exposure has both positive and negative impact on EFL learners. The effects of these online platforms varies according to the environment and the users' method while playing online. These outcomes may encompass enhancement in the communication abilities and the overall vocabulary of the users, as well as an increase of a hostile and aggressive behaviour.
- 2- The online video games might enhance the communication abilities via the consistent practice of these skills. Speaking in English and listening to English through the microphone while playing online video games allows the learners to practice their communication abilities. Furthermore, we surmise that online video games can also enhance the intercultural communicative of the users who shared a fair amount of games with people from different cultural backgrounds.

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- 3- We conjecture that age and gender are salient in affecting the benefits of online video games on EFL learners and their communication abilities. We suppose that the females are most likely to be less affected by the online video games than males; moreover, the younger participants would be more affected than the older ones because they are more invested and immersed when playing online.

The present dissertation is divided into three main chapters. The first chapter deals with an overview of the key concepts and related literature to the subject, including online video games benefits and the main theories. In the second chapter, we provide an exhaustive explanation of the undertaken methods used as well as the involved instruments to gather the required data in the fulfilment of the research. As for the last chapter, it covers the analysis of the compiled data, and then proceeds to cover the discussions and deductions we concluded after interpreting the finding.

Chapter One: Overview

1. Introduction

This chapter covers an all-around comprehensive overview regarding the origins of Online Video Games and their influence on the different skills of EFL learners. At first, the overview deals with the history and emergence of online video games in the 20th century. This chapter also explained how OVG could be beneficial for EFL learners, whether used as educational tools to learn effectively or as tools that enhance different cognitive skills as well as the social and emotional intelligence of learners. The last and important objective of this overview is to shed light on the practical and theoretical potential of OVG in enhancing EFL learners' communication abilities, as well as their intercultural communicative competence.

1.1. Online Video Games before the 21th Century

The advent of the evolution of computer networking and the technologies blossomed the video games into a mediated social environment, where users can have fun, socialize, and even acquire knowledge. This alteration begins with the dawn of the Internet in 1993 and the emergence of PC gaming in the 90s.

The 16-bit era, also common as the fourth generation of video game consoles, which emerged from 1987 to 1999, witnessed the appearance of the 16-bit models, resurgence, and decline of arcades video games, improved handheld consoles and PC gaming. Although early home computer games took place in the early 1970s, online computer gaming involved and became accessible until the transition to 3D video games and the explosion of the Internet, which occurred in the 90s.

The emergence and availability of the Internet to the public in 1993 has brought about major changes in the world of online video games, however, due to the slow of services and problems with cable operators, Nintendo and Atari have attempted to develop online gaming using cable providers in 1994, and it was unceasing failures. Until the creation of Sega Dreamcast in 1999, the first console in the world to have a built-in modem to support the Internet and play online, which many considered it as the ground zero of the real online gaming advances as well as the shifting point to the sixth generation era.

During the sixth generation period, online PC and home console games became major aspects of the gaming culture. With an entire utilization of the Internet, several platforms became available for users to choose from, the most popular ones were the Sega Dreamcast, PlayStation, Nintendo GameCube, and Xbox Live. Although, these competitive platforms provided various features, they shared the same remarkable qualities, notably, providing the users for the first time with new ways of interacting, and communicating with each other inside the video game, via a chat function.

This era has also witnessed a huge emergence of PC gaming and marked the highest number of online video gamers in computers, which was estimated to be 1040 million players, and kept dramatically increasing until it reached 1402 million players in 2020. (Statista, 2020) Nevertheless, the home consoles kept developing as well, and reached the eight-generation in 2013, which is the latest generation up to today. According to statistics, the number of online console gamers was estimated to be more than 600 million consoles worldwide by the end of

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2018. (Statista, 2020) Unlike the gaming PC, also common as a PC gamer, there are many home consoles around the globe, from small handheld consoles such as the Nintendo Switch to big home video game consoles like the PlayStation 4, which all had a built-in modem for Internet support and online gaming.

1.2. Benefits of Online Video Games.

Bawa (2017 p154) argued that online video games have the potential to function as a useful learning tool that can meet learner's interests while promoting skills such as "communication, evaluation of information, research, problem-solving, critical thinking and literacy."

1.2.1. Online Video Games as Educational Tools

Greenfield (1990) suggested that there are several literacy skills associated with video games and computer screens, which can be learned only by screens, and are distinct from the traditional literacy skills thought at school.

Research in the educational potential of computer video games have led to deeper interests in the field of digital-based learning games (DBLGs). Studies on the use of virtual environments and online video games in language learning have found benefits ranging from increased motivation and engagement in the classroom to enhanced vocabulary as well as improvement in the communicative competences, notably, the speaking and listening skills. (Zhang & Kaufman, 2015; Zhang et al., 2017)

1.2.2. Online Video Games in Skill Development

Various empirical works have shown that online video games do improve multiple skills as well as the cognitive abilities of the players.

1.2.2.1. Human Skills

Several researchers from various fields of study had an interest in the use of video games to improve different human skills. The scholars Grossman & DeGaetano (1999) used training simulators video games as an educational tool to train soldiers in the arts of war (Herz & Macedonia, 2002; Mayo, Singer & Kusumoto, 2006). Nevertheless, Michael Macedonia, a former chief technology officer at the U.S, claims that simulation training video games have "proven effective for enhancing motor control, as in driving a tank or firing a rifle decision-making, as in calculating the resources needed for combat; and leadership, as in responding to an ambush" (Macedonia 2002, p. 33)

Additionally, a research by Rosser Jr. et al. (2007) reveals that surgeons, who played the laparoscopic surgery video game training simulator, for more than three hours per week in the past were 27% faster than surgeons that did not play the video game and did 37% fewer mistakes.

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1.2.2.2. Cognitive Abilities

In terms of cognitive abilities, Boot et al. (2008) suggest that video games can be used to improve attention, memory, and executive mental control. Lowery & Knirk (1982) on the other hand, concluded after a study that video games do improve cognitive skills such as spatial relations ability, word recognition skill, and eye-hand coordination.

The research lead by Boot et al. revealed that participants who have been playing video games regularly for a couple of years could track objects moving at greater speeds, perform more accurately in a visual short-term memory test, switch between tasks more quickly, and make decisions about rotated objects more quickly and accurately.

1.2.3. Online Video Games in Social Development

Since the dawn of the internet and video games, these mediums were promptly perceived to be for entrainment purposes only, and that the stereotype of a video gamer is alone boorish boy (Shaffer, Halverson, Squire, & Gee, 2005). However, Yee (2006), alongside with many other scholars, believed that most of the extreme gamers are goal-seeking, high-achievement and social students. Due to the nature of online video games, the players must have a high level of social interaction and cooperation to be able to work with their online teammates to accomplish goals as a team and win the matches. (Cole & Griffiths, 2007)

Moreover, Cole and Griffiths further challenged the stereotype of the video gamer to be socially inept by conducting a study on the impact of online video games on social relationships. Astonishingly, the results were quite remarkable, eighty percent of the 912 participants in their study preferred to play their games with friends and family. Nevertheless, their study showed that 76.2% of the males and 74.7% of the females in the study made good friends within the virtual world of the game. Krotoski (2004) supported this claim and asserts that MMORPGs are built around group interaction that results in the forming of friendships as well as personal empowerment as a means of establishing their own identities. (Lei & Wu, 2007)

1.2.4. Online Video Games in Emotional Intelligence

It is not only in developing skills and in social interaction that video games have had a positive impact. Several studies have shown the feasibility and effectiveness of the use of video games, integrated with school training, in enhancing the learners Emotional Intelligence competence.

Laudia Carissoli & Daniela Villani (2019) created a training program called EmotivaMente which included many or some simulator video games as experience-based learning tools, the video games chosen were meant to stimulate different emotional reactions from participants as well as increase their emotional intelligence.

Interestingly, the findings were extremely positive. laudia Carissoli & Daniela Villani reported that the students who participated in the EmotivaMente training program showed an improvement in the evaluation and expression of emotions to the self. Through increasing awareness of the emotional functioning of the participants: by experiencing contradictory

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emotions (e.g., fear and fun with “Silent Hill”), participants felt abler to recognize and manage their emotions.

T. Lavander has led another study, which investigated the potential of online games in enhancing emotional intelligence competence, as well as modifying attitudes towards social issues, mainly the views of people towards the poor and the homeless. T. Lavander (2011) created a video game called Home It's No Game, in the form of a simulator that would help raise awareness and empathy towards the poor people, by experiencing poverty in the game. The results showed that those who played Homeless: it is no game, felt increased sympathy for homeless people from the first few minutes of playing the game, and dramatically increased for the game.

T. Lavander is not the only scholar interested in the impact of video games in the emotional intelligence competencies. D. N. Ruggiero, similarly, conducted a study to investigate the potential of digital simulations in engaging users' willingness to learn more about the social issue: poverty. Ruggiero (2014) used a simulator game called “Spent” to conduct a comparative study between reading about poverty and playing a simulator about poverty. The results showed that playing Spent has increased students' willingness to learn about homelessness more than reading about the social issue, consequently leading to greater engagement and motivation in learning about the issue. Additionally, using the same simulator: Spent, Richey S, Ryder, P. Bilodeau, and Schultz (2016) found that the simulator game has improved students' attitudes towards the poor people.

1.3. Online Video Games and Communication Abilities

1.3.1. Defining the Communication Abilities

Generally, communication can be defined as a process of exchanging information through a metaphorical “pipeline” along which messages are transferred from one person to another. (Axley, 1984) The most common method of communication is verbal, using a specific language to deliver different messages. Communication is established when a message or information is delivered from the sender (the speaker, writer) to the receiver (the listener, reader), followed by the receiver giving feedback (Sulaiman Masri, 1997). The four main skills used to deliver and receive these messages are speaking, writing to deliver and listening, reading to receive.

1.3.2. Facilitating Social and Academic Communication Through Technology

Technology is becoming more commonplace in our Social and Academic settings; therefore, it is necessary to understand how such advancements in communication technology can help us in facilitating our social and academic communication.

