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Girls and story-based videogames: an intervention in a 10th grade English class

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Forord

Denne masteroppgaven markerer slutten på mitt femårige studium på UiT, Norges arktiske universitet. Det har vært fem fantastiske og lærerike år, fylt med mange gode minner. Jeg vil uteksaminere meg selv med god kompetanse som jeg vil ta med meg videre til livets neste kapittel. Jeg vil takke alle mine medstudenter og lærere for å ha gjort studieårene mine eksepsjonelt bra. Jeg vil gjerne sende en spesiell takk til min veileder, førsteamanuensis Hilde Brox, for å ha dyttet meg i riktig retning for å bli ferdig med denne masteroppgaven. Også vil jeg takke mine nære venner og familie for å pushe meg videre og tro på meg selv. Dere er gode, og uten dere ville det ikke vært en masteroppgave å levere.

Abstract

In this master's thesis in English didactics, I explore how a 10th grade class in a Norwegian upper secondary school views computer games as a means of experiencing a story. According to a national survey conducted by the Norwegian Media Authority, girls are not as fond of computer games as boys are for their storytelling potential. The results of this survey indicate that 25% of girls believe that computer games are a great way to experience a story, while 60% of boys feel the same way. Based on these statistics from the Norwegian Media Authority, I ask the following research questions:

1) Why do boys and girls experience gaming as a medium for stories so differently?

- Will experiences with a story-based video game change the girls' perception of video games as a way of telling stories?

- If so, what is the reason for this change?

In order to answer these questions, I tested the computer game *Life is Strange* (2015) in a Norwegian 10th grade to determine if girls' perceptions of computer games as a storytelling medium change when they are exposed to a game designed for their demographic.

The class responded to a survey similar to the one published by the Norwegian Media Authority which allowed me to compare their responses to the national standard. The class then played the game over the course of several school hours. The class received new questionnaires with the same questions as before the intervention to determine whether the girls' attitude toward computer games had changed.

The findings of this study indicate that girls' attitudes toward computer games as a storytelling medium become more favorable when they are exposed to gender-specific computer games. Empathy, relatability, and language comprehension are identified as intriguing findings.

Sammendrag

I denne masteroppgaven i engelsk didaktikk har jeg undersøkt hvordan en 10. klasse i en norsk ungdomsskole tenker om dataspill som måte å oppleve fortellinger på. Gjennom en nasjonal undersøkelse utført av Medietilsynet (2020) kom det fram at jenter i langt mindre grad enn gutter synes dataspill er god kilde for fortellinger. Data hentet fra denne undersøkelsen viser at 25% av jentene synes dataspill er en fin måte å oppleve en historie gjennom, mens 60% av guttene svarte det samme. Med bakgrunn i disse tallene fra medietilsynet, så har jeg formulert følgende problemstilling of forskningsspørsmål:

- 1) Hvorfor opplever gutter og jenter gaming som et fortellermedium så forskjellig?**
 - Vil erfaringer med et forteller-basert dataspill endre jentenes syn på dataspill?**
 - Hvis det er tilfellet, hva er grunnen for denne endringen?**

For å kunne svare på disse spørsmålene har jeg testet ut dataspillet *Life is Strange* (2015) i en norsk 10. klasse for å se om jenters holdning til dataspill som fortellermedium endrer seg når de er introdusert til et spill som er mer rettet mot et kvinnelig publikum.

Først svarte klassen på en undersøkelse helt lik den som er publisert av Medietilsynet for å sammenligne dem med den nasjonale standarden. Deretter skulle klassen spille igjennom spillet over flere skoletimer. Så fikk klassen nye spørreskjema, med samme spørsmål som før intervensjonen, for å se om det har blitt en forandring i jentenes holdning til dataspill.

Funnene i denne forskningen viser at jentenes holdning til dataspill som fortellermedium blir mer positiv når de blir eksponert for dataspill som er tilpasset dem. Elementer som innlevelse, gjenkjennelse og språkforståelse blir trukket som interessante funn.

