USING VIDEO GAMES IN EFL CLASSROOMS
TO ENHANCE STUDENTS' 21st CENTURY SKILLS

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Abstract: In this digital age, EFL students have been used to using technological media in their daily lives. They have learnt English through video games even before they meet their English teachers for the first time in primary school. By the time they are adults, they have learnt a lot because of video games. Video games are also believed to be able to enhance students' 21st century skills. EFL teachers need to improvise the teaching and learning activities by inserting video games in their classrooms not only to improve their students' English ability, but also to enhance the students' 21st century skills needed for the upcoming Asean Economic Community (AEC) in 2015. From this perspective, this paper is aimed to discuss the integration of video games in EFL classrooms for adults by EFL teachers in institutions, the guidelines regarding the practical use of this technology, and the 21st century skills that can be enhanced through the use of this technology. This paper is useful for EFL teachers to utilise video games for learning and to motivate students.

Keywords: *Video Games, 21st Century Skills, EFL classroom, Teaching and Learning Activities*

Introduction

21st century is the age of digitalisation, where everything goes digital. This age has led us to the birth of digital natives: children who were/are born in the digital age. This age has also made us, the predecessors, digital immigrants: those who were born before the digital age (Prensky: 2001).

With the advancement in digital technologies, and the digital natives' fast adaptation to them, conventional educational system needs reforming, i.e. no more "I talk, you listen" learning. The learning environment must also be made interactive and more fun for students, without losing the essence of education itself. It is essential that educational system adapt to the needs of the students to face the upcoming challenges: Asean Economic Community (AEC) in 2015. One of the ways to prepare students in global competition is enhance their 21st century skills.

21st Century Skills

Adapting ourselves and preparing our next generation to live, compete, and work in 21st century are not a simple task. We must first learn to live in it to prepare our children for it. Although our children may automatically get accustomed to living in 21st century, we should not divert our eyes and instead we should keep monitoring their development. Teachers should also understand the life, competitions, markets, and challenges in 21st century in order to direct their students to the correct path of globalisation. We need to understand the skills needed by the students to survive this era.

21st century skills and knowledge are new ways of living and thinking in this new age. Saavedra and Opfer (2012: 5) explain the skills:

> 21st century skills are cross-disciplinary and relevant to many aspects of contemporary life in a complex world. They do not currently have a specific place in most curricula. And most of 21st century skills are not entirely composed of skills, by any means. They involve aspects of skill and understanding, but many of them emphasise inclinations, such as curiosity, creativity, and collaboration, that are not, strictly speaking, skills. Some lists emphasise technology, and others stress attitudes and values more.

In addition, IMLS Project Team and Task Force also considers some 21st century skills. The team proposes 20 skills along with the sub-skills that different institutions might focus on different skills:
1. Critical thinking and problem solving, i.e. reason effectively, use systems thinking, make judgements and decisions, and solve problems
2. Creativity and innovation, i.e. think creatively, work creatively with others, and implement innovations
3. Communication and collaboration, i.e. communicate clearly and collaborate with others
4. Visual literacy
5. Scientific and numerical literacy
6. Cross-disciplinary thinking

7. Basic literacy
8. Information literacy, i.e. access, evaluate, use, and manage information
9. Media literacy, i.e. analyse media and create media products
10. Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) literacy, i.e. apply technology effectively
11. Global awareness
12. Financial, economic, business, and entrepreneurial literacy
13. Civic literacy
14. Health literacy
15. Environmental literacy
16. Flexibility and adaptability, i.e. adapt to change and be flexible
17. Initiative and self-direction, i.e. manage goals and time, work independently, and be self-directed learners
18. Social and cross-cultural skills, i.e. interact effectively with others and work effectively in diverse teams
19. Productivity and accountability, i.e. manage projects and produce results
20. Leadership and responsibility, i.e. guide and lead others and be responsible to others

On the other hand, Wagner (2008) on his book *The Global Achievement Gap*, proposes only seven survival skills students need to be prepare for 21st century life, work, and citizenship, those are: 1) critical thinking and problem solving; 2) collaboration and leadership; 3) agility and adaptability; 4) initiative and entrepreneurialism; 5) effective oral and written communication; 6) accessing and analysing information; and 7) curiosity and imagination. From the seven skills Wagner (2008) mentions, it is necessary that Southeast Asia students learn to accustom themselves to be able to communicate and access information in English, given the fact that Southeast Asia countries have various national languages, in order to live, work, and compete in the upcoming AEC. Hence, it is also the duty of EFL teachers to help students obtain the skills from their classrooms.

