

THE ROLE OF LITERATURE IN TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE WITH THE HELP OF DIGITAL EDUCATIONAL GAMES

Abstract

The use of literature in foreign language learning has been largely disputed over the last decades as not being necessary or even as being a hindrance for the learners since it makes no contribution to the purpose of learning a language for practical use. However, lately there has been a turn towards using authentic material in the classrooms and literature provides such a resource. But young children and teenagers seem to have lost interest in reading books since they prefer digital media. So, how can a teacher use literary texts without discouraging their students from studying them? Technology has come to help. Multimodal texts and digital educational games have received increasing attention in recent years as research shows that they affect students' learning and motivation. They stimulate the students' imagination and promote skills such as problem solving and collaboration. They help students develop multiliteracies such as visual literacy, cultural literacy, information literacy and critical literacy. In this paper we shall focus on the main steps to consider in this process.

Keywords_ English as a foreign language, literature, technology, digital educational games, multiliteracies

INTRODUCTION

The English language is a compulsory subject of the Greek State curriculum. but, very few, if any, literary texts are included. The stress is mainly on the structure and practical use of the language. Literature is very important for its linguistic, cultural and humanistic value. In relation to education, it can be a very powerful tool since it provides students with authentic material, it is motivating and promotes cultural awareness. Students can develop language skills, learn new vocabulary and grammatical structures and grow their pragmatic and sociolinguistic knowledge. However, literary texts can be challenging even for teachers, so how can they appear

more interesting and appealing to students? The application of digital games combined with literature can contribute greatly in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classrooms. Today's young children and teenagers are very familiar with technology and spend hours in front of their electronic devices playing games. It is very important for the teacher to incorporate digital media into the classroom to make the learning process more engaging and revitalize their interest in reading literature. Before that, it is important to consider the main steps in this process:

- Select appropriate literature according to the proficiency level, needs and interests of the students.
- Prepare and design scenarios suitable for the students' level and relevant to the selected literary text.
- Make sure the students are familiar with the technology being used.
- Integrate digital games that align with the contents and theme of the literature.
- Prepare the students before diving into literature.
- Try to find analogies in real life.
- Provide guidance and support throughout the process.
- Feedback and evaluation are of utmost importance.
- Have in mind to keep a balance to create a well-rounded learning experience.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To begin with, the work of Wang and Dostal explores the potential of utilizing digital educational games for English as a foreign language (EFL) learning. Employing qualitative methodology, the study delves into the features and functions of such games, drawing from relevant findings in Web of Science and SCOPUS databases. It highlights that teachers and parents play a crucial role in selecting suitable games, emphasizing their role as supplementary tools rather than substitutes for classroom teaching. Conclusively, the paper suggests that if employed judiciously, digital educational games can enhance the effectiveness of EFL learning, providing valuable insights for those interested in integrating technology into language education. It underscores the importance of a balanced approach, cautioning against excessive reliance on digital games and advocating for diverse learning methods to achieve optimal outcomes.

On the contrary, the article written by Sardone and Devlin-Scherer refers to the transformation of a methods class for preservice English teachers, integrating sessions on incorporating digital learning games into middle and high school classrooms. Preservice teachers played and shared these games with students, subsequently explaining their purpose and potential uses. The study explores the games played, reactions of preservice teachers and students, and suggests ways for inservice teachers to incorporate games into the curriculum. The conclusions stress the value of games without a clear winner to prioritize learning over competition. Highlighting specific games like *Ayiti: The Cost of Life* and *Darfur is Dying*, the study advocates for using games as tools for critical discussions on global issues. Emphasizing collaborative learning and knowledge acquisition over winning, the article recommends web-based games as effective instructional resources in the English curriculum, providing an engaging and accessible approach for both teachers and students.

The study by Sabirli and Çoklar investigates the impact of educational games on academic success, motivation, and attitudes of elementary school students. The research involves 90 students in a public primary school during the 2017-2018 academic year, utilizing a quasi-experimental design. The results reveal that educational games, specifically focused on "In The Classroom" and "Numbers" subjects in the English lesson, significantly enhance students' course achievement. The experimental group using educational games demonstrates a higher increase in success compared to the control group. Additionally, the use of educational games leads to increased motivation towards the English course, aligning with previous research findings. However, there is no significant difference in attitudes towards the course between the groups, suggesting that attitudes improved equally in both groups. The study emphasizes the positive impact of educational games on student success and motivation, highlighting their potential as effective instructional tools in primary education.