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1 Introduction

Since the introduction of the first video game in 1961 (Juul, 2005, p. 3), children and teenagers have enjoyed playing video games. As video game consoles and personal computers began to enter the average household in the 1990s, the youth's enthusiasm for the genre grew stronger each year. As newer video games became increasingly violent and time-consuming, the excitement of the parental generation quickly shifted to concern (Dietz, 1998). Over the past decades, scepticism regarding video games has persisted and influenced attitudes towards gamers. There is a stigma associated with being a gamer that you would not normally associate with people who read novels and books. If a child tells his or her parent that they are so immersed in a book that they cannot put it down, most parents will respond positively. If the same story were included in a video game, parents would likely react less enthusiastically, a sentiment shared by the majority of teachers.

During the technological expansion of the last few decades, new forms of media and textual diversity have emerged. Throughout this evolution, the Norwegian ESL instructor has faced a unique challenge. Internet and digital media are likely the most important source for youth English language acquisition. Most of the children's English input outside of school comes from digital and social media (Brevik, 2019). The English curriculum has always emphasized writing and reading skills, but primarily through traditional text forms (Brox & Jacobsen, 2014). It is believed that the gap between traditional and new text forms and text competency is substantial, particularly in the ESL field (Langseth, 2012, p. 2-3). There is reason to believe that more texts will be experienced via digital media in the future.

Even though video games can be fun, exciting, and inclusive, the genre does have its downsides. The result of a recent report from the Norwegian Media Authority discovered that there is a massive gender gap in who believes video games are an enjoyable way of experiencing stories. In the report, 60 percent of boys believe games are an enjoyable way of experiencing stories, while only 25 percent of girls agree with the statement. ^[OBJ]

Why do boys and girls experience gaming as a medium for stories so differently?

In the report *Barn og medier 2020* (Medietilsynet 2020), the children were asked to answer the statement if gaming is a nice way of experiencing stories. They were asked to either agree or disagree with the statement. The answers in this research might be misleading because, for

many, this statement can be misinterpreted. The children in the study might have different experiences while gaming. This report does not look at the reasons behind the findings. Do children interpret video games differently? Can children have a different level of enjoyment with videogame stories? Is there a storyline in the video games the children are playing? Or maybe some children do not have as much experience playing video games. This thesis will look at the reasons behind this question and if it is possible to change the perception some children have while playing video games. In order to achieve that, some follow-up questions are necessary.

Will experiences with a story-based video game change the girls' perception of video games as a way of telling stories?

If so, what is the reason for this change?

This thesis will test out whether an introduction to a narrative-based videogame changes the girls' perception of gaming as a media for storytelling. The research will take place in a Norwegian 10th grade classroom. The research will start by using the same format as the study conducted by the Norwegian Media Authority, with almost the same questionnaire in order to map the gender gap in the local classroom and see if it compares up to the national standard. After the questionnaire, the students will try out a video game that focuses on the life of a teenager and problems associated with the same theme. The video game I have chosen is *Life Is Strange* (DotNod Entertainment, 2015). This video game is suitable to be used in an educational manner. This video game is not sexualized as many video games tend to be, and there is a plotline that is easy to understand and follow.

At the end of the research phase, the students have answered a similar questionnaire like the one they were presented with in the beginning. By having the same survey after the students have played through the video game in the classroom, the results can tell if the experience of the game has changed the attitude toward videogames as a medium for storytelling for this group of students.

1.1 Background

In October 2020, the Norwegian Media Authority published a survey of children's and young people's digital media habits. This survey covered everything from young people's access to

technology, gaming, privacy, and information literacy. The survey was spread over 50 schools and over 3300 students throughout Norway. The purpose of the survey was to show a uniform presentation of children and young people's use and experiences of digital media. Students were to answer a questionnaire in which they were told a statement, and based on this statement, they were to either answer "agree" "disagree", "neither disagree nor agree" or "don't know".