When we say classrooms, it does not mean rooms that students sit in to listen to lectures; classrooms can also mean any place students get to learn something and gain new knowledge. Therefore, it is possible that teachers conduct a moving classroom, i.e. make the students experience the real learning outside the classroom. This is supported by Guardian Unlimited (2005) which releases the fact that employers are frustrated that young people of all abilities are finding it harder to cope in their early years at work because they have been stifled in the classroom and textbook learning rather than seeing and experiencing how they learn is applied in the world outside (in Galarneau & Zibit 2007: 63). Therefore, in order to achieve the objectives of learning in the 21st century, teachers need to improve their teaching methods by expanding the classrooms into those applicable.

Learning in the 21st Century

21st century demands people who live in it to improve their skills in order to survive in global competitions. They are obliged to possess the 21st century skills which they can get from either experience or education. However, enhancing people's 21st century skills from education needs a long process and must be supported by well-considered curriculum and well-thought lesson plans with clear objectives. In EFL learning, it is important that the objectives of the learning improve not only the English skills, but also the 21st century skills.

The learning activities in the 21st century are also very much different from those of the previous centuries. Students' needs have also changed from only wanting to gain knowledge and pass the exam, to wanting to apply the knowledge and have/improve both soft and hard skills. That is why schools, especially those in Southeast Asia, need to provide or improve students' 21st century skills and prepare them for the AEC. Saavedra and Opfer (2012: 6) explain why schools need to increase their focus on developing students' 21st century skills.

> Though students need a foundation of basic civic knowledge, rote learning—recitation of information about government and citizenship—is not a sufficient way to promote civic engagement. They also need to learn how and why to be engaged citizens who think critically—so that they can, for example, analyse news items, identify biases, and vote in an educated way; solve problems so they can propose or review policies to address social challenges.

In addition, students cannot obtain the skills simply by sitting in classes, listening to lectures, and taking notes—they must implement what they learn to activities that may, consciously or unconsciously, develop their skills, namely, video games. This is in line with what Johnson (2005) says, "It is striking that many people today are not acquiring 21st century skills through structured learning environments that anticipate these needs, but rather through various 'cognitively demanding leisure' activities they choose to engage with, including to a larger and larger extent, videogames" (in Galarneau & Zibit 2007: 61).

Video Games as a Tool for Learning

Video games, which are mostly commercial video games, can be played on Sony Playstation, Nintendo Wii, Xbox 360, personal computers (PC), and handheld devices including mobile phones and tablets. There are two types of video games played today: offline and online video games. Offline video games are mostly played by just one player. There are, however, some offline video games that can be played by 2-8 players using additional controllers; or, in Xbox 360 case which provides Kinect sensor, players just have to log in to their profiles to play together.

Online video games, on the other hand, are games that can be played by two or more players, even hundreds, using the Internet connection or Local Area Network (LAN) access. People from all across the globe can play one video game at the same time. They can either compete with each other, or form a team for one goal. They can even form a team to compete with other teams in order to win the game. These online video games that let players come together to play are called Massive Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games (MMORPGs).

Video games have been widely played by children or adults ever since they were first invented in the end of 1980s. Nowadays video games can be played for not only entertainment purpose, but also educational purposes. There are practitioners in education such as Marc Prensky (2001, 2006, 2007) and James Paul Gee (2003, 2004, 2005) who contribute their ideas about video games being educational. In his book, *Don't Bother Me, Mom—I'm Learning!*, Prensky (2006) elaborates the benefits of playing video games by both children and adults, especially children, to develop their 21st century skills unconsciously. As they play the video games, children learn new things without even realising they are learning. In fact, Dr. James Rosser, the doctor in charge of laparoscopic surgery training at NYC's Beth Israel Hospital confirms that he uses the same hand-eye coordination to play video games as he uses for surgery. He even makes his doctors warm up before surgery by playing video games.