“Recent advancements in communication technology have enabled billions of people to connect more easily with people great distances away, yet little has been known about how the frequent presence of these devices in social settings influences interactions.” (Przybylski & Weinstein, 2012, p. 1)

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Several studies investigated the potential of technology in facilitating communication in both academic and social contexts.

1.3.2.1. Academic Communication

Teachers can use technology tools such as chat rooms and educational websites to maximize the communication among their students. Teachers can design a chat room that would create a similar virtual environment to the classroom. In which students are allowed to immerse in natural native English setting, by doing so, the teacher creates a comfortable environment in which students can improve their English skills, by discussing school-related issues as well as other general topics such as personal hobbies and interests with classmates and 'virtual classmates' in a low-stress environment. (Bikowski & Kessler, 2011; Ware 2004) Ingram et al (2000) suggested that the instructors could also allow non-students to join the chat rooms to discuss various topics with the students, to increase their interest in different fields, and in turn, increase their motivation to improve their English skills.

1.3.2.2. Social Communication

Technology also has the potential to facilitate social communication. In 2011, Campbell and Kwak investigated how smartphones communication influences the extent to which one engages face to face with new people in public. The study found that mobile phone use facilitated the task for the participants to talk with strangers. Baym, principal researcher at Microsoft Research, supports the evidence found and suggests that digital communications enhance relationships and that “the evidence consistently shows that the more you communicate with people using devices, the more likely you are to communicate with those people face to face.” (Adler, 2013)

Coyne et al. (2011) found that individuals who were more satisfied in their relationships reported using the media more frequently to express affection and love toward their loved ones, as it provides couples a way to connect virtually to satisfy both function and emotional needs. (Parker et al., 2012) Coyne et al. (2011) found that individuals who were more satisfied in their relationship reported using the media to express affection toward their partner.

1.3.3. Fostering Communication Through Online Video Games

Several studies suggested the use of online video games to benefit EFL students, by creating a low-stress environment where users are allowed to practice their English skills and foster communication among the classroom. The use of online video games would also help the users to shape their personalities and motivate them to learn more.

Teachers can use online video games to motivate their students to practice their English skills and to learn more at the same time in a fun way, as Hadfield (1990) put it; games are “an activity with rules, a goal, and an element of fun.” Using online video games, teachers can stimulate an intense competition among students in the classroom to work harder and be rewarded with a specific "prize" offered in the game.

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(Arnseth, 2006) Mei & Yu-Jing supported the use of video games in the EFL classroom, and stated that the use of these games in the academic setting would help the introverts and shy students to be more engaged in the classroom, as they react positively to them. The usage of video games would reduce anxiety, increase positive feelings and self-confidence of the introverts, because of the absence of the judgment, criticism, and punishment aspects, thus, these individuals would practice the foreign language freely in a low-stress environment. (Crookal, 1990)

AlShaiji (2015) suggested that the students should be able to develop and design their gameplays, which gives them a sense of pride and identity. Zheng et al. (2012) supported the idea and suggested using massive multiplayer role-playing games to allow users to create their characters, in the form of freedom of self-expression and, eventually, stimulate communication with strangers around the world. Such communication would allow users to learn words and structures in a context using correct pronunciation and spelling.

1.4. Defining the Intercultural Communicative Competence

The term intercultural competence has been defined in numerous ways by researchers and practitioners from different areas and fields, however, most intercultural scholars do not define intercultural competence in relation to specific components but rather give definitions are boarder in nature, which suggests a challenge when trying to find a determined definition and appropriate assessment of the term, as Deardorff (2006) put it: "Scholars throughout the past 30 years have defined intercultural competence in its various iterations but there has not been agreement on how intercultural competence should be defined". Deardorff (2006, p. 233) Therefore, several definitions should be taken into consideration in terms of defining the term intercultural competence as it is not entirely understood, nor do practitioners of the intercultural communication field agree upon a common definition. (Straub et al. 2007; Fantini, 2000)

According to a study by Deardorf (2004), most experts agreed with a definition suggested by Byram (1997), a leading scholar in foreign language teaching and intercultural communication, which states that intercultural competence is "the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (Deardorff, 2004)

1.4.1. Online Video Games in Enhancing the Intercultural Communication

In 2019, Olena Shliakhovchuk investigated the potential of the game "The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion" in acquiring cultural literacy, intercultural skills, and broadening intercultural empathy. The results of the study suggest that video games can both reinforce or weaken labels and stereotypes; "help to acquire cultural knowledge and develop intercultural literacy, socio-cultural literacy, cultural awareness, self-awareness, and the cultural understanding of different geopolitical spaces; and to some extent also facilitate the development of intercultural skills" (Olena Shliakhovchuk, 2019)

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A study by SALEEM ALHABASH (2012) explored the potential of video games in enhancing American students' cultural awareness of foreign nations. The study investigated how the game PeaceMaker, a video game simulation of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, would affect the American students' views toward Palestine and Israel as countries and two different people. After playing the game for a short time, participants reported major changes in attitudes towards the two nations, the overall attitudes towards Palestinians positively changed, and those towards Israelis negatively changed.

In 2010, Peng W, Lee M, & Heeter C, conducted a study using the game "Darfur is Dying" to investigate the potential of interactive video games in influencing people to help and empathize with foreign nations. A portion of the participants was asked to play the interactive game, and the other portion of the participants was asked to read a text with comparable information about the crisis in Darfur. The results showed that the students aged 10 to 14 were more influenced and willing to help the Darfurian people than those who read a text with comparable information about the crisis in Darfur.

1.5. Conclusion

This chapter has laid out a general overview of the practical and theoretical aspects of Online Video Games, notably, in the academic setting. Within this chapter, we dealt with the origins, historical background, factual & studied benefits, and impact of the OVGs on EFL learners. Furthermore, the literature regarding the subject of interest has suggested that the use of OVGs can be beneficial in the academic setting as a pedagogical tool in enhancing the communication and interest among advanced learner.

Chapter Two: Data Analysis and Results

2. Introduction

This Chapter presents the description of the research methodology and the research tools used to collect the data necessary for our study. It describes the various phases of the research work, which includes the selection of participants, the learners' questionnaire, the interview, the data collection process, and the process of data analysis.

2.1. Research Methodology

To collect the maximum amount of relevant data, the mixed methods research was employed for conducting our study that involves collecting, analysing, and integrating quantitative and qualitative research.

The rationale behind the use of the quantitative approach is a result of our need to gather data in a numerical form, from different individuals to have structured and statistical data, which can be used to construct graphs and tables of raw data to explain our phenomenon. As for the qualitative research method, it is used due to its nature to understand humans, behaviours, lived experiences and perceptions, in other words, the qualitative research allows the researcher to study people in their natural setting. The qualitative research method would provide our study with a "human voice" and "give life" to our findings, in other words, "Hybrid data, allows us to keep the soul in the data" (Seemann, 2012)

2.2. Procedure

The study was conducted in the department of English language, at Abdelhamid Ibn Badis University, with the assistance of 50 students from the different departments of the university. The study, which took place during the second semester, was made of questionnaires as the opening phase, followed up by semi-structured and structured interviews as well as several virtual observations in online video games as a concluding phase. The study was overall 6 weeks long.

2.3. Context

The study was carried out at both the English and medicine departments at the University of Abdelhamid Ibn Badis, which is situated in Kharouba, Mostaganem.

The rationale behind choosing our participants from different departments is our need to gather a random amount of young adults, to investigate the potential of online video games, in enhancing the communication abilities of EFL learners as well as the other type of learners.

2.4. Population

The participants of our study were 35 males and 15 females from Abdelhamid Ibn Badis University, ranging from the age of 17 to 22.

40 students were from the English Department, 25 out of these were licence students, whereas the other 15 were master students.

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The remaining 10 participants of our study were from the medicine department, 7 males and 3 females, from various levels, were involved in the collection of data for our study.

2.5. Data Collection Instruments

To carry out our study, three data-gathering instruments were utilized: i) a students' questionnaire, ii) a gamers' interview, iii) an in-game online video game observations

The aim of choosing these three tools relays on our study needs. To confirm or reject the hypotheses, the researcher needed to collect hybrid data.

The questionnaires were distributed to all the 50 participants of our study, but only a few participants showed interest, agreed to do an interview, and take part in the in-game observations.

The questionnaire was submitted to online using the Google Forms, the rationale behind the use of a web-based questionnaire is to provide participants with a low-stress environment, as well as give them the time necessary to submit their responses; therefore, the answers would be more accurate and valid. Lin & Wang (2015) found that web-based questionnaires are more reliable than face-to-face questionnaires in terms of data collection.

The web-based questionnaires are also free, which would prevent the researcher from wastage of pages, and prevent the respondents from wasting time by physical presence. In addition, to save more time for the researcher, the Google Forms would provide the researcher with the users' responses in a simpler way, as well as present the numerical data in various graphs to be read.

Nevertheless, six males and two females, from both departments, agreed to be interviewed and participate in the observation. Due to the slow internet services, the interview was conducted face to face, in the Department of English, at Abd El Hamid IBin University.

The in-game observation was composed of two observations to gather a suitable team of participants as well as the most suitable online game for convenient and valid data for our study. The first observation, which is the initial observation, was undertaken with two groups of participants composed of 4 players each in a set of different online video games. The aim of the initial observation is to meet the necessary conditions for a valid observation. The preparatory observation has allowed the researcher to choose the most suitable online video game, as well as the most convenient participants for the primary observation. The latter was undertaken through the online video game League of Legends, with 3 males and 1 female.

2.5.1. The Learners' Questionnaire

The aim behind using a questionnaire is first, to analyse the learners' views towards online video games and their perceptions on this matter. (Wallace, 1998) The questionnaire would also reveal to the researcher the abilities of the participants in English as a foreign language, and whether these abilities have been affected by online video games or not.

