

EFL Instructors' Perceptions of Integrating Video Games as Extracurricular English Activities

Çağla Usta¹ , Ahmet Şahan² 

Abstract

This study delves into EFL instructors' perceptions of integrating video games as extracurricular activities. Combining quantitative and qualitative data collection methods, a mixed method was employed. The data were collected through a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. 147 EFL instructors who work at universities in Türkiye took part in the quantitative phase of the study, and 10 instructors volunteered to participate in the interview sessions. The quantitative data were analyzed via SPSS 23, and for the qualitative data analysis MAXQDA software program was utilized. The results revealed that EFL instructors have generally positive perceptions of integrating video games as extracurricular activities, with a minority actively using them in their teaching. Moreover, there was a consensus that video games could be more effective when utilized as extracurricular tools rather than main instructional tools. Notable concerns expressed by the participants included time limitations, a busy curriculum, and a lack of knowledge about video games. Despite these concerns, it was found that the EFL instructors are willing to use video games in their teaching practices and learn more about them. These findings point out the importance of targeted professional development programs for the effective integration of video games into language teaching as extracurricular activities.

Keywords: video games, instructors' perceptions, extracurricular activities, higher education

İngilizce Okutmanlarının Video Oyunlarının Ders Dışı İngilizce Etkinlikleri Olarak Entegre Edilmesine İlişkin Algıları

Özet (Türkçe)

Bu çalışma, İngilizce okutmanlarının video oyunlarını ders dışı etkinlikler olarak entegre etme konusundaki algılarını incelemektedir. Çalışmada, nicel ve nitel veri toplama yöntemlerinin bir arada kullanıldığı karma yöntem kullanılmıştır. Veriler anket ve yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler yoluyla elde edilmiştir. Yapılan ankete Türkiye'deki üniversitelerde görev yapan 147 İngilizce okutmanı, görüşmelere ise 10 gönüllü okutman katılmıştır. Nicel veriler SPSS 23 aracıyla, nitel veriler ise MAXQDA yazılım programı yardımıyla analiz edilmiştir. Sonuçlar, İngilizce okutmanlarının video oyunlarını ders dışı etkinlikler olarak entegre etme konusunda genel olarak olumlu algılara sahip olduklarını, az sayıda katılımcının ise bunları aktif olarak derslerinde kullandığını ortaya çıkarmıştır. Ayrıca katılımcılar, video oyunlarının ana ders materyali olmasından ziyade, ders dışı araçlar olarak kullanıldığında daha etkili olabileceği konusunda fikir birliğine varmışlardır. Katılımcıların dile getirdiği endişeler arasında kısıtlı zaman, yoğun müfredat ve video oyunları hakkında bilgi eksikliği bulunmaktadır. Bu endişelere rağmen, İngilizce okutmanlarının öğretim uygulamalarında video oyunlarını kullanmaya ve bu konuda daha fazla bilgi edinmeye istekli oldukları sonucuna varılmıştır. Bu bulgular, video oyunlarının ders dışı etkinlikler olarak dil öğretimine etkili bir şekilde entegrasyonu için hedeflenen mesleki gelişim programlarının önemine işaret etmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: ders dışı etkinlikler, okutmanların algıları, video oyunları, yüksek öğrenim



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¹ Instructor, Erciyes University, cagla.usta08@gmail.com

² Asst. Prof. Dr., Erciyes University, asahan@erciyes.edu.tr

Introduction

In the 21st century, the traditional methods in language teaching seem quite outdated and inadequate to address the needs, expectations, and characteristics of today's learners as the notion of learner and learning has been changing tremendously. It is commonly argued that the minds of young people today have significantly altered, and they do almost everything differently compared to the previous generations (Carstens & Beck, 2005; Prensky, 2001). In a similar vein, the notion of language learning and the purpose of English language education have been changing and evolving in accordance with the new learner profiles and the requirements of the technological era. Therefore, in the landscape of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction, the incorporation of innovative and engaging teaching methodologies has become indispensable.