It is noteworthy that the systematic literature review by Acquah and Katz examines the effectiveness of digital games on second language learning for participants aged 6–18 between 2014 and 2018. The analysis of 26 studies reveals that digital learning games (DLGs) can positively impact language acquisition, affective/psychological states, contemporary competences, and participatory behavior. Common features influencing outcomes include ease-of-use, challenge, rewards and feedback, control, goal-orientation, and interactivity. The majority of research focused on English language

learning, utilized mixed methods, and was conducted in East Asia or the Middle East. Overall, DLGs are identified as effective tools for language learning, offering a fun, engaging, and challenging approach that fosters learner autonomy. Although positive outcomes were reported in 70% of cases, further research is recommended to explore the optimal implementation of DLGs in classroom settings and to investigate their impact on different age groups. The review suggests that DLGs have the potential to revolutionize the learning environment by bridging schools and enabling cross-cultural communication.

Furthermore, the study by Papastergiou aimed to assess the learning effectiveness and motivational appeal of a computer game designed for learning computer memory concepts in Greek high school Computer Science curriculum. A sample of 88 students was randomly assigned to two groups: one using the gaming application and the other a non-gaming one. Results indicate that the gaming approach was more effective in promoting students' knowledge of computer memory concepts and more motivational than the non-gaming approach. Gender differences in gaming engagement did not significantly impact learning gains or motivation. The study suggests that educational computer games can enhance learning and motivation in high school CS courses, supporting previous research. Despite the simplicity of the game, positive effects on knowledge acquisition and motivation were observed, hinting at the potential of more sophisticated games in education. The study emphasizes the effectiveness of digital game-based learning (DGBL) in various subjects within high school curricula and highlights its equal efficacy for both genders.

The study of Stamou et al. explores the integration of flexible educational scenarios, emphasizing serious games and modern pedagogical theories in History teaching through distance learning. The scenarios transition from teacher-centered to student-centered approaches, utilizing ICT to foster critical thinking, problem-solving, and digital literacy. Distance learning is seen as a dynamic system supporting collaborative learning methods, providing multilevel experiences. The teacher's role remains mediating, and gamification facilitates self-evaluation. Overall, the integration of digital educational scenarios promotes systematic student involvement and teacher creativity in building meaningful relationships through a multilevel reform process.

The aforementioned works explore diverse aspects of integrating technology, particularly digital educational games, into language and subject instruction. Want and Dostal delve into the potential of digital games for English as a foreign language (EFL)

learning, emphasizing the importance of a balanced approach. Sardone and Devlin-Scherer focus on the transformation of a methods class for preservice English teachers, highlighting the value of games in fostering critical discussions on global issues. Sabirli and Çoklar investigate the impact of educational games on elementary school students, stressing the positive effects on academic success and motivation. Acquah and Katz conduct a systematic literature review, revealing the effectiveness of digital games in second language learning, emphasizing features influencing outcomes. Stamou et al. explores the integration of serious games and modern pedagogical theories in History teaching through distance learning, emphasizing a transition from teacher-centered to student-centered approaches, fostering critical thinking, problem-solving, and digital literacy, with a focus on collaborative learning methods and gamification. Finally, Papastergiou assesses a computer game for learning computer memory concepts, indicating its effectiveness in high school Computer Science education.

These studies all have as their overarching theme the identification of technology—more especially, digital games—as an effective teaching tool that improves motivation and learning outcomes. Whether in elementary education, computer science training, second language acquisition, language learning, or discussions of global issues, each study offers distinctive insights into its application.

THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY IN LANGUAGE LEARNING

Game-based approaches are becoming more popular than theoretical teaching strategies because of the introduction of student-friendly technological resources that have brought new applications and potentials. Educational games are not designed solely for the entertainment of the students. This does not, however, mean that they should abandon the fundamental goal of traditional games, which is to entertain. As a result, it appears that educational games are defined by their ability to blend and integrate enjoyment and learning, so that if any of these two elements are absent, the games cannot be considered educational. Many young people's lives today revolve around digital gaming, which is a great opportunity to engage with students who might not be very interested in formal education. Students and teachers will benefit if language instruction can be integrated with well-known game genres without detracting from the game factor. One thing that can be said about the general utility of games, given their vastly different scopes and purposes, is that, when played in ideal environments, by carefully trained user groups, well-designed games can provide a variety of beneficial