Chapter Two: Data Analysis and Results

2.5.1.1. Description of Learner's Questionnaire

Our questionnaire is divided into three main parts. The first part is dedicated to personal information, such as age, gender, department, and the English grades. The second part, which presents the largest part in the questionnaire, is devoted to the investigation of the impact online video games have on the learners' different communication abilities being studied; speaking, listening, writing and reading skills, as well as the impact of online games in the users English grades. The second part would be mainly composed of questions with multiple choices of answers. The questionnaire was a convenient instrument choice due to its nature of being both qualitative and quantitative data collection instrument. Therefore, we have opted for this data collection tool to gather the necessary qualitative data to reinforce the quantitative data gathered. Thus, we have dedicated the final part of our questionnaire to open-ended questions.

The questionnaire consists of 15 questions, 12 questions are multiple-choice questions, and 4 out of these questions are followed up by an extra space that participants can use to provide further detail for data collection purposes. The third main part of our questionnaire consists of the remaining questions, which are open-ended. For further investigation, we let participants express their feelings and opinions freely, which would provide us with quantitative data.

The first four questions provided us with the participant personal information, which will be used later on for data analysis. The rationale behind the age and gender inquiries is to divide our sample into groups according to their different characteristics. Followed up by the fourth inquiry, which provides the researcher with the participant English grades, this information will be used as a key factor in a comparative study later on.

Followed up by the second part of the questionnaire, the first two questions of the second part aim are to know to what extent learners are familiar with video games, and online video games, this would provide the researcher with an insight on the participant knowledge regarding video games. The third and fourth questions would provide the researcher with the players' main goals on joining online video games and how much time they spend daily on these platforms. After that, the fifth and sixth questions seek to discover the participant views on online video games and to what extent, he or she believes their English grades were affected by these games. The purpose of the remaining two questions aims at knowing to what degree participants believe their communication abilities were affected by their use of online video games. The rationale for adding the extra space is first, know if any other means being used other than microphone to speak or keyboard to type and for the second question, to understand how the participants think their communications abilities were affected by their use of online video games.

As it has been mentioned above, the third part of the questionnaire deals with the open-ended questions. The last part of the questionnaire, which attempts to gather as much quantitative data as possible, starts by investigating the potential of online games in enhancing intercultural communicative competence. The aim behind this question is to reveal to what extent the players perceive the potential of online video games in enhancing their intercultural communication abilities when interacting with other players from different cultures and countries. The second open-ended question deals with engagement in the English classroom. In this inquiry, the participant are asked to freely express his or her views, regarding the potential

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of online video games in enhancing learners' engagement in the English classroom. The last question of our questionnaire aims to know more about the experience of our participants with online video games; therefore, we asked them to provide us with their favourite online video gamer and the reason behind that preference.

2.5.2. The Interview

As mentioned earlier, to achieve the results intended for our study, we used the interviews as a second data collection instrument for which we have opted to collect qualitative data. Following the positivist paradigm, we considered the use of interviews to understand our participants, their behaviours, lived experiences, and perceptions on the matter studied as key elements in acquiring knowledge. Therefore, the aim of using the interview is not only to gather the required hybrid data, but to also, reinforce and triangulate the numerical data collected from the questionnaires with the more in-depth, insightful and vivid data, as Smith (2006) put it: "triangulation attempts to confirm inferences made from the findings of several research methods and approaches." (Smith, 2006, p. 465)

To utilize the interview at its utmost potential as an instrument tool of collecting data, we divided it into two parts; each part contains its own set of questions. The interview has first a set of structured questions then a set of semi-structured questions. The rationale behind using a structured model is our need to gather the quantitative data; therefore, in the first part of the interview, the researcher will ask a structured set of questions only. (Leedy and Ormrod, 2001) Whereas the semi-structured model is our primary reason in choosing interviews as a data collection tool, the researcher will then proceed with the second part of the interview and collect the quantitative data needed by asking for in-depth explanations as well as giving the interviewee the floor to further explain their thoughts.

2.5.2.1. Description of the Interview

As it is highlighted previously, the interview is composed of two main parts. The first part deals with the structured set of questions; it is composed of three questions. The second part of the interview is devoted to the semi-structured questions; it has three semi-structured questions with an additional one open question, which is optional.

Question (1) attempts to determine whether the participants of the study are considering the educational benefits of online video games or not. Additionally, such inquiry provides the researcher with the intentions of the participants when playing online video games.

Question (2) looks into the users' perceptions regarding the use of online video games in enhancing their English communication abilities and their English grades. The interviewees are given a choice to report by either answering positively or negatively.

Question (3) seeks to discover which of the communication tools the interviewees prefer in communicating. The rationale behind this question is to understand how the ways of communication affect the communication abilities differently. Moreover, it investigates to what

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extent the reading and writing skills are involved in virtual communication through online video games.

Question (4) seeks to understand how and what are the factors involved in affecting the communication abilities of our participants. The choice of a semi-structured question is to provide both the researcher and the interviewee with enough room for further inquiries.

Question (5) attempts to determine whether the participants of our study are aware of the intercultural communicative competence, and to what extent they believe the use of the online video games, can be either beneficial or not in enhancing such ability.

Question (6) gives the floor to the participants to provide a list of the skills and abilities they believe they can or have enhanced through playing online video games.

Question (7) provides the researcher with a specific type of online video games. Such information would help the researcher to understand how different types of online video games is interlinked with the development of communication skills as well as intercultural communicative competence.

2.5.2.2. The Interview Procedure

Following Spradley (1979) "Research Tips: Interview Data Collection" guide, the participants of the interview were chosen based on the questionnaire answers. Using the survey checklist, only the participants who reported to be very familiar with the online video games were selected to take part in the interview. 8 interviews were interviewed in the library of the Medicine Faculty at the University of Abdelhamid Ibn Badis, whereas 2 interviews were questioned online using the Instagram video call feature. All the interviews were conducted in English.

The researcher had fostered his relationships with the participants over the past, to set a friendly and low-stress tone before conducting the interviews. Additionally, the day of the interview, the researcher started by setting a friendly and calm environment by asking initial questions as a warm up to help interviewees be more confident to answer. (Kawulich B, 2015) Afterward, to facilitate the process of data analysis, the researcher asked the interviewees for their consent to record the interviews, and if nicknames should be used for confidential purposes (Al-Yateem N, 2012). All the participants agreed to be recorded, as well as the use of their real names if necessary.

2.5.3. The in-Game Observation

The in-game observation is the third and final instrument used to collect data, which will be qualitatively joined with other elements of the current study, in a way that we can utilize this instrument to triangulate data, that is, to verify, reinforce and help to interpret the data derived from other instruments and fill in the missing gaps. The in-game observation will provide the researcher with data collected from the participants' natural setting, as Marshall & Rossman (1995) put it: "Through observations, you may learn about activities that participants

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may have difficulty talking about in interviews" (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p. 75). Moreover, the observations are a perfect choice for our study due to its nature of being an anthropological study, wherein the researcher endeavours to "determine how much time is spent on various activities, verify the verbal expression of feelings and determine who interacts with whom in what ways" (Schmuck, 1997). Additionally, observations allow the researcher to "provide a systematic description of the events, behaviours, and artifacts of the social setting." (Marshall & Rossman, 1989, p. 79)

The researcher has conducted two separate observations, an initial observation, and thereafter conducted a primary structured observation. The rationale behind undertaking an initial observation before the primary observation is a result of the researcher need to gather multiple conditions checked before the actual observation, as well as meet the participants' acceptance. According to Schensul & LeCompte (1999), the researcher is granted acceptance by his participants on observations based on whether the group members trust him, feel comfortable with him, and feel that their involvement with the researcher will be safe for them and for their community.

2.5.3.1. The Initial Observation

As has been mentioned previously, the initial observation is conducted to have a list of conditions checked for both the researcher and the participants. The researcher joined the initial observation as a participant-observer to better understand what is being observed. Additionally, the participants are more likely to be tolerant and open with a researcher who is part of the group. (Kawulich B, 2015)

The researcher has carried out some different in-game observation sessions with two different groups composed of 4 participants each, both of the groups played the same online video games; Counter-Strike GO, League of Legends, Age of Empires and GTA: San Andreas Multiplayer. The participants were composed of both males and females from different ages and academic fields. The rationale behind choosing two different groups and various types of online video games is to determine which of the participants and video games are the most suitable for the actual observation to collect data.

Accordingly, the parameters of the initial observation were the choice of participants, the choice of the online video game, and the acceptance of the participants.

Fortunately, after an initial observation of twelve hours, three days long overall. All of the conditions were checked as we were ready to move forward with the primary observation.

2.5.3.2. The Choice of Online Video Game and Participants for the Observation

The choice of online video game and participants represents the overall results of our initial observation, the selected online video game was League of Legends due to its characteristics, and the selected participants for next stage were three males and one female who showed acceptance towards the researcher, and willingness in communicating.

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2.5.3.2.1. The Description of Game

The games involved in the initial observation varied in different aspects, notably, the amount of co-operation required between the players was our main concern as well as the ability of games to stimulate different feelings. League of Legends, a MOBA video game, was the most suitable choice for our study, as it provides the players with enough room to communicate while they are playing, which helps the researcher to investigate and observe the differences in behaviour stimulated from the action happening in the game. League of Legends as a game, is also distinguished for its nature of being a very team-work based game, thus, communication is essential to a successful collaboration. Participants would have to play as a team and communicate effectively to establish strategies and apply them, this would reinforce the use of verbal communication in our observation. Additionally, participants showed significant interest and enthusiasm in League of Legends than the other games, they were more involved and interested in the game as they were very familiar with it.

League of Legends is a multiplayer online battle arena video game, released in 2009 by Riot Games. In the game, players take the role of a “champion” with a unique set of abilities and powers, to collaborate with four other online players as a team to win the match. The game is a subgenre of strategy video games in which players play in a team composed of 5 players against another team in a structured and limited map, invariably composed of 3 lanes though the overall shape varies from a game to game. Each user has control over one character only and would team up, cooperate and communicate with his teammates to destroy the opposing team's main structure with the assistance of periodically spawned computer-controlled units that march forward along set paths.