The most prominent goal of language teaching is to equip learners with language skills applicable to real-life scenarios, that is, to extend learning beyond the classroom setting (Krashen & Terrell, 1984). To achieve this objective, extracurricular activities might serve as significant components. Extracurricular English activities, also known as informal learning, out-of-class activity, or extramural English, simply refer to English activities that learners participate in outside the English classroom (Sundqvist, 2009). It should be noted that engaging in extracurricular English activities does not necessarily require a deliberate effort to acquire the language; rather, it can occur naturally during various occasions by being exposed to the target language. This characteristic of extracurricular activities aligns with the notion that language is acquired unconsciously, that is, the learner does not consciously focus on the linguistic form but rather on the message or content (Krashen, 1985). As examples of extracurricular English activities, learners watching an English TV series, listening to English songs, or reading in English for pleasure can significantly enhance their familiarity with the English language and culture. Additionally, these activities may lead to the unconscious acquisition of new vocabulary items or structures. Furthermore, previous research indicates that students who have a high level of proficiency in English often attribute their success to learning activities outside of the class (Nunan, 1991).

Despite their undeniable influence on language learning, extracurricular English activities remain underexplored in the literature or are often limited to more conventional pursuits such as reading, watching films, or listening to music. However, as emphasized earlier, in order to engage the new generation in language learning effectively, we must turn our attention to a key player in popular media: video games.

A video game is defined as “a game which we play thanks to an audio-visual apparatus and which can be based on a story” (Esposito, 2005, p.2). The term *video game* functions as an all-inclusive term in the present study and refers to all games played on electronic devices such as computers, gaming consoles, tablets, or mobile phones (Wu, 2015). Video games encompass a diverse spectrum, which makes their categorization quite complex. They could be classified according to the platforms they are played, such as computer, console, arcade, mobile, online, and VR games. Adams (2013), on the other hand, proposes a categorization based on interaction, leading to genres such as Action (e.g., Call of Duty), Adventure (e.g., Uncharted), Fighting (e.g., Tekken), Puzzle (e.g., Tetris), Role-Playing (e.g., Elder Scrolls: Skyrim), Simulations (e.g., Cities: Skylines), Sports (e.g., ProEvolution Soccer), Strategy (e.g., Age of Empires), and Social (e.g., Minecraft). Additionally, video games can be categorized based on their intended design purposes. Some prominent genres are defined below:

- Advergames: Interactive games crafted to promote products or services by companies.
- Commercial games: Developed primarily for entertainment and leisure purposes.
- Educational games: Designed for instructional use, serving as engaging tools for teaching.
- Serious games: A subset of educational video games aimed at purposes beyond mere entertainment. These games simulate real-world events to facilitate teaching or training in diverse fields such as military, engineering, science, healthcare, or politics.

Video games have evolved into a crucial element of mainstream culture, captivating individuals across various age groups, genders, occupations, and socio-economic backgrounds. As gaming keeps becoming more popular and inclusive, it has become a topic of considerable debate and controversy. Despite debates regarding potential harms, numerous studies underscore the benefits of playing video games, including enhanced cognitive skills and intellectual development. More precisely, video games are widely accepted to promote language learning in various ways. Previous studies point out that video games provide social interaction, immersion, personalized learning, autonomy, and more importantly motivation to learn (Ebrahimzadeh & Alavi, 2017; Rudis & Poštič, 2018; Thorne, 2010). Moreover, it is suggested that the “beyond-game” culture that has emerged around video games through online communities (Gee, 2008) might offer profound opportunities for English language learners to engage with a broader English-speaking community.

It is quite surprising that video games, prevalent and engaging leisure activities for the youth (Sylvén & Sundqvist, 2012), have drawn very little scholarly attention as a form of extracurricular activity. Furthermore, existing literature predominantly concentrates on pre-service teachers' perceptions or merely the educational games, neglecting the broader landscape of video games as extracurricular tools, especially within the Turkish EFL context. This research seeks to address this significant gap by delving into EFL instructors' perceptions of video games as extracurricular English activities in Türkiye considering potential barriers, benefits, and the current landscape of video game use in the context of EFL instruction. Also, unlike previous studies focusing on educational games, this research encompasses all types of games, including commercial ones, to provide a comprehensive understanding of their impact.

Therefore, the present research not only addresses the gap in the literature regarding video games as extracurricular English activities but also sheds light on EFL instructors' perceptions. The results of the study might contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the role of video games in enhancing language learning beyond the traditional classroom. Moreover, significant educational implications could emerge regarding in-service and pre-service teacher training programs.