and successful language learning experiences. Games can provide an immersive environment where the target language is frequently used. In order to advance in a game, players need to actively use the language by conversing with other players or game objects. This indicates that they are employing language in authentic and significant ways to complete a task. Additionally, it indicates that they are using the target language in socially acceptable contexts. In the context of a game, pragmatic appropriateness takes precedence over grammatical accuracy. Students are thereby exposed to linguistic and cultural information that they would not have learned in a classroom or from a textbook. They will typically come across a range of scenarios requiring the use of various language types, such as asking for assistance, providing clarifications or organizing activities. Playing games can be a strong tool for promoting learner autonomy, a possible source for maintaining language and a way to spark interest in learning new languages. Compared to activities linked to school, players' engagement with gaming and its associated activities is frequently higher and more immediate. The players form what has been referred to as "affinity space" (Gee, 2003), where a common interest dissolves boundaries between people and cultures, fostering an accepting and collaborative environment.

INTEGRATING LITERATURE THROUGH DIGITAL GAMES

The incorporation of literature in EFL classrooms is not new and has been supported by many because of its benefits. It enriches language, it increases the cultural awareness and promotes the personal involvement of the reader. New language is also introduced, motivation is boosted and variety to the lesson is added through meaningful context. Despite the benefits, teaching literature poses some difficulties to teachers and students as well. One problem is the belief that literary texts are too difficult and complex for students to comprehend and, thus, they do not help with the learning of the everyday vocabulary and grammar that they will need to communicate. Another problem is that the literary texts are too long and the students do not have the time to read them or they get bored very soon. These problems can be minimized if the teachers choose the suitable texts. Some criteria they need to consider are:

- The students' age
- The students' language level
- The students' needs

- The students' interests
- The students' cultural background

It is also important that the students should be introduced to different genres of literature since each genre provides them with different experiences. Poetry motivates them to find personal interpretations and explore their emotions. Short stories promote their learning and understanding of different cultures and their critical thinking. Drama helps them increase empathy, develop sensitivity, creativity and communication skills. Novels promote learning about different traditions and cultures and stimulate their imagination. It is important to use whole literary texts and not adaptations or graded readers so that a real and authentic experience is offered to the students. Fairy tales, myths and legends are more appropriate for younger children and young adult literature is more appropriate for teenagers, without excluding classic texts that can also be creatively used.

There are several benefits to playing digital games in the EFL classroom. Language acquisition is most effective when learners are exposed to enjoyable and engaging content. When students are exposed to stimulating material, they pick up the language regardless of their desire to do better at it. Students are encouraged to collaborate and study in groups through games. Games create a stress-free environment, which is the driving force behind effective teaching and language acquisition. Playing games in groups helps student improve their cognitive and teamwork skills. Games enable teachers to be innovative and creative and they also increase students' motivation, attention and involvement in the subject being taught. They help students feel less stressed and anxious, which is crucial for language acquisition. Learning English as a second language involves self-assurance, ease and positive attitude towards the language, the teacher and the learners themselves. Compared to students who experience significant levels of stress, those who learn a language with low levels of anxiety and stress are more likely to succeed.

Digital games have two potential applications for language acquisition. Firstly, the game itself provides language that players must engage with in order to advance and eventually reach a successful conclusion. This is accomplished by reading or listening to the games content, which provides backstory, specifics on different game statuses and hints towards short-term objectives. Secondly, a digital game can serve as a starting point for language use, just like any other language learning resource. Even if it does

not automatically provide the target language, it encourages language use while playing. Most of the time, in order to use digital games in the classroom, the teacher should assign pre, during and post-game assignments to students to keep the gaming activity in line with the intended learning objectives. Therefore, the design of educational or teaching scenarios are very important in this process.

A sequence of instructional activities that can either be basic or complex are used to implement a scenario. The identity, the teaching process, the implementation framework and the implementation are the typical components of an educational scenario. With the help of collaborative scenarios, the teachers can use digital games to guide student interactions within a positive framework. Students can benefit greatly from the game experience in terms of cognitive and meta-cognitive growth through the educational scenarios. The main stages of work for the implementation of such a scenario are:

- Planning
- Preparation
- Facilitation
- Evaluation

Instead of emphasizing on “getting the answer right”, an educational scenario focuses on the processes of engagement, critical thinking and improvement. Students are actively involved and practical learning is prioritized above theoretical understanding. The benefits are expected to come from the motivation, the engagement and the enjoyment of the game which will activate the cognitive processes. The creation and the implementation of a digital educational game that involves literature in the target language is not an easy task. Understanding human nature and what makes the students happy are prerequisites. The link that the game creates between the learning process and the scenario is a central component. It is important for students to learn while they play, without feeling that their effort to learn detracts from their enjoyment of the game. There are a lot of digital games that can be used in the EFL classroom, depending on the selected literary text, the level of the students and the electronic equipment that is available in each school. Timelines, WebQuests and digital posters are easy even for young students. The depiction of a scene from a text with the creation of a cartoon or the digital narration, the creation of speaking avatars acting a scene or the creation of a wiki for discussing a matter that is essential in the plot of a text are more appropriate

for teenage students. Negotiation games, interactive maps or Escape rooms can also be used in the classroom. All the above do not require special equipment and are not very difficult to implement. They require organization and time on behalf of the teacher and time and collaboration on behalf of the students so as they can be a fun and effective experience.

CASE STUDY

In the aforementioned framework, a survey addressed to English teachers in primary and secondary education was conducted in the form of a questionnaire. The survey took place in the island of Corfu and twenty-five teachers answered the questions regarding the integration of literature and digital games in the classroom. The results were very interesting and indicative of the reality in Greek EFL classrooms. Further research needs to be done so that safer results and conclusions can be drawn.

It seems that teachers are interested in game-based learning, but 56% of them are not very informed about it, although 60% of them consider the use of digital games in the classroom as very important. Nevertheless, 64% of them do not use digital games in their classrooms very often (fig.1.,2.,3)

What is your knowledge about game-based learning?
25 responses

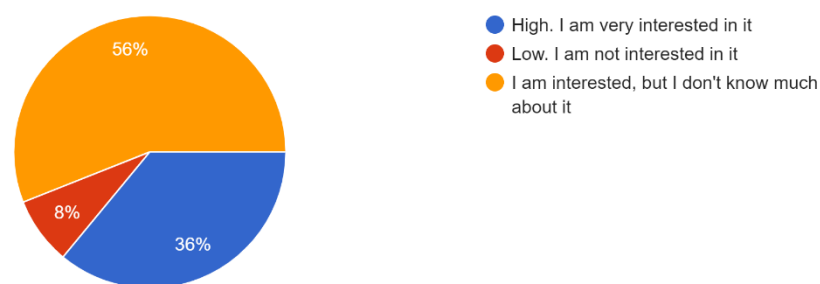


Fig.1. The teachers' level of information concerning game-based learning

How do you perceive the use of digital games in the classroom?

25 responses

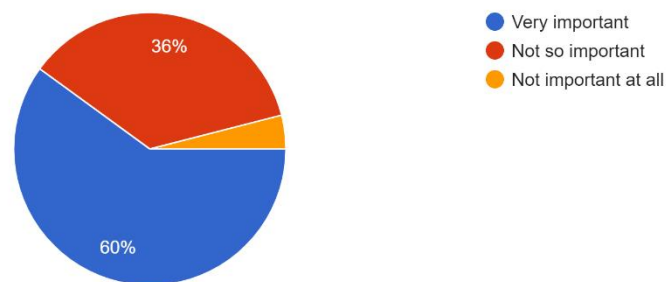


Fig.2. The importance of the use of digital games in the classroom

Do you use digital games in your classroom?

25 responses

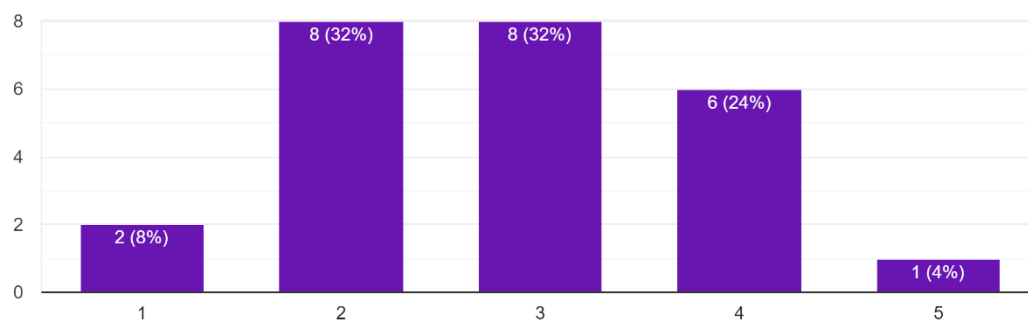


Fig.3. The frequency teachers use digital games in the classroom (1: never-5: very often)

Regarding the use of literary texts in the classroom, 52% of the teachers agree or strongly agree that literary texts should be used in the classroom, but only 32% often use them, whereas 52% would use a digital game that integrates literary texts. As far as their students are concerned, 64% believe that the use of digital games would raise their students' motivation towards reading literature and improve their performance. Fewer than half of them (48%) agree or strongly agree that digital games would offer their students opportunities to take better control over their learning process or improve their problem-solving skills (45,9%), but 76% agree or strongly agree that digital games offer their students opportunities to interact with each other and 56% agree or strongly agree that the combination of literature and digital games improve their students' critical thinking. What they seem to agree on is that the use of digital games would help students with learning difficulties come closer to literary texts (fig.4).