Figure 1 presents the post-match lobby of League of Legends. Each team is composed of five members. This lobby provides the players with the ability to communicate verbally, as well as communicate through the chat with their peers and the opponents. Thus, the researcher utilized this lobby at the end of every match to communicate with them. Another favourable aspect of this game is featuring a pre-made team of 5 members with another pre-made team of 5, i.e., every team we played against was either friends or family members from different levels. To conclude, the lobby was very helpful for our study to see what is going on between the participants and their enemy team, it would allow the participants, as usual, to practice their intercultural communicative competence.

Figure 1: Post-Match Lobby of League of Legends



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2.5.3.2.2. The Participants

The selection of our participants for the primary observation was challenging. Our main characteristics were based on the participants' ability to communicate effectively. One female and three males were not involved in the next stage of the study because of a lack of acceptance and communication. The female was very introverted, which caused major communication issues with her teammates as well as showing signs of discomfort towards the researcher. Moreover, the three males were not interested in an MMORPG game as much as they were interested in action games, thus, their willingness to communicate and share their thoughts with their teammates was not present as they were very immersed in the game itself. These males reported that they would have communicated a lot if the type of the game was different, however, they have no interest in other games other than action.

The selection of our participants for the primary observation was challenging. Our main characteristics were based on their ability to communicate effectively. One female and three males were not involved in the next stage of the study because of a lack of acceptance of communication. The female was very introverted, which caused major communication issues with her teammates as well as showing signs of discomfort towards the researcher.

2.5.3.2. The Primary Observation

As it has been highlighted previously, the participants of our study became more familiar and comfortable around the researcher, and they were ready to take part in the primary observation through which its revenue will be used to support the interpretation of the students' questionnaire and interviews. The researcher has followed multiple techniques to establish a valid observation.

a- The Pre-Observation Stage

The primary observation was undertaken in eighteen hours (5 days long) by the researcher, in which the researcher played both roles of a participant and an observer. Every outset, proceeded with the researcher, using Merriam's (1998) map technique to take notes in the field, by creating a visualisation of the context which later on would help the observer to recall the details of the setting.

Additionally, the researcher has worked a time sampling observation template to take notes on the occurring events, in a what and when manner. (Kawulich B, 2015) The researcher has used the integrated audio recording software to record the participants' verbal communication at every commencement of the observations, and all the users involved agreed to be recorded.

The lobbies were created every time by the researcher as they proceed by inviting the involved players, at the commencement of every observation session, the observer works on establishing a calm and friendly atmosphere by asking a warm up questions and genuine questions to his participants.

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b- The During the Observation Stage

The observation phase was more entertaining for the participants and rewarding for the researcher than the initial observation. The interactions and overall atmosphere was eased by the previous encounters the researcher and his participants had. The participants of our study were more talkative and engaged in conversations with one another, as well as telling jokes and sharing stories with the observer.

The researcher occasionally stimulated discussions between participants and initiated potential lobby discussions with the opponents at the end of each match. The aim behind such a step was to establish verbal communication with people from different backgrounds to observe the intercultural communicative competence of the participants.

The rate of communication and use of orders was significantly higher, when we were inside a match, all of the participants were communicating excessively, while using a special set of expressions and words from time to time.

Remarkably, we have found no difficulties in asserting the use of the English language pre, during or post any of the matches we had with our participants, they used the English language easily as a means of verbal communication as well as discussed in the text.

2.6. Conclusion

Throughout the present chapter, we presented the methodology and the research design that characterized our research. We brought to light the main procedures and instrumentations that we used in our study, providing an exhaustive description of each aspect that participated in the fulfilment of this practical part of the research work. Questionnaires, interviews, and observations were the tools used in the accumulation of the data, which will be analysed and discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter Three: Data Analysis and Results

3. Introduction

The main objective of this final chapter is to analyse and interpret the data collected about the benefits of online video games using well-established tools of research. Following the same systematic order, this chapter scrutinizes the data assembled through the three main instruments in the order of questionnaires, interviews, and observation to provide a well-organized structure of framework. At last, we congregate the overall analysis to ideally, confirm or reject the hypotheses of our research.

3.1. Data Analysis

To properly discuss the research results, it is necessary to analyse the data collected to either confirm or reject our hypotheses, and answer our research questions. The data are analysed and interpreted in three phases. Consequently, each phase of the chapter dealt with the analysis of one instrument utilized in data collection. The researcher approached each phase by splitting the analyses based on the significance of the data collected in the research study. In other words, the variables of the study, age, gender, and communication abilities, as well as the three main research questions of the research, were used as a reference in interpreting the data. Our focus herein was to interpret the data collected to understand the EFL learners' perceptions about the use of online video games, as well as the potential of these online platforms to enhance their communication abilities, as well as the intercultural communicative competence of the users.

3.1.1. Analysis of the Learners' Questionnaire

As has already explained, in the second chapter, we used the questionnaire to investigate whether online video games influence the EFL learners' communication abilities, and also to what extent age and gender, as key factors, play the role to affect the outcomes of the research. To investigate these three variables, communication abilities, age, and gender, we divide the questionnaire into two main parts.

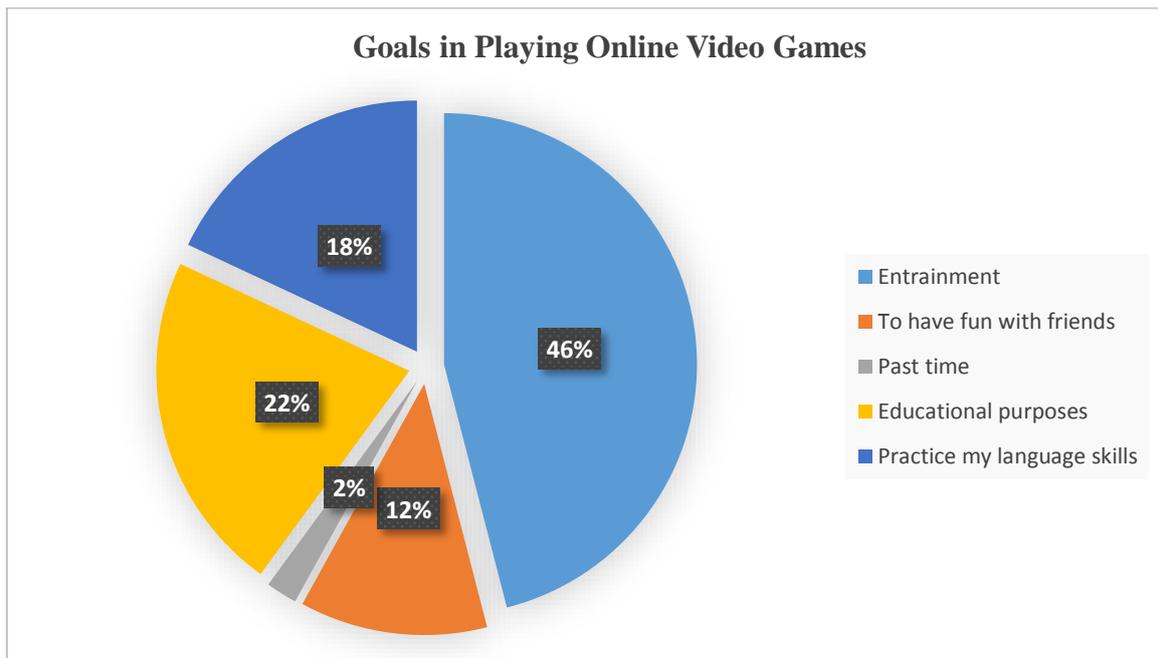
Based on the variables presented above, and for an insight into the perspectives of the participants, the analysis of the questionnaire will cover multiple inquiries; the assortment expectations when playing online video games, the effects of OVGs on EFL learners, and the impact of OVGs on EFL learners' communication abilities as well as their intercultural communicative.

a- The Assortment of Expectations when Playing OVGs

The following graph presents a numerical analysis of the third question of the questionnaire in which we have opted to gather data regarding the expectations of the participants when joining these online video game platforms. Figure (2) demonstrates the participants' answers regarding their intentions towards the OVGs, as well as their daily use of these platforms. (See appendix, question 3, part 2)

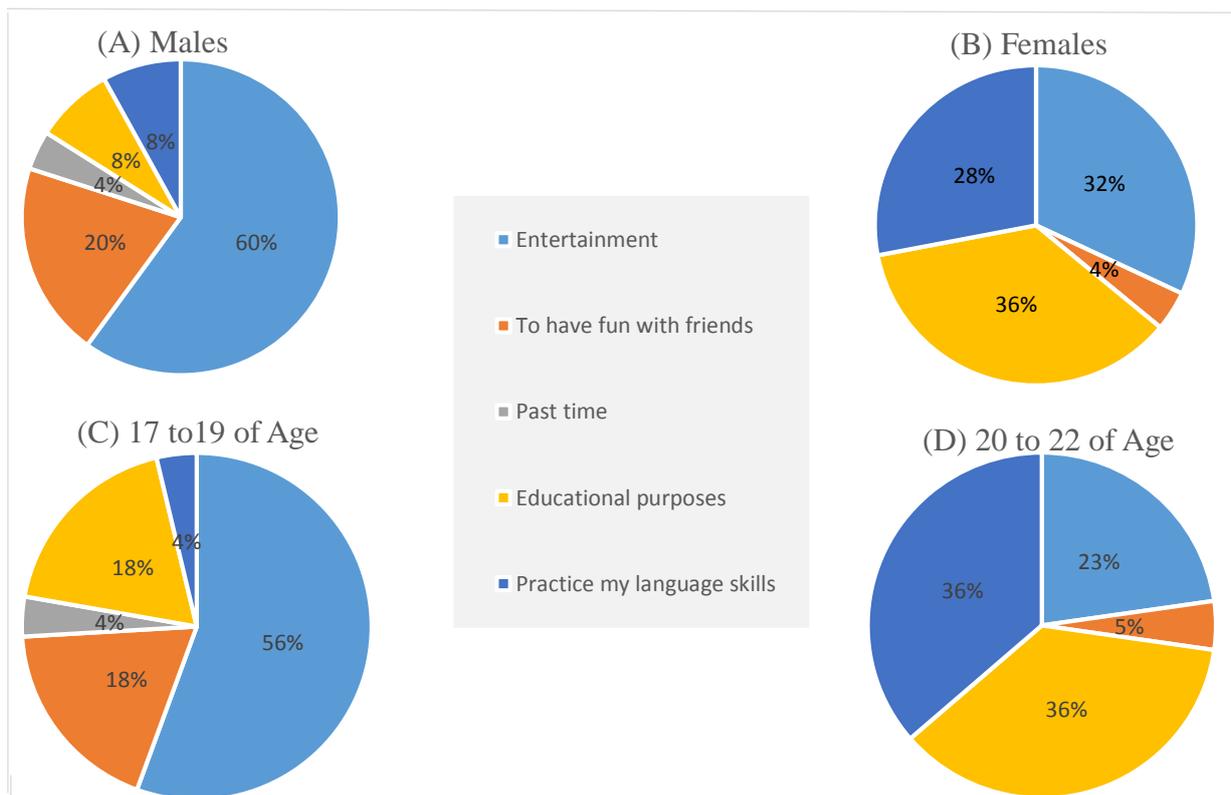
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Figure 2: Goals in Playing Online Video Games