In essence, the present study seeks to find an answer to the following research question:

- What are EFL instructors' perceptions of integrating video games into English language teaching as extracurricular English activities?

Method

A mixed method, combining both qualitative and quantitative data analysis, was employed in the present study. The current study particularly focuses on a specific section of the findings of the thesis, shedding light on the multifaceted dimensions explored within the original research.

Participants

The study focuses on EFL (English as a Foreign Language) instructors in Turkish schools of foreign languages. Due to the impracticality of reaching all EFL instructors in Türkiye, a smaller but representative sample was selected using convenience sampling (Dörnyei, 2007). This method, categorized under non-probability sampling, involves choosing participants based on their accessibility (Dörnyei, 2007; Stratton, 2021). The questionnaire was sent to 152 schools of foreign languages in Türkiye. 147 EFL instructors who work at schools of foreign languages of universities in Türkiye participated in the quantitative phase of the research. Ten of these participants volunteered for the interviews.

Data Collection Tools and Procedure

Because a mixed method was employed in the study, both qualitative and quantitative data were collected. For the quantitative data collection, an online questionnaire including five sections was

adopted and redesigned. For the present study, only the last section of the questionnaire was employed. This section included 10 items exploring the perceptions of instructors regarding the use of video games as extracurricular activities. The items were adapted from Wu (2015) and Li (2017) with several additions and changes made by the researcher. Also, the term “extracurricular” was replaced with equivalent terms, “supplementary/ out-of-class”, in order to make them clear for the participants. For the qualitative data collection, semi-structured interviews including six open-ended questions and several prompts were carried out. These questions enabled the participants to elaborate on their answers and provide the researcher with further explanations for their responses.

To enhance validity and reliability, both data collection tools were reviewed by two subject-matter experts and one statistician. With the feedback obtained, necessary modifications were made by the researcher to ensure that the items were clear, relevant, and comprehensible. The data collection instruments and procedures employed in this study received ethical approval from the Erciyes University Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee. Furthermore, the participants provided their consent to engage in both the questionnaire and the interview through the consent forms.

Data Analysis

Regarding the quantitative data, descriptive analysis was conducted. The frequencies and percentages were calculated to reveal the participants’ perceptions of video games as extracurricular activities. For the qualitative data analysis, the audio recordings of the semi-structured interviews were transcribed by the researcher. Then the data were carefully organised through MAXQDA software. Following that, codes, themes, and categories were created. The final step involved the summary and the interpretation of the data in accordance with the research questions.

Findings

In this section, the findings of the quantitative and qualitative data analysis are presented. First, the findings of the quantitative data analysis are shown in the table below. Then the findings of the qualitative data are presented with codes and categories. Finally, the quantitative and qualitative data analysis are explained together providing significant quotations from the interview sessions.

Table 1. The Frequency of the EFL Instructors' Perceptions of Video Games as Extracurricular Activities (Questionnaire Results)

Integrating video games into English language teaching as supplementary/out-of-class activities...		f	%
is an effective way to extend learning beyond the classroom.	Disagree	14	9.5
	Neutral	32	21.8
	Agree	101	68.7
may help me build rapport with my students.	Disagree	11	7.5
	Neutral	41	27.9
	Agree	94	63.9
would require some knowledge and experience in gaming.	Disagree	10	6.8
	Neutral	20	13.6
	Agree	117	79.6
would not be as effective as using video games in class as the main instructional tools.	Disagree	42	28.6
	Neutral	62	42.2
	Agree	43	29.3
would be effective only with educational video games, which are designed for educational purposes.	Disagree	46	31.3
	Neutral	41	27.9
	Agree	60	40.8
would increase my workload.	Disagree	26	17.7
	Neutral	54	36.7
	Agree	67	45.6

would require too much technical support and guidance.	Disagree	31	21.1
	Neutral	51	34.7
	Agree	65	44.2
is a practice that I use in my own teaching.	Disagree	91	61.9
	Neutral	32	21.8
	Agree	24	16.3
is a practice that I would like to use in the future.	Disagree	26	17.7
	Neutral	51	34.7
	Agree	70	47.6
is a practice that I would like to learn more about.	Disagree	16	10.9
	Neutral	48	32.7
	Agree	83	56.5

Table 1 shows the results of the questionnaire related to the perception of EFL instructors regarding integrating video games into English language teaching.