If Rosser can do that to his subordinates to improve their skills in surgery, EFL teachers can also make use of video games in classrooms to make students learn English and other 21st century skills without having to feel 'forced' to learn. To add up, video games is even a more interactive tool for learning compared to videos, audios, and other ICT media, because students are involved in the process and take part in deciding what to do to make the process end well. As a gamer myself, I have proven the advantages of playing video games. Two major skills I develop during my playing are multitasking and my reflex movement, including my reflex in making decisions. Gee has also proven the positive effects of video games from his nine-year-old son, who got interested in learning mythology at his age, because of his playing *Age of Mythology*.

Insertion of Video Games in EFL Classroom and the 21st Century Skills Obtained

In this section, I am going to elaborate some video games that can be used in EFL classrooms and their effects for students. I have applied some video games in my EFL classrooms. However, most of the games and the 21st century skills that can be enhanced I am going to list here are merely an idea, supported by my own experience playing those. EFL teachers can use some of the games depending on their study objectives. Teachers can install the Xbox 360 console, Wii, or Playstation in the classroom by connecting the console to LCD projector in the classroom using HDMI to VGA converter.

Racing Games, Fighting Games, and Football Games

Racing, fighting, and football games can be played by only one player. They will, however, be even more interactive when they are played together, especially in the classroom. Some examples of these type of games are Moto GP, MX VS ATV Reflex, Tekken Tag Tournament, and Pro Evolution Soccer. Some of the games of these types can be played using both controllers or the Kinect sensor (for Xbox 360 only). Playing these games can stimulate students to learn tactics: how to beat their opponent without losing their own points. Learning tactics is part of critical thinking and problem solving, one of the 21st century skills. The games can also enhance students' sportiveness, because whoever loses can accept it and still have fun with the games. These types of games can even make students multitask, because they push several buttons on the controller as their eyes are looking at the screen (flexibility and adaptability). When played in a classroom full of students, even though there may be only four students who can play the games, the others can take sides of each team and support their team. It is recommended that they speak English as they cheer their team.

Serious Games

Serious games such as role-playing games or RPGs (The Sims, Farming Simulator, Minecraft), first person shooter or FPS (Medal of Honor, Call of Duty, Farcry), and third person shooter (Tomb Raider, Tenchu, Dark) can be played both offline and online. Even though I personally think that these games are better played only by one player, they can even be more fun and interactive when played massively. Today, game developers have allowed players to play the games offline and online. Xbox 360, for instance, has this Xbox Live that

allows players to connect to the Internet using the integrated wi-fi and play games with everyone from across the globe. Should there be no Internet connection, the games can be played by multiplayers in classroom.

Some of these serious games give players two options: whether to compete with each other, or to cooperate with each other. There are many of the 21st century skills students can get by playing these serious games. Since they are working together to reach a common goal in Co-Op version, they must communicate and collaborate well. They will be able to work effectively and respectfully with diverse teams. They will also able to understand, negotiate, and balance diverse views. For leadership, as they play the games cooperatively, we can see who can lead and guide others. Perhaps the student who leads and guides others as they play can be a good leader in the future.

When these games are played by a single player, a player will have to work himself to finish one level in order to go to the next level and get achievements. This is one 21st century skills: initiative and self-direction. When the player loses in one level, he/she must replay the level, which can make him/her learn from his/her mistakes and do better in the next opportunity.

Some consoles also provide microphones that will let players give instructions and call for help using their voice. The instructions will only be executed if players speak clearly with good pronunciation. Most games are in English, so this can also improve students' English ability.

Conclusion

Video games have more positive effects than the negative ones and they can absolutely improve students' 21st century skills for living, competing, and working in 21st century and prepare them for the upcoming AEC. EFL teachers should improve their teaching methods by inserting video games in their classrooms. Teachers have to make students learn without even 'studying'.

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