Do you believe that the use of digital games would help students with learning difficulties come closer to literary texts?

25 responses

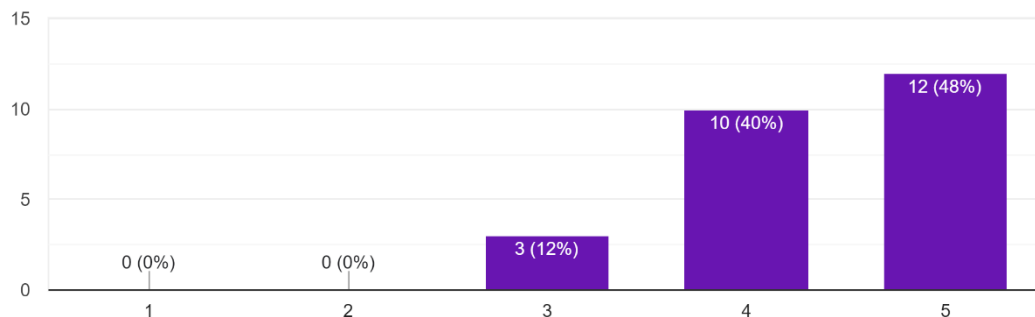


Fig.4. Digital games and students with learning difficulties

Finally, it is very important and indicative of the EFL classrooms in Greece that 60% of the teachers are not sure that it would be easy for them to use digital games and 52% are not sure that they would enhance their effectiveness. (fig.5., 6).

Would it be easy for you to use digital games in your classroom?

25 responses

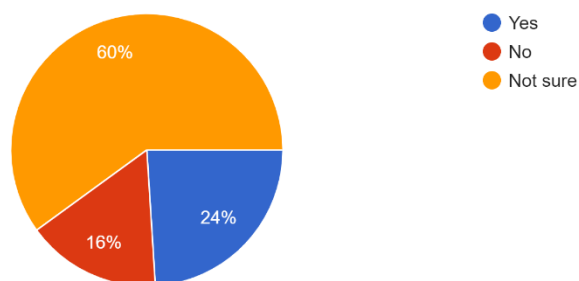


Fig.5. How easy is it for teachers to use digital games in the classroom

Would using digital games in your classroom enhance your effectiveness?
25 responses

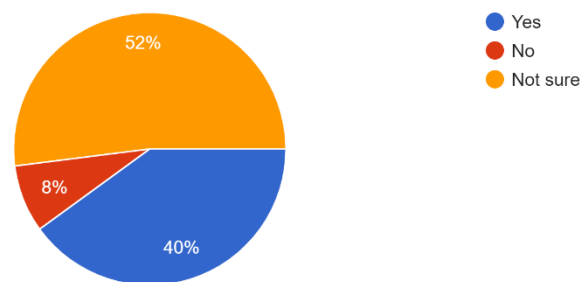


Fig.6. How sure teachers are that the use of digital games would enhance their effectiveness

CONCLUSION

Literature can be appealing to students with different learning styles and offers opportunities to foreign language classrooms. Literary texts can assist students in developing their four language skills: reading, writing, speaking and listening and are solid sources for linguistic inputs. Reading literature can improve the students' understanding of different cultures and societies. Students' awareness and knowledge of the language are also developed along with their imagination and emotions which increase motivation for learning.

Digital games, on the other hand, can be used in classroom to increase students' motivation towards studying foreign languages and to give them more opportunities to interact with traditional and non-traditional learning tools. They can serve as a starting point for discussions in the classroom where students can voice their opinions or they can be used to draw students in and reinforce instructional themes. Gaming has the potential to be an engaging and helpful tool if the game's content is closely related to the subject and students enjoy playing it. These games let language learners from different sociocultural backgrounds engage with one another and create new opportunities for inclusive language learning approaches. In combination with literary texts, they can promote effective learning, linguistic, social, cognitive and pragmatic awareness.

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