Table 2. EFL Instructors' Opinions on Integrating Video Games into Teaching (Interview Results)

Categories	Codes	f
Willingness to integrate	Good idea	2
	Not a good idea	1
	Positive yet cautious	7
	Interested in learning more	10
	Total	20
Foreseen Benefits	Enjoyable learning	2
	Motivation to learn	3
	Interaction	2
	Lower affective filter	2
	New perspectives	1
	Developing rapport with students	1
	Exposure to English	2
	Practice	3
	Total	16

Table 2 demonstrates the findings of the interview session with corresponding categories and codes.

The results show that the majority of the questionnaire participants (68.7%) believed that integrating video games into English language teaching as supplementary/out-of-class activities is an effective way to extend learning beyond the classroom. Similarly, most of the interview participants shared the same idea. They also provided further reasons and explanations as well. Motivation and practice were among the most frequently mentioned benefits. Relevant excerpts from the interview sessions can be seen below:

I think video games are valuable as out-of-class materials because of students' interest and motivation to use them. (Participant 4)

Personally what I think is that it would be good for the students because we are no more in the time of where traditional teaching is applied. Innovative methods and implementing the tools that the current era offers us can be useful. (P5)

As I have previously mentioned, playing a video game is a relaxed atmosphere for learning a language and it's mostly natural and students do it not by some force but by their own will. (P6)

Moreover, most of the questionnaire participants agreed (63.9%) that the integration of video games into English language teaching as supplementary/out-of-class activities might help them build rapport with their students. Likewise, the same opinion was shared by one interviewee as the following:

It may bring the instructor and the students closer. We never understand why students play video games for hours. We may have a new perspective in terms of making language learning and teaching more fun. (P3)

In addition, the significant majority of the participants (79.6%) assumed that video game integration would require some knowledge and experience in gaming. The same opinion was uttered frequently in the interview sessions as well. Most of the instructors who supported the video game integration also highlighted the need for some knowledge and experience with games. The following excerpt exemplifies the aforementioned opinion:

As a teacher firstly I need to have enough information about those video games maybe the rules maybe the strategies I can suggest to my students. If I know if I am knowledgeable about it, of course, it's a good way of practicing. (P7)

Regarding the way of integration, as main instructional tools or supplementary materials, most of the participants (42.2%) remained unsure. However, all the participants in the interview sessions expressed that it would be better to use video games as supplementary (extracurricular) activities in teaching as can be seen in the following excerpt:

In class, we have a lot of different students and some of them may not be interested in video games, so as main instructional tools, I think it should not be used, so as supplementary or out-of-class materials it should be better. (P7)

Concerning the type of video games, the majority of the instructors (40.8%) in the questionnaire believed that the implementation of educational games would be more effective compared to other games (commercial games). On the other hand, the interviewees had various responses. Some of them supported the use of educational games while others were definitely against it. Different opinions were expressed as follows:

I don't think that educational games would be useful. I am sure that students will find them boring. (P3)

I would prefer educational games if it is going to be a part of the curriculum. But for students, they can play whatever they want in their own time, if it is in English, it would be useful. (P8)

As for the perceived barriers, almost half of the questionnaire participants agreed that video game integration would increase their workload and require technical support and guidance. In a similar vein, interviewees stated some barriers as follows:

Teachers may not be familiar with video games. New devices may be too complicated for some teachers. (P3)

I guess time, gender, and also developing game industry. We couldn't catch them all. (P2)

Regarding their current use of video games, only a minority (16.3%) expressed that they use video games in their teaching. However, approximately half of the instructors expressed their willingness to use it in the future, and more than half of the instructors would like to learn more about it. The findings of the interview sessions were in line with this result. Some related excerpts from the interview sessions can be seen below:

No, actually I don't use video games, but I advise my students to play video games. It is not a waste of time. (P9)

I would very much like to learn about using video games out of class as most of my knowledge is built on my personal experience so I would want to learn about the theoretical background or the literature on how effective they are or what types are more effective etc. (P10)