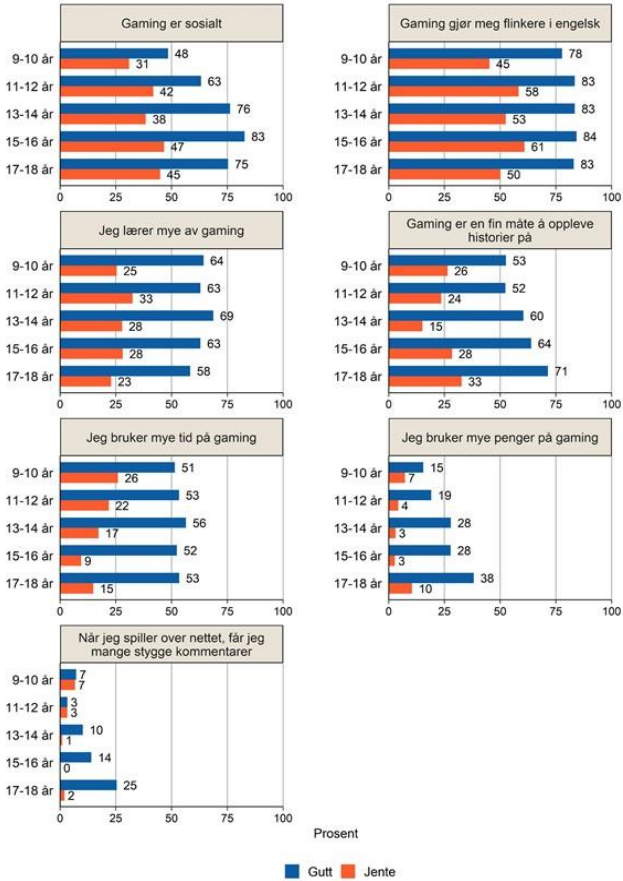


Figure 1 Questionnaire from Norwegian Media Authority (Medietilsynet 2020)

In this report it is clear that there are different attitudes toward video games in regards of gender. The male students' answers were more positive towards video games than the female's answers. Within the section on gaming, there was one particularly interesting result. The results were surprising under the statement "gaming is a great way to experience stories". Less than half of the students agreed that they experience stories through gaming. Of these, the gender differences were the most unexpected, 25% of girls agreed with the statement, while 60% of the boys agreed. It is worth noticing the age differences that students who experience that gaming are a great way to experience stories increase with age.

A closer examination of the remaining data from the survey of the Norwegian Media Authority illuminates these numbers further. When asked if students spend a lot of time on gaming, 18% of the girls agree, while 53% of the boys agree with the same statement. 65% of boys think they learn a lot from gaming, while 27% of girls agree with the same. These numbers may suggest that when students feel they have a sense of story through the game, the amount of time students spend on computer games increases. Under the statement that gaming is a great way to experience stories, the gender differences between boys and girls are readily apparent. There may be a correlation between these gender differences and the findings regarding who spends a substantial amount of time gaming and who believes they learn from gaming. It is noticeable that the game *Sims* is becoming more and more popular with age, especially among girls. There seems to be a correlation between the age the video game *Sims* become popular with girls, and the increase in the percentage of girls who believe gaming is a nice way of experiencing stories. These finding may indicate that girls who have had more experience with video games are more likely to be positive to gaming as a storytelling media, even though the percentage of girls who play video games decreases with age. The video game *Sims* is a game were the player makes their own narrative. This finding might suggest that the narrative in games help girls experience gaming as a nice way of telling stories.

This master's thesis will explore the reasons behind the gender gap in experiencing gaming as a medium for stories. Is it possible that the stories told in video games are too little narrative-based? Or are the narratives in most video games more appealing to the male gamer than the female gamer? This study examines a group of girls' own views on these questions.