The figure above shows the overall participants' main goals in playing online video games, 60% of the learners prefer playing OVGs during their leisure time to get some rest, whereas 40% of the participants use online games to learn or practice their language skills

Figure 3: Goals in Playing Online Video Games Based on Age & Gender



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The graph above displays an exhaustive numerical data regarding the participants' goals in playing online video games, based on age and gender.

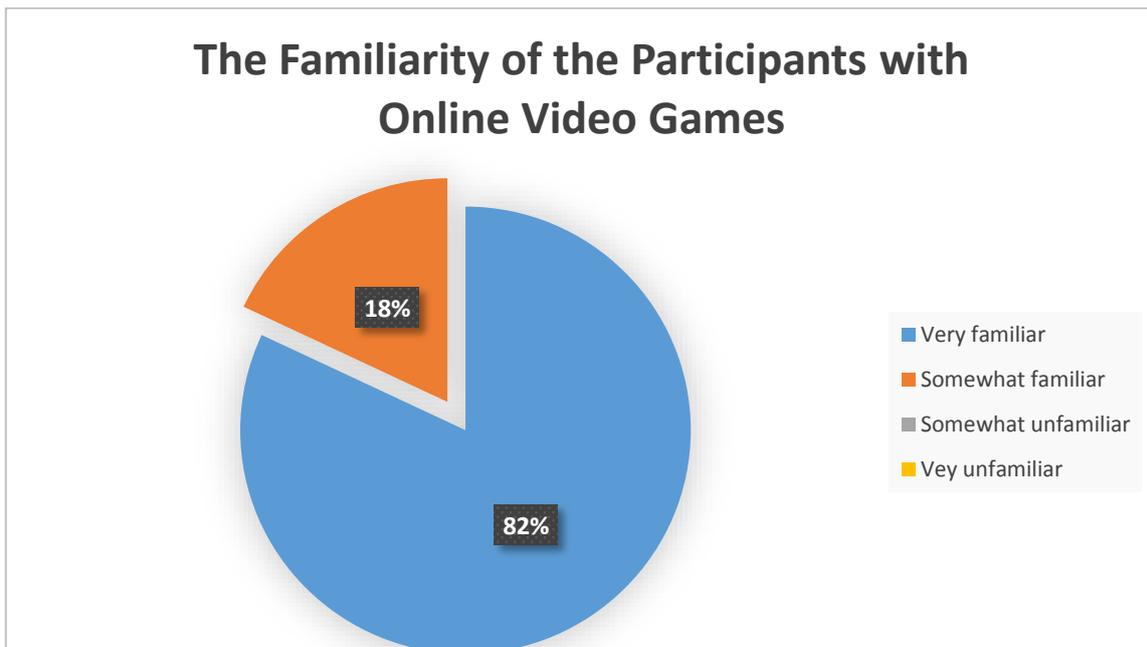
As it is displayed in (A) and (B) of figure three, 84% of males and 36% of females reported using online video games to be entertained, whether as a past time or to have fun with friends. As for educational purposes, the results showed that 64% of females play online video games to practice their communication abilities.

In figures (C) and (D) the results showed that 78% of the participants, aged from 17 to 19, tend to play online video games to have fun, especially with friends, and 72% of the participants aged from 20 to 22 reported that they play OVGs for educational purposes to practice their communication abilities.

b- The Effects of OVGs on EFL Learners

To scrutinize the effects of online video games on the participants of our study, we formulated the first and second inquiries of the questionnaire, (See appendix, questions 1 & 2, part 2) to investigate to what extent; the participants are familiar with the OVGs. Their answers are portrayed in the graph below:

Figure 4: The Familiarity of the Participants with Online Video Games



Despite the dominant percentage of 82% who reported to be very familiar with online video games, we noticed that 18% of the participants reported to be somewhat familiar with these type of games.

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This inquiry opened the floor for the subsequent questions. The graph below presents the views of the participants regarding the effects of online video games as platforms. (See appendix, question 5, part 2)

Figure 5: The Benefits of Online Video Games

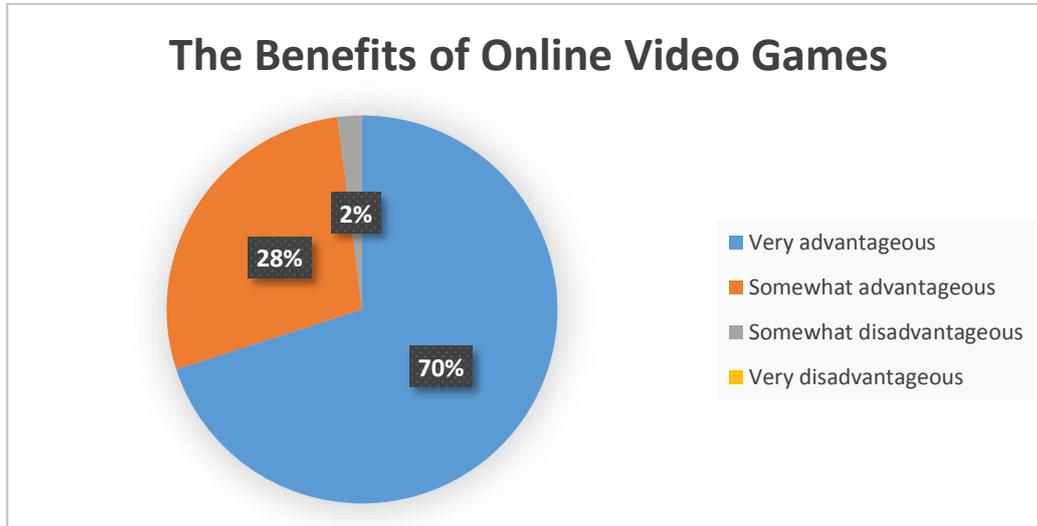


Figure (5) shows that approximately all of the participants (98%) declared that the use of online video games is very advantageous; however, surprisingly, 2% (1 female participant) declared that online video games are somewhat disadvantageous. Below are some extracts of the participants to explain what has been already said in this section:

“Online video games are nice. However, without proper supervision, they can become very disadvantageous and unhealthy. I personally won’t allow my kids to play online unless they’re trustworthy.” Said the 1 female that represents 2%.

“I do not think I have learned from school as much as I did learn from playing online, plus I had to make friends I could never make in real life. Playing online taught me many things but most importantly made me feel socially accepted.”

“You can have fun, learn, meet new people, experience new things, and feel the rush all at once. I never joined a game to learn, I just happen to be learning anyway.”

As for our participants’ views towards the online video games in affecting their English grades, the figure below displays what was collected as a qualitative data and answers to question 6. (See appendix, question 6, part 2)

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Figure 6: The Effects of Online Video Games on English Grades

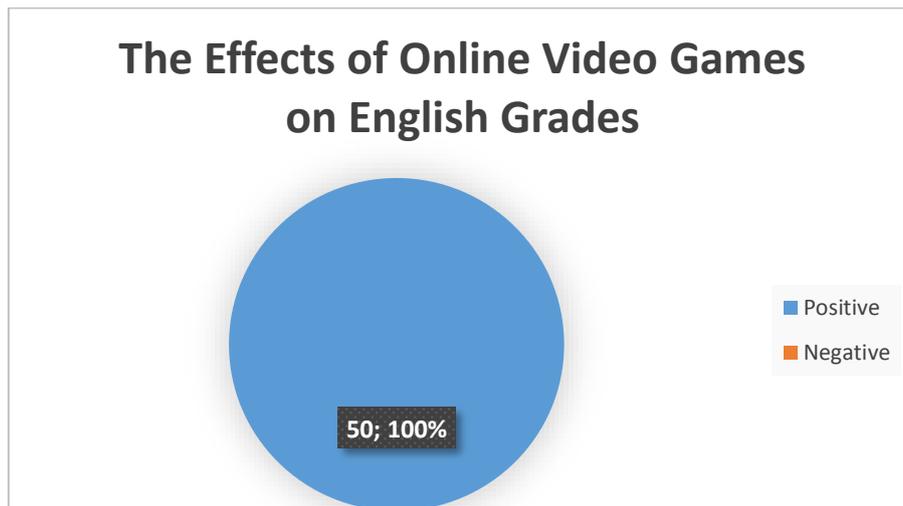


Figure six shows that all of the 50 participants reported that the online video games they played have positively affected their English grades. The majority of the learners have elaborated more on the space provided. Some of them are as follows:

“I have been playing online video games in English before actually learning English at school. I became fluent in writing and speaking at 11 years old. School takes 4 years to teach you basics you learn in a month playing online.”

“Most of the books we use are in French. However, online video games have helped me learn more English. Nowadays, most of the new Medicine books are in English, I find no struggles in reading, in English. Most of my promo mates find difficulties in reading the English books.”