I would love to learn more about making use of video games in my teaching and as supplementary activities. They will bring joy, and I am sure they will help both learning and teaching. (P3)

Conclusion and Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to explore the perceptions of EFL instructors about the integration of video games as extracurricular activities. The results of the qualitative and quantitative data analysis revealed various views. Firstly, the participants all agreed that video games offer valuable opportunities if they are used in language teaching. To put it differently, the EFL instructors have positive perceptions of using video games in English language teaching, and they believe integrating video games into English language teaching is an effective way to extend learning beyond the classroom. This result aligns with Can (2003), Koh et al. (2011), and Güleroğlu (2015). Furthermore, the participants regard video games as useful tools to practice language skills and they acknowledge the motivation factor video games foster. Likewise, Bedir and Müftüoğlu (2016), Franciosi (2014), İnce and Demirbilek (2013), and Rocha et al. (2018) indicate that motivation was one of the perceived benefits of video games. Moreover, the EFL instructors support the idea that integrating video games might contribute to building rapport with students. Despite their positive perceptions, few participants reported that they use video games in their teaching. In contrast to Schrader et al. (2006), Chik (2011), and Hsu and Chiou (2019), the EFL instructors are probably aware of the pedagogical potential of video games; however, they are not very well-informed or cautious about them due to several concerns. Regarding the concerns, most of the instructors pointed out the limited time, heavy curriculum, and limited knowledge. These findings are in line with previous studies (Alshaya, 2020; Bedir & Müftüoğlu, 2016; Hsu & Chiou, 2019; Koh et al., 2011). Also, the participants in the current study believed that video game integration would increase their workload; however, a study conducted by Bensiger (2012) revealed that pre-service teachers do not believe that their workload would increase. This difference might be attributed to teacher candidates' lack of experience in teaching.

Regarding preferences for game types, the participants in the questionnaire predominantly preferred educational games, while interview sessions revealed an equal split between those supporting educational games and commercial games. Alshaya (2020) suggests that teachers' perspectives on educational games may be influenced by external factors rather than personal experiences. This might be the case for the current study as well. While educational games align with learning objectives, they are often perceived as artificial and less motivating by students. Similarly, Beggs et al. (2009) highlight the need for sophistication in educational games. This suggests that educational games may not fully meet the needs of today's learners as much as commercially available games they enjoy in their personal lives. Therefore, the current study recommends a reconsideration of commercial games in addition to educational ones. Concerning the preference for video games as the main instructional tools or extracurricular activities, the respondents in the questionnaire were indecisive about the effectiveness of using video games as extracurricular activities or main instructional tools, whereas all interviewees ($N=10$) favored integrating video games as extracurricular activities. The main reasons for objecting to in-class use of video games were limited class hours, diverse student interests, and a lack of knowledge. Likewise, the studies conducted by Can (2003) and Franciosi (2014) suggest the integration of video games in teaching as supplementary tools. Finally, the results revealed that over half of the participants would like to use video games in teaching in the future. Furthermore, similar to Bedir and Müftüoğlu (2016), Can (2003), and Sandford et al. (2006), the participants are willing to learn more about video game integration.

In brief, the results of the study indicate that EFL instructors hold favorable views regarding the incorporation of video games into language teaching. A small proportion of the participants reported that they currently integrate video games into their teaching methods. The most common barriers are listed as a lack of knowledge about video games, limited time, and a busy curriculum. Regarding their

preferences for educational versus commercial games, diverse opinions exist among the participants. Nevertheless, the majority agrees that video games would be more effective if integrated as supplementary or extracurricular tools. Lastly, a significant number of the participants expressed a desire to learn more about the integration of video games into language teaching and incorporate them into their future teaching practices.

The results emphasize the instructors' willingness to integrate video games into language teaching; however, there is a notable gap in their knowledge and expertise, which highlights the importance of in-service teacher training programs and English language teacher education that address the incorporation of video games effectively. Moreover, educators and curriculum developers could explore ways to integrate both educational and commercial games as supplementary tools, considering the diverse interests of students. Furthermore, the prevalent preference for utilizing video games as extracurricular activities indicates a potential shift in traditional approaches. It is essential to equip instructors with the skills and strategies necessary for integrating video games beyond traditional classrooms, recognizing the potential benefits of video games for language learners in extracurricular contexts.

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