1.2 The aim of the research

This thesis will investigate whether exposure to the video game *Life is Strange* will make more girls favour video games as a storytelling medium This is done through a study and research-based analysis of the value of video games and gender diversification in video games, and a succeeding intervention in a Norwegian 10th grade classroom in a Norwegian Upper Secondary School. The intervention is to understand if an introduction to a story-based videogame that is marketed towards girls will make a difference in the girls' perception of games as a form of literacy.

As the world is becoming more and more technologically independent, there will be an increase in technological forms of literacy. Text based interactive games have evolved into virtual reality and augmented reality games in a very short time compared to the development of other types of literature. If girls do not find video games a good medium for storytelling, will they miss out on a whole literary genre that keeps growing bigger every year?

After this introductory chapter, Chapter Two presents the theoretical and thematic field that situates this study. It looks at definitions of games and play, examines literature pertaining to their pedagogical potential, and addresses possible reasons for gender division. Chapter Three presents the game *Life is Strange* (2015) and its topics, in-game situations, and game narrative. Chapter Four presents the methodological approach used to collect and analyse data. It looks at the research design, the choice of participants, data collection, and discusses research quality. Chapter Five unveils the study's findings and discusses these in light of relevant theory presented in Chapter Two. Findings such as the social aspect of video games, language exposure, relatability, and immersive text experiences are addressed as the most relevant findings. The sixth and final Chapter presents the conclusion of this thesis and sums up the answers the research topic and questions presented in Chapter One.

2 Theoretical and thematic field

This chapter presents relevant theory and previous research on games and video games, discussions surrounding the educational value of video games, and of games and gender diversification.

2.1 What does it mean to play a game?

According to *The Oxford Dictionary*, a game is a structured form of play. Something that is covered in rules and contains a winner and a loser¹. Playing games is a timeless and universal activity. Upton (2015) makes the following observation:

Everyone plays. From the pre-Columbian ball courts of Central America, to the board games of the Indian subcontinent, from the rope-skipping games of the Outback, to the pebble-and-pit games of Africa, from the chivalric tournaments of medieval Europe, to videogames in modern Japan — everywhere we look, in every era and every culture, we find games, and humans playing them. (Upton, 2015, p.9)

In the book *Homo Ludens* from 1938, Johan Huizinga gave a detailed description of the term play. He wrote that play has become evident throughout human culture as a voluntary recreational activity that is accomplished through a fixed set of rules. Huizinga believed that there are four crucial components to play – rules, freedom, movement, and boundaries. If we look at football, it is easy to understand how these components operate. If we remove one of Huizinga’s components, play will collapse (Upton, 2015, p.13-14):

No rules: Picking the ball up with your hands is not football.

No freedom: Only passing the ball in a predetermined order is not football.

No movement: Standing still watching a ball is not football.

No boundaries: Placing the ball on the penalty spot at any given time is not playing

¹ https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/game_1?q=game

football. A penalty must take place within an ongoing match.
(Huizinga, 1938, p.13)

If someone were to examine their social environment closely, one would find games in almost everything. Games shape our recreational time, our professional time, the democratic process and international relations. Games drain our assets and then give us new ones. Enemies are created over games and friendship are improved. For a lot of people, games provide the feeling of glory and shame (Blagden, D & Rond, M. d., 2018). Jesper Juul's (2005) classification of a game has several similarities to Huizinga's. His classic game model represents six features needed for something to be called a game they are as follows:

- “1. A rule based formal system;*
- 2. with variable and quantifiable outcomes;*
- 3. where different outcomes are assigned different values;*
- 4. where the player exerts effort in order to influence the outcome;*
- 5. the player feels emotionally attached to the outcome;*
- 6. and the consequences of the activity are optional and negotiable”.*(Juul,2005, p.6-7)

These six points are deemed necessary and adequate for something to be considered a game. This model is the core of what all games are based upon (Juul, 2005, p. 7).