“Of course positively, all I do is write, talk and type in English, I might have learned some habits of using informal words, and some slang, but overall, no doubt online gaming helped me utter my English.”

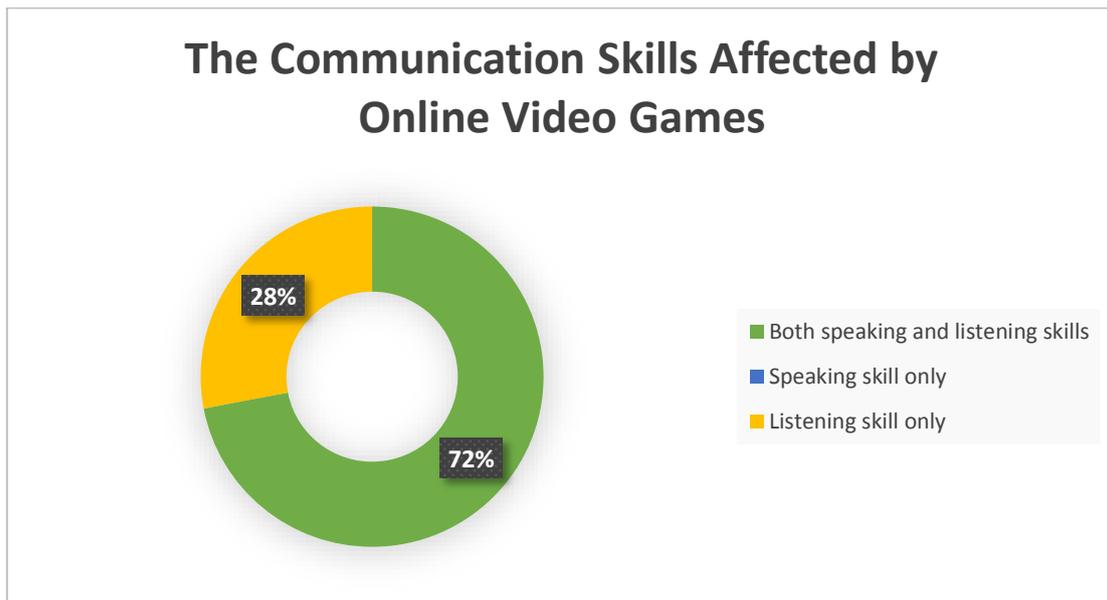
“I do not think a gamer would ever answer negatively to this question, I might seem an exaggeration but for me, and most gamers I know, it is a fact that online games affect your English grades positively.”

c- The Effects of OVGs on EFL learners’ Communication Abilities and Intercultural Communicative Competence

The informants were asked about their thoughts on the effects of online video games in enhancing their communication abilities, such as speaking and listening skills. (See appendix, question 8, part 2) The figure below shows their sentiments:

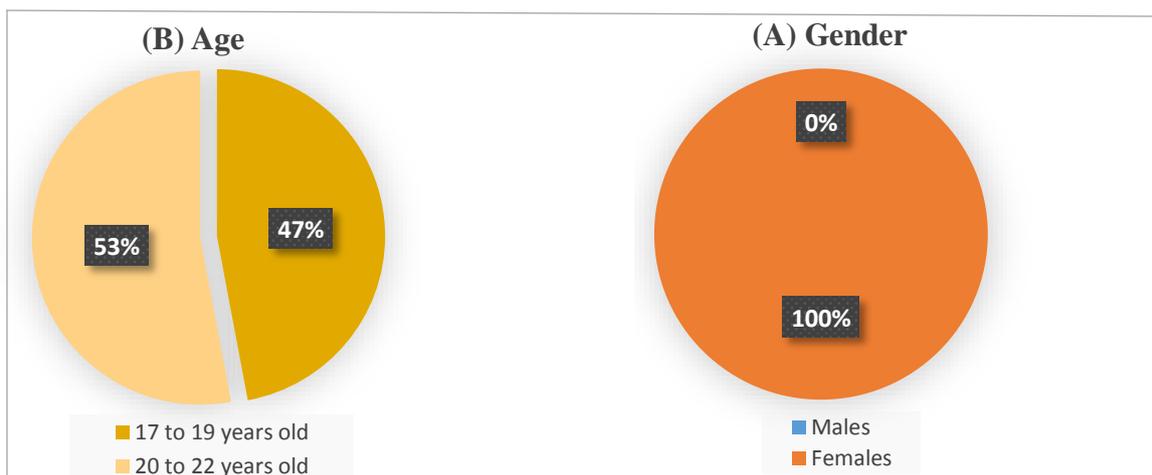
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Figure 7: The Communication Skills Affected by Online Video Games



As mentioned in figure 7, the dominant percentage (72%) of the learners asserted that, the use of online video games enhances both the speaking and listening skills, but 28% of the involved users said that only their listening skill was involved. To elaborate more on this point, the incoming graph presents detailed results regarding the 28% of informants whom neglected the presence of the speaking skill.

Figure 8: The Listening Skill Based on Age and Gender



For further in-depth understanding of the variance, explanatory lines from the informants are quoted as follows:

“I use verbal communication when playing online, it is faster and more efficient, I believe, that is the primary reason, I am good at speaking and listening in English, I practice these skills regularly when playing online.”

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“As an introvert, I do not talk a lot when playing; however, most of the time, I am open to listening to my teammates talking to remain updated and tight on plans. I think this has improved my listening skill.”

“At first, I had terrible speaking and listening skills; however, I was too comfortable when playing online, and I kept practicing my bad communication skills. Today, I am much better than I used to be. Online gaming does help to enhance your English abilities.”

“It did help me enhance both of my speaking and listening skills. I am not sure if it is best to practice your communication skills online with non-native though, you might pick the wrong pronunciations.”

In the third part of the questionnaire, the participants were asked to provide a name of their favourite online video game and to give reasons behind this preference. A couple of informants discussed the potential of online gaming in enhancing their communication abilities as well as a set of other skills as follows:

“My favourite online video game is Aion. Although I do not play this game anymore, but it is my favourite online game, because of how much development, it did to my character, as well as me as human being. I played the game for about eight years, I practiced my English speaking, and I could interact with natives with no struggles whatsoever. I also witness a huge critical thinking improvement in me, as well as problem-solving. I learned a bit about every country and many cultures from the friendship I made.”

“Dota 2 is my favourite game. I met my only friends there, they ...thanks to them, I am practicing my English skills, as well as German every day online. I also became very knowledgeable in different fields from them. Online games teach us a lot more than just the speaking ability.”

d- Intercultural Communicative Competence

Lastly, the final analysis of the questionnaire investigates the views of the informants towards the benefits of online gaming in enhancing the intercultural communicative competence. The majority of the informants declared that online video games had a positive impact on their intercultural communicative competence, whereas the minority invested their thoughts with conditions to a successful learning through online gaming, as follows:

“Yes, online gamers do learn a lot about the other cultures, most of us gamers in Algeria want to move to Europe, for better gaming conditions, and that’s a result of our awareness of the external world, and other cultures which we learned from online gaming. However, this type of learning can only happen if the other players are from different cultures and are willing to be tolerant and friendly. To summarize, there is no exact answer to this question, it depends on the conditions I mentioned.”

“Playing online with an Algerian is not going to enhance your intercultural communicative competence whereas playing with an Indian does.”

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3.1.2. Analysis of the Learners' Interviews

As formerly stated, the interviews were utilized to gather qualitative, relevant data to both reinforce and assert the data collected from the questionnaire. Ten participants composed of 8 males and 2 females, from both of the English and Medicine departments, agreed to take part in the interview. The latter was analysed in conjunction with the same pattern of analysis we used for the questionnaire. Also, to back up the assembled data, the interview analysis will cover the same inquiries covered in the questionnaire analysis: the participants' expectations & wants when playing online video games, the effects of OVGs on EFL learners, and the impact of OVGs on EFL learners' communication abilities, and their intercultural communicative competence.

Seeing that our research work is about investigating the interconnectedness of online video games and EFL learners' communication abilities, we shaped our interview to understand the correlation between these two elements. Therefore, the questions of the interview emphasized understanding how the different types of online video games, can affect and enhance the communication abilities of the learners.

Structured questions

Question (1): What is your main goal behind playing online video games?

Analysis: 6 males aged from 17 to 19 responded that they use OVGs to have fun and past time with friends, and also for some educational purposes. 2 males and 2 females aged from 18 to 22 answered that they use online games to practice their English communication abilities as well as having fun.

Question (2): In your opinion, did playing online video games enhance your English communication abilities and your English grades, positively or negatively?

Analysis: 8 males and 2 females (100%) responded positively to the answer. A couple of respondents elaborated on their answers as follows:

BGhost: *"Hell yeah it did, my English is entirely thanks to online gaming, it enhanced it in a very positive way, if there was a more positive word than "positive" then it would be it"*

Abd-el-Kader: *"Yes, I was bad at pronunciation, very bad. I am confident online video games helped me to speak properly, however, only the terms I use on gaming though."*

Wolf: *"You listen and you speak in English when you're inside an online game, of course, this helped me. It did not help me directly improve my grades, I just got better at grammar and writing by using consistently the chat when playing which helped me get more marks in the exams."*

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Question (3): How do you usually communicate with other online players inside an online video game?

Analysis: 8 males declared the use of verbal communication via the microphone as the primary means of communication, and they also stated that the use of text messages depends on the absence of the microphone. Two women replied that they communicated verbally with their friends via the Internet by SMS, but if they felt comfortable in the team, they used the microphones. One female has justified her answer in the following lines:

Soph: *“I honestly prefer to speak when playing as it is more efficient and immediate; however, unless I am with friends or players I am comfortable with, I would only use the keyboard to type in the chat.”*

Question (4): You previously mentioned that online video games do enhance your communication abilities, in your opinion, how does that happen?

Analysis: 8 males and 2 females (100%) explained in their own words how online video games positively affected their communication abilities.

