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Digital Games in the Language Classroom: Designing Better Curricula Through Exploratory Factor Analysis

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Digital game-based language learning is a growing field of study which has begun to highlight the potential of digital games as language learning tools. Much of the literature in the field has addressed the potential benefit of engagement outside the classroom with digital games for second language acquisition. However, when digital games are used in the controlled environment of a foreign language classroom, the enormous variety of commercially produced digital games makes designing objectively effective digital gaming curricula more challenging. Furthermore, what has failed to be addressed in much of the relevant literature in the field is whether variables such as a player's target language ability, perception of digital gaming, and personal gaming habits influence student performance in courses using digital games as a method of instruction. One way of approaching how to effectively use digital games as a language learning tool in the classroom is through multivariate data analysis such as exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to identify latent factors correlated with variables such as performance on tests, gaming habits, and attitudes towards a digital gaming curriculum. This study attempts to address this issue by showing how EFA can help educators interested in using digital games to not only better understand classroom data but also to design better curricula. The study itself was conducted over a three-year period in university-level EFL courses and the curriculum was based on the smartphone edition of the single-player role-playing game *Life Is Strange* (Dontnod Entertainment, 2015). The study identified three latent factors correlated with the variables of vocabulary acquisition from the game, comprehension of the in-game narrative content, gaming habits, and the perceptions of smartphone games as language learning tools. This presentation will demonstrate how these results may help to design more effective lessons which use digital games as an instructional tool.

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Keywords

Digital game-based language learning, curriculum design, multivariate analysis, exploratory factor analysis, smartphone gaming

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