Juul also implements the element of fiction in the context of games. Rules and fiction are battling it out for the players' attention. While all games have a set amount of rules, some also have a fictional element. In the fictional element, the player often controls a character, and the story can take place anywhere from the jungle to the arctic. These worlds do not necessarily exist, as they are worlds presented by the game and imagined by the player. As laid out above, no game can function without rules. In contrast to rules, fiction is co-dependent on rules in games. A fictional game-world can be depicted in a variety of ways; By means of sound, text, graphics, the game manual, *and* rules of the game (Juul, 2005). The rules of the game are designed to be objective, obligatory, and generally above discussion. When it comes to fiction, it is all turned around. Fiction can be subjective, optional, and up for discussion. A game's rules and a game's fiction are therefore attractive for opposite reasons (Juul, 2005).

Fiction and storytelling are often misinterpreted as the same. When talking about fiction, the player can imagine the game world in any way possible, but a story is a fixed set of events that is presented to the player (Juul, 2005). For example, in chess, the game takes place on the black and white board, but the player can imagine the pieces fighting it out in a jungle even though the game is taking place right in front of the player. While in *Life is Strange*, the game presents a set of events to the player, making the game a fiction and a story.

2.2 2.1 What is a video game?

Video games are a digital phenomenon that is becoming more popular every year. They can be played on PCs, game consoles, and mobile devices. Since the dawn of video games in the early 1960s, there has been a lot of progression in the field. From the arcade game *Spacewars* (1961), to augmented reality- and virtual reality-games people can play from their pocket. This amount of progression over such a short period of time, suggests that research and literature cannot always keep up with the constant improvements and innovations in the field. Unlike books and films, the history of video games is short. Since 1961, the video game industry has just tapped into its seventh decade, which a short time compared to the history of other media formats. The study of video games has therefore been described as a gold rush to be the first to shed light on new similarities connecting games and other cultural forms such as art and literature (Juul, 2005,p.11).

Video games have been in an aggressively expanding community and industry for several years. Every few years, a new game console is released, promising more realistic graphics, better external hardware, and higher quality sound systems (Klug, C. & Lebowitz, J. 2011, p. 5). The hardware of gaming consoles and PCs are not the only thing that is changing. Video games are in an evolving environment, where their stories stand as a central point in their evolution. Stories in video games have progressed from the simple “rescue the kidnapped princess” in *Super Mario* to the complex novel-like storytelling in games such as *Elders Scrolls* and *Witcher*. This shows that the video game industry has become more focused on the narrative element of the genre.

When Ostenson (2013) asked his students what a story was, he was told that a story has a beginning, a middle part, and an end. It also often has a conflict that needs to be resolved. With

such a broad definition of a story, one can argue that there is a story in all types of games. The game *Pokemon* where the player has to catch different virtual animals to fight enemies, has a story. In such games, the story is not the central theme (Ostenson, 2013, p. 2). The story is more complex in other games like *Dungeons and Dragons* and *Grand Theft Auto*, where players must go through a more significant amount of dialogue to build their character. Finally, there are find story-based games. These games are not based on skills or creating a character but making a story the player must solve through different actions; actions that the player can choose and reject themselves (Ostenson, 2013, p. 2-3). These games are also known as «player agency games» (Bycer, 2015).

According to Juul (2005), it is possible to define the challenges and history of video games as either emergence games or progression games. Emergence is a typical feature of games such as chess and *Sims* because the player's actions can change the game's outcome and the player can create their own narrative in the story. Where in progression games, the game developers have decided the story and that this will follow a linear line. *Life is Strange* (2015) is an emergence-type game with components from progression games. The overall structure of the game is emergent, but it is filled with tasks the player must do in order for the story to proceed.

With the evolution of video game stories, writers have become a more central part of the genre. The agency-based element of newer video games has allowed writers to create almost any type of story they can imagine. By giving players the freedom to choose their own directions and narrative, they have created more diverse and relatable game stories that will satisfy any player (Klug & Lebowitz, 2011, p.37). According to Turley (2018), agency-based video games are presented as good video games in the context of literature. Through such agency-based computer games, players are placed in a situation where players can live through the game's narrative (Turley, 2018, p.112-113).