Some of the statements are as follows:

Wolf: *“Consistency and efficiency, I spend 2 to 6 hours and up to 10 hours at weekends playing online video games with other people, mostly natives from Europe and North America. You listen to them talk in a perfect accent, using slang and dialects, it’s only a matter of time to be affected by them. And also, you get to talk back to them and keep up conversations going, that’s how I learned English and how I am improving my communication abilities.”*

Imed: *“By practicing speaking and listening every day, it’s not a phenomenon, it is just a normal way to learn and practice your communication skills. We learned Arabic from our parents and us as gamers, we learned from the people we encounter and speak to online. Of course, you are not going to meet a native English speaker every single time for sure but you still learn from non-natives as well as you’re practicing with people from the same level as you.”*

Iheb: *“In contrast to TV, or YouTube or even the classroom, in online video games, we get to practice the most important skill, in my opinion, which is the speaking skill. By chatting using my microphone and through speaking, I get to make mistakes, eventually, learn, and practice the skill more. You can also get better at writing from writing in the chat and reading through the stories and biographies of the characters and so on.”*

Question (5): In light of what you have experienced when playing online video games, do you think such platforms help you improve your intercultural communicative competence?

Analysis: 8 males and 2 females (100%) positively responded to this inquiry and provided further details regarding the matter. Some of the revelations are:

BGhost: *“Oh hell yeah it does, you get to talk to people from all around the world, and then the conversation sways from the game, so you start talking about random and personal stuff,*

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they tell you about their countries, cultures, etc, that's in, my opinion, the best way to get intercultural competence”

Wolf: *“My dream destination is Germany and honestly if I didn't have my gaming friends I would not know this much detail about this country as I do now. People in online video games would give you the details and information no other website including TripAdvisor would give. There is a whole list of countries, cultures, and religions I learned and became familiar with through my online gaming friends, it for sure does help to improve the intercultural communicative competence.”*

Ime: *“Yes for sure, you talk with people from different cultures, and as humans we are curious and thus you just naturally learn about them, most of the times subconsciously but at the end of the day there is this huge baggage of knowledge about other cultures picked up from online games.”*

Ahmed: *“I know a lot about a lot of countries. I know what is Netherlands most known for and what are their traditional dishes, as I also know about India as much as I know about my own country. Online video games provide you with the ability to speak with strangers from all around the world, different nations and cultures, you learn a lot from encountering others online as they do as well with you.”*

Question (6): As an online video gamer, what are the other skills, which we did not mention, that might be developed through online gaming?

Analysis: The majority of respondents (7 males) provided answers to the inquiry. The rest of the participants did not have any answers regarding the proposed question. The most noteworthy replies are as follows:

BGhost: *“Online games have way more benefits than merely spending time, or enhancing one's language, the exposure to situations where a human would not normally find himself/herself in actually teaches them how to deal with them in their daily life. There is also the fact that gaming gives you the ability to train reflexes and situational awareness, it also helps those who have difficulties talking to people outside such as the introverts and the ones who suffer from autism or depression”*

Wolf: *“Where do I start from? Critical thinking and problem-solving, I also feel like I am more aware of my surroundings and can react quickly and I feel like I can read texts and scan a computer screen a lot faster now. I am not sure if this is worth mentioning but I also learned the skills of negotiation.”*

Jalil: *“Critical thinking, problem-solving, multi-tasking skill, social skill? I am not sure about that but it sure does help you learn how to communicate properly.”*

Question (7): To conclude this interview, could you provide me with the name of your favourite game and the rationale behind the preference?

Analysis: 8 males and 2 females (100%) agreed to provide the name and the details of their favourite game. The most suitable answers for our analysis and discussions are:

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Wolf: *“My favourite game is for sure League of Legends. It is just too perfect for me, you can have fun, meet and befriend new people, and you can learn a lot as well it is very resourceful and educative.”*

Imed: *“Counter-Strike is my favourite game, I love action games, it gives you a consistent blood rush and adrenaline, especially when things get intense and you have to kill, protect yourself and either give or receive orders from you teammates, it sounds like a real life war.”*

Jalil: *“League of Legends. I have been playing this game for five years for the same reason, very fun and challenging. I sometimes hate the fact you have to play with 4 teammates and completely rely on them to be victorious in the match, however, in the end of the day, I enjoy talking and learning with new people, that’s what online video games are about in the end of the day, social fun online video games.”*

3.1.3. Analysis of the in-Game Observation

The in-game observation scrutiny is based on the three main variables of our research work: communication abilities, age, and gender. In this phase, the researcher attempted to investigate the identical antecedent dimensions of the research, the concerned population supposition and wants when playing online video games, the effects of OVGs on EFL learners, and the impact of OVGs on EFL learners’ communication abilities and the intercultural communicative.

a- The Concerned Population Supposition & Wants when Playing Online Video Games

The primary observation took place over five days, 18 hours, and 20 games online. When we first joined a group chat and invited the four selected participants, we observed that the participants in our study were extremely knowledgeable and aware of their environment and why they joined these platforms. One of the participants uttered the phrase "time to learn" in a satirical way that gives certainty that they are aware of the effects of online video games on them and the fact that they are visible. However, contrary to our expectations for the first game, the participants in our research showed great tolerance and attachment to the researcher. Besides, although the participants in our study were strangers of different ages and genders, they were comfortable in making jokes and appearing immediately.

During the subsequent matches, the researcher occasionally evoked thoughts to comprehend the reasons and assumptions of their participants when playing online. From the answers of the participants on the observation, as well as previous instruments of data collection, we deduced that the primary goal of using online video games is to have fun with friends.

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b- The Impact of OVGs on EFL learners' Communication Abilities as well as their Intercultural Communicative Competence

During the first matches, we noticed that all participants had good pronunciation and rich vocabulary. However, given that most of the words they know were mainly used in online games, we have concluded that the diversity and exploitation of online video games by participants can improve their communication skills as well as their vocabulary. However, the participants showed a wrong and phonemic interpretation of some other unknown words, which helps confirm previously formulated hypotheses. They also showed great readiness for self-correction, by retyping words that were misinterpreted correctly or by repeatedly expressing unclear terms.

Based on what is said, we have paid great attention to the intercultural communicative competence use and enhancement during the 18 hours in-game observation. As predicted, the utilization of this skill was not possible at every single match, however, we involved the use of intercultural communicative competence more than we expected. Several participants of our observation, as well as some members of the enemy team we played against; stimulating conversations, which then quickly became more of a “friendly conversations”, as both of our participants and these strangers initiated in a more personal and in-depth conversations about the differences in their lifestyles in a short period, in an unorthodox way, both parties pointed out the similarities and differences in their lifestyles as well as their cultures. As it might have been noticed, we used a significant portion of our time outside of the game, which is a result of our presence in the lobby. We noticed that at the end of each match that we played with our participants, a conversation appeared in the lobby with members of the enemy team, in addition, the participants chose to communicate in the lobby for at least fifteen minutes before starting another game or match. After observing these discussions in the lobby, we concluded that the participants, as well as the members of the enemy team, were excellent at communicating with strangers and making friends. They also showed great success in raising awareness, maturity, circulation and expression of their ideas, as well as in sharing their lifestyles and culture with other online games.

3.2. Discussion of the Results

In this research work, we endeavour to understand how online gaming can be beneficial in affecting the EFL learners' communication abilities, as well as their intercultural communicative competence, seeing that the use of these platforms provide the users with a virtual environment where they can interact with people from different cultural backgrounds.

As has been mentioned previously, we conducted our analysis in parallel with the three main variables of our research: communication abilities, age, and gender, as well as the main inquiries of our research work. We provided a brief analysis of the results obtained using the three data collection instruments, namely, learners' questionnaires, interviews, and in-game observations. The findings revealed that the use of online video games do have a positive impact, to a large extent, on the EFL learners, as well as their communication abilities and

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intercultural communicative competence. Additionally, a set of other cognitive skills were reported to be involved.

The obtained results from the learners' questionnaires, the interviews and the observations showed that the participants are very aware of the importance and the benefits of online video games in affecting them positively, and that online gaming might not be entirely about having fun and wasting time only, but there is also the potential of learning as well. Nonetheless, the majority of participants reported that they are very familiar with online video games, and subsequently, answered that the online video games improved their English grades positively as well as providing them with the ability to be more active and engaged in the English classroom. At this point, we assumed that there might be a possibility to use online video games as pedagogical tools to teach EFL and other advanced learners.

From the data analysis, we also deduced that the online video games have a huge positive impact on the EFL learners' communication abilities as well as providing them with the necessary set of skills required to do so. Participants reported that online gaming has helped them in improving their speaking and listening skills to a great extent, as well as the writing and reading skills at a low extent. Additionally, based on in-game observations led by the researcher, we observed that the players correct each other, that is, in case one does make spelling or articulating mistake, the other members would help him auto-correct himself/herself. Nonetheless, another observation we made is the fast pace at which individuals become comfortable with one another and become friends; as a result, players do end up having a long list of friends on their accounts, which eventually results in an endless set of pre-made matches.

Subsequent results confirmed that online video games provide users with a safe comfortable environment, which results in making friends around the world easily. Through excessive communication with people from different backgrounds, the participants of our study reported to have noticed a huge improvement in their intercultural communicative competence, as well as their basic knowledge about other cultures and nations. It is safe to say that according to the participants of our study, online gaming has provided them with a fair share of knowledge in which the educational field did not cover, and that online gaming, along with other virtual platforms, is the only logical and normal setting in which individuals should opt to practice their intercultural communicative competence.