2.3 The value of video games

Games and video games have been used in education for several years now. According to Plass, Homer & Kinzer (2015), games can help increase student participation and encourage emotional and social learning.

Video games can be considered a part of students' literacies. Video games can use many different symbols to convey a message at the same time. Modes comes in different shapes such as colour, sound, pictures, movement, and many more. In video games, these modes often overlap each other making the possible literary value enormous. Neiburger (2007) explains that the value of video games can exceed the literary value of books like this:

The value of video games is constantly debated. Video game detractors argue that playing games are at best recreational and at worst desensitizing and degenerate--no match for the educational and literary value of reading a book. However, literacy is not just about print anymore. Literacy is the ability to decode abstract meaning from symbols rapidly. In reading, a setlist of characters--the alphabet--must be learned and mastered; in video games, those symbols can be anything, and they are usually unique to each game, and there are a lot more than 26 of them. To learn how to play a new game, users must be able to rapidly decipher the game's unique symbols and conventions (Neiburger, E., 2007).

The amount of symbols in video games give them the opportunity to catch the player in a reading experience that is mesmerizing.

2.3.1 Extensive reading and the importance of reading a variety of texts

Extensive reading is the act of reading for pleasure instead of reading because one has to (Vicary, 2013). It is not limited to traditional forms for literature. In video games, reading makes use of more symbols than in novels or books. Extensive reading is as Vicary (2013) mentions, reading should be pleasurable and enjoyable. A pleasurable reading experience makes the reader more likely to return to the text and develop empathic relations with the text. Blair (2013) explains that extensive reading also contributes to language proficiency and English as a foreign language student. In the context of extensive reading, the reader usually reads longer, and easier texts compared to intensive classroom reading. Extensive readers do not focus on every word of the text but on the meaning of the story. Vicary (2013) presents five principles for extensive reading both at home and in the classroom. The first principle for extensive reading is that the texts should not be difficult. If the words in the text are too difficult for the reader, they will most likely lose interest in the text, removing it from the idea of extensive reading. The second principle is that there should be a vast variety of reading material. Not all students are interested

in the same thing, and in order for extensive reading to take place, everyone must read something they are interested in. The third principle for extensive reading says that everyone should be able to choose what they want to read. Vicary does not specify what medium or format the texts should be presented in, but according to The Directorate for Education and Training (UDIR) (2022), texts appear in large variety of modes, formats and media. The fourth principle holds that the students should read as much as possible. The main point of extensive reading is to continue reading. The last and fifth principle for extensive reading is that teachers should be encouraging extensive reading in their classrooms.

According to the new Norwegian curriculum (LK20), it is important to work with different types of texts in order for the learner to develop linguistic skills, experience cultures and understand the lives of others.

An extensive reading experience when playing video games is essential for students to be motivated to continue playing on school or at home. For students to experience the five principles of extensive reading through video games, teachers need to include a variety of video games in the classroom.

2.3.2 Traditional books or graphic novels

Video games and graphic novels share many of the same educational values. The multimodal aspect in graphic novels and the interactivity in video games is what set them apart from traditional literature. Graphic novels are influential in ESL classes because they can challenge strong and reluctant readers. Krashen (2004) talks about the significance of being able to choose literature based on personal interest. Choosing your own literature helps boost motivation in students, and motivational reading is essential for students to continue reading. Even though comic books and graphic novels consist of more pictures and less text than traditional novels, there are more codes and modes that need to be deciphered in order to understand the text (Rimmereide, 2013. pp.133-134). According to Krashen (2004), the benefits of implementing graphic novels in the ESL classroom overcome some negative aspects, for example, a change in the traditional classroom culture could be problematic in the beginning. Graphic novels are fun, motivational, and successfully implement literacy skills (Krashen 2004).

2.3.3 Graphic novels or video games

Ostenson (2013) argues that even though traditional forms of literature have been the dominant form of storytelling, we must accept that this is not necessarily the best nor the only the medium for telling stories. Through Ostenson's (2013) study, it was discovered that computer games (video games) help motivate students in the classroom. Ostenson believes that students who are exposed to a type of storytelling that helps disadvantaged students and can challenge talented students (Turley, 2018, p. 110). Computer games can be good arenas where students can experience stories, but using computer games in teaching can present some problems. Although computer games can be good arenas where students can experience stories, Turley (2018) reminds us that some computer games can be so complex that they can take time to get through the games - often much longer than it takes to read a traditional book or a graphic novel.

Both video games and graphic novels benefit from multi modalities. Modalities such as visual, verbal, and audio are becoming more and more relevant for today's society (Rimmereide, 2013, p. 131-132). Decoding images and verbal expressions are considered a highly valued literacy skill, and this is reflected in the new Norwegian curriculum (LK20).

Video games and graphic novels share many of the same literary values. There have been video game adaptations of comic books in industrialized countries since technology made it possible. Most of these video games have their origin in superhero comics. In the far east, Japanese anime and manga culture has expanded rapidly to the West in the last few years. Currently, almost every mainstream manga and anime have been adapted into video games, thus making the two genres melt together as one (Picard, 2008). Graphic novels and video games both share a type of storytelling where the reader must decode much more than the traditional 26 letters of the alphabet. One may argue that the main difference between video games and graphic novels is the interactive element, where a graphic novel is a predetermined story, a video game is not. Besides this fact, video games and graphic novels clearly share many of the same educational benefits.

2.3.4 What motivates a reader to keep reading?

Being motivated is the feeling of being engaged. Reading a story that makes the reader emotionally connected to the narrative, the reader is more motivated to continue reading. When a student is motivated, they have the courage and curiosity to achieve something. Motivation is the driving force that makes us start something and what makes us continue doing it. Motivation controls our behaviours and actions in different situations.

A game's narrative is the storyline that is created by different in-game actions and dialogue. Games allow for a non-linear narrative that is decided by the choices made by the player, unlike more traditional novels and television shows, where the narrative is linear and predetermined. A game's narrative provides the players with a strong motivational force and creates a level of immersion that makes players intrinsically motivated to return to the game (Plass, Homer & Kinzer, 2015, p.7).

Immersion is an expression used long before video games were created. Immersion has been a central component of different types of media. Journalism, filmmaking, and traditional literature, all have a connection to the expression of immersion. Even though all three media share many characteristics with video games, immersion in video games is different. While the *Oxford dictionary* describes immersion as a "deep mental involvement in something", game studies researchers have a different meaning of the word. Immersion in video games is interpreted as a mental connection uniting the player and the avatar, and the feeling of participation (Bryant & Giglio, 2015, p.58). According to *Handbook for interactive storytelling* (Smed, 2021, p.119-120), immersion is described as a consequence of *flow*. Players who experience flow feel a sense of agency – that their gestures can influence the game world. The theory of flow demonstrates why players are immersed when utilizing skills that they understand. Flow is when a player feels completely absorbed in the game, and it is the optimal state of intrinsic motivation (Smed, 2021).

In his thesis on immersion in video games, Tanskanen (2018) presents a model of the different elements that cause immersion in video games. The combination of storytelling, game design, and psychology, creates what we experience as immersion in video games. *Psychology* is the players' mental and cognitive state – something the game developers cannot control; *storytelling* is the story the game developers want the players to experience, and *game design*

is the way the developers want the players to experience the story. When these three elements work in sync, the player is more likely to experience an immersive relation to the video game (Tanskanen 2018).



Figure 2 Tanskanens (2018) model for immersion in video games

Immersion is a sensation greatly appreciated by players. According to Hsu, Conrad & Jacobs (2014), texts with narratives that effect the player on an emotional level create a bond between the player and the protagonist. This bond makes the emotional choices made in a story have an empathic effect on the player. Feelings such as fear, empathy, sympathy, and identification are common for the player in an immersive story. According to Walter (2012), narratives with emotional contents invite the player to be more empathic with the story's main characters compared to texts with no emotional connection.