In light of the significant results of the study, we noticed that age and gender factors are key elements in the rate at which the users of online video games acquire knowledge, and enhance communication abilities as well as the intercultural communicative competence differently. The results revealed that most males are interested in the fun aspects the online gaming providers, such as the dopamine rush stimulated by the excitement from the action or adventure online games or simply having quality time with friends, whereas most females are interested in learning and practicing their communication abilities. Nonetheless, the data interpreted have shown that both males and females have the same amount of fun and general knowledge acquiring, despite their actual needs. On top of that, males showed more interest in using spoken words, to communicate, whereas nearly all the females chose to use the chat, since they are shy and not comfortable enough being heard. As a result, the males have shown a higher level of speaking skill improvement, whereas, for females, only the writing skill was altered. We have

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deduced that the differences at which females and males acquire and improve their communication abilities differently via online video games, is the extent to which a skill is being practiced. Logically, according to Figure 8, the females reported no improvement in the speaking skill because the less you speak, the less you practice; and the less you practice, the less you enhance; similarly, the males reported nearly no alterations in their writing skills as they do not type in the chat often, which results into less practice, and less enhancements in their writing skill. Additionally, the gender factor is not the only variable that affects the extent to which communication abilities are enhanced. To put it in simple words, the younger participants from 17 to 19 years old reported to prefer having fun and enjoying time with their friends, whereas, the older participants from 20 to 22 years old preferred to practice their skills, and acquire general knowledge. Accordingly, the results grasped from our research showed that the participants reported being affected by online video games at different rates, based on age, and the older participants reported a slightly higher rate of communication abilities development compared to the younger participants. Therefore, we have deduced that having a positive stance and willingness to learn from online gaming contributes positively to the extent to which users acquire knowledge and ameliorate the involved communication abilities.

Including everything, we have deduced that the age and genders factors affect the rate of acquiring and learning differently, solely when the users themselves choose to be less exposed to the online gaming platforms or choose to be less involved; in other words, all users, of different ages and genders, learn at the same rate under the same circumstances. To illustrate, if a 30 years old female plays the same online video game as an 18 years old male, for the same period and using the same approaches of communication, with the same mind-set, both of these individuals learn and acquire different set of skills at the same pace. Thus, the age and gender factors do not directly affect the outcomes of online gaming, but rather varies the processes of acquiring knowledge and enhancing different communication abilities from one to another.

Although the main focus of our research work is to investigate the potential of online video games in enhancing the EFL learners' communication abilities as well as their intercultural communicative competence, we deduced that there is a long list of other skills that might be enhanced when playing on these platforms. The results collected indicated that most of the participants believe in the critical-thinking and problem-solving skills are the first major skills you learn when playing online. Additionally, we concluded that OVGs provide the users with the ability to train reflexes and situational awareness, by excessively exposure to situations where human beings would not normally find themselves in which eventually teaches them the most suitable steps and actions to make. Another benefit of the situational awareness is teaching the users to different skills needed in life, such as the negotiating skill. Nonetheless, users can also subconsciously acquire and develop cognitive skills such as multi-tasking, enhances memory, and increases the brain's speed. Last but not least, online gaming does enhance the vocabulary of the players, according to the data collected from the interviews and the observations, we concluded that there is a set of special vocabulary that might be composed of both formal and informal words, that is learned from playing online. The set of words differs

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from game to game, but generally, from type, we observed that the gamers from same type of games but different ones still do share the same vocabulary and word choice.

Despite the perfect image we portrayed so far regarding the effects of online video games, there are still conditions to be checked before the actual learning takes place. The rate at which EFL learners learn and practice their communication abilities is based on the type of the game, and the involved players in the match, as well as the communication itself. The enhancement of the EFL learners' communication abilities, as well as the intercultural communicative competence, is based on how successful the undertaken virtual communication is.

To illustrate, players do not depend on each other to win matches but solely on their performance, so players do not need to speak or chat with other players, and therefore, players do not speak or write in the chat which affects their communication skills, while teamwork and strategic online games respond via online to communicate with other players to win matches. Players are obliged to communicate with each other to win games, and as a result, their communication skills are practised. Therefore, the rate at which users learn and practice their skills depends on two main factors: the amount of connection that online video game provides and other players in the game or match.

Ideally, once the presented factors above are checked, a normal conversation in-game should be undertaken, and therefore, learning takes place. However, although we did not witness any of these inept matches, our participants responded that occasionally, players could be very toxic and unfriendly, which causes an extreme opposite of learning, since most of these players would insult or be very hostile for no particular reason.

The data collection process did not encounter any kind of rehearsed agreement between the participants and the researcher, nor were the results modified. The findings were carefully collected and reported within a framework of a sheer objectivity.

3.3. Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, after having analysed and discussed the findings obtained from the quantitative and qualitative analysis, we discovered that the users of online games are aware of the positive and the negative aspects of these platforms. Furthermore, through the questionnaires, interviews, and in-game observations, we reported the conclusive results withdrawn, expounding how the constant exposure to online video games motivates and pushes the EFL learners to use either spoken and/or written English to communicate with their online peers, which eventually, enhances their communication abilities, as well as their intercultural communicative competence. Ultimately, we revealed how the difference in age and gender contributes to the rate to which a person is exposed to online video games, which indirectly alters the extent to which one acquires knowledge and enhances different skills differently.

General Conclusion

General Conclusion

The digital revolution has paved tremendous pathways for the emergence of technology, which becomes ubiquitous and necessary in our daily lives. The advent of such utility gave birth to the 'Information Age, wherein almost all of the adolescences around the world occupy a virtual persona in a virtual world. Correspondingly, online video games have witnessed a fair share of alterations as well, namely, by invading teenagers' homes around the world and the Algerian youngsters' homes in specific. In parallel with such growth, our study aimed to investigate whether playing online video games can result in positive outcomes that might be used constructively to achieve convenient alterations, in the Algerian academic settings. Therefore, we conducted a series of data collection sessions to determine whether online video games can be beneficial for our advanced English as foreign language learners.

During our research, we focused on three main areas and three variables. The first area was to determine the effects of online video games on the EFL learners, and this could be intercepted in skills, enhancing the cognitive level or acquired knowledge. After that, we dealt with the extent to which online video games enable EFL learners to improve their communication abilities as well as their intercultural communicative competence. The last element we investigated is how age and gender as variables influence the rate of these outcomes differently from a learner to another.

To achieve the desired data, we conduct 50 questionnaires and several interviews. We used both quantitative and qualitative research methods, and the data collection instruments utilized were a learner questionnaire, an interview, and an in-game observation.

In a nutshell, throughout the three undertaken chapters and the compiled data, we discovered that online video games do have a series of positive effects on the EFL learners. This swings from a series of cognitive abilities such as better memory and critical thinking to visible enhancements and alterations in communication abilities such as speaking and listening skills, as well as the writing and reading skills at a low extent. We also unveiled how online gaming exposes the EFL learners to different cultural backgrounds, which can be used to induce improvements in the intercultural communicative competence within our advanced learners.

Also, the present study indicates that online gaming can also be beneficial in enhancing social skills as well as emotional intelligence, which are both necessary in the outer world of our graduates, as well as the other learners. Nonetheless, we have also disclosed the influence of the age and gender factors on our EFL learners as individuals, which eventually changes the

General Conclusion

extent to which these individuals acquire skills and knowledge at different paces. This also suggests possible orientations in the existent pedagogical tools and approaches used in the field of Langue and Communication in the given context.

Finally, the three hypotheses of the study were validated and supported. As expected, the use of online video games by EFL learners turned to be efficacious in terms of communication abilities and intercultural communicative competence development.

However, it is a must to note that according to the analysis and deductions we arrived at, to have an optimal learning experience by online video games is extremely dependant on the game itself, as well as the other involved online users in the matches. In other words, online video games are not a supplement pill that one has to swallow to gain knowledge or to enhance a certain skill, but it is a process of learning that takes time with pre-conditions to be checked. The ultimate goal of our study is not to entirely label online gaming as the perfect way to acquire and develop different skills but to rather present it and raise awareness regarding the potentials of this tool, and perhaps, present it as a possible new tool that can be used pedagogically in advanced EFL learners' classes, namely, the "Language and Communication" classes at *Abdelhamid Ibn Badis University*

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Appendices

Learners' Questionnaire

Investigating the Potential of Online Video Games in Enhancing EFL Learners' Communication Abilities

Dear students,

This questionnaire aims to investigate the potential of online video games to enhance learners' communication abilities. To do this, we would like to ask you to help us answer these questions. Your responses will be kept completely confidential, and your assistance is greatly appreciated.

Part 1- Personal information

1 - **Your Gender:** Male
Female

2 - **Your Age:**

3 - **Your Department:**

English Department

Medicine Department

4 - **How would you describe your English grades?**

Very good

Good

Average

Not good

Part 2- The Potential of Online Video Games

1 - How would you rate your familiarity with Video Games?

- Very familiar with video games
- Somewhat familiar
- Somewhat unfamiliar
- Very unfamiliar

2 – How would you rate your familiarity with Online Video Games?

- Very familiar with online video games
- Somewhat familiar
- Somewhat unfamiliar
- Very unfamiliar

3 – What are your main goals when playing Online Video Games? (You are allowed to choose more than one answer)

- Entrainment
- To have fun with friends
- Past time
- Educational purposes
- Practice my language skills

4 – How much time do you spend on playing Online Video Games a day?

- Less than an hour
- 1 – 2 hours
- 2 – 5 hours
- 5 - 12 hours
- Over 12 hours

5 – How do you perceive the benefits of Online Video Games?

- Very advantageous
- Somewhat advantageous
- Somewhat disadvantageous
- Very disadvantageous

Please explain why?

6 – Did playing Online Video Games affect your English grades?

- Yes, positively
- Yes, negatively
- I don't play online video games

How did it affect your grades?

7 – What are the means you use to communicate with other players on Online Video Games?

- Through speaking on the Microphone
- Through typing in the chat
- Other means

8 – Has playing Online Video Games affected your English abilities? Such as speaking and listening abilities?

- Yes, it has affected both of my speaking and listening skills
- No, it has not affected any of my speaking and listening skills
- I do not play online video games

How do you think that happened?

Part 3-

1 – In Online Video Games, participants would interact with people from different cultural backgrounds. Would you perceive this type of communication as advantageous, or disadvantageous and why?

2 – Do you think that the use of Online Video Games would enhance the learner’s engagement in the English classroom? Please justify your answer

3 – What is your favourite Online Video Game? Could you tell us a little bit about it, and why do you like it?