All game elements in game design have the power to induce an emotional response. Empirical evidence has also shown that emotions and empathy can enhance and impact learning. Games

use design features such as music, visual effects, and agency to induce emotions that are conducive to learning (Plass, Homer & Kinzer, 2015).

Game characters with whom the players can associate themselves, often lead to a positive emotional reaction when playing. Studies show that a singular game event can impact the emotional state of a player. Both positive and negative in-game events have shown to have positive effect on players motivation to continue playing (Plass, Homer & Kinzer, 2015, p.14).

Intrinsic motivation is created when the player feels a connection to the video game. The feeling of relatedness, emotional responses and the need for self-determination is crucial for the player to come back to the video game. Even though immersion can occur in traditional media, interactivity is a factor that sets video games apart from them.

2.3.5 Self-determination as a motivating factor

The feeling of having the opportunity to impact certain situations is important for the students' motivation, and being able to decide what is going to happen, gives the student a feeling of freedom. Ryan & Deci (2000) present the theory of self-determination, where the concept of *relatedness* is included. Relatedness is described as the feeling of being connected to someone else. In a game, relatedness can occur when a player feels a connection with another player or playable character. The feeling of relatedness is important for engagement and increases the desire to play again. Relatedness is also directly linked to the player's power to make in-game choices (Plass, Homer, & Kinzer, 2015, p.18). Self-determination theory focuses on the correlation between internal motivation and self-determination. The theory of self-determination tells us that our behaviour is controlled by a desire to meet three internal psychological needs: the need for self-determination, the need for competence, and the need for belonging. These three points are the most important needs necessary in order for students to be immersed and therefore, intrinsically motivated (Gagne & Deci, 2005).

Self-determination is the opportunity to influence the decisions in a task. A student can satisfy this need with involvement and having the authority to make decisions. The need for competence states that the student must believe they have the relevant competence needed in order to complete or work with the task. The need for belonging is by many considered the least

important compared to other two. The theory states that a student gets motivated when they get the feeling of responsibility and community (Gagne & Deci, 2005).

In the results from the report *Barn og medier 2020* (Medietilsynet, 2020), seen through the perspective of immersion, it may seem as if boys are more motivated and emotionally invested in video games as storytelling media. Why do girls not have the same connection to storytelling in video games as boys?

2.4 Gaming and gender diversity

Studies have shown that video games can be an effective substitute for traditional, text-based literature (Ostenson, 2013; Turley, 2018). At the same time, the Norwegian Media Authority discovered a massive gender gap where girls feel like they do not see games as a suitable medium to experience stories from. There may be different ways to explain this gap. One possible explanation could have to do with identification: that games often depict female characters in a way that make it hard for girls and women to identify with. Another related explanation is that the gaming culture is so male-centred that female gamers have not been exposed to the same amount of story-based video games. The following sections take a closer look on research that have explored these connections

2.4.1 Male domination

Men control the video game industry. A 2021 research concluded that women only represent 30 percent of the world's game designers, a rise from 21 percent in 2017 (IGDA, 2021, p.8). Such a low diversification leads to consequences. Even though women represent roughly 50 percent of all gamers, there is still an absence of female game characters. A study from 2021 showed that only 21 percent of all games had a playable female lead protagonist (Lin, B. 2021). In the popular video game series *FIFA*, there was not until 2016 the player could select an all-female football team (EA, 2021)

The whole field of computer science is male dominated. In the last decades, the percentage of women in computer science has dropped significantly, and this also has an effect on who get involved in the video game industry. As computer science started to become a popular field of

interest in the middle of the 20th century, more and more men and women were introduced to the field. According to the non-profit organization *Girls who code*, the percentage of women in the field of computer science peaked at 37% in 1995 and has since then reduced in number, as shown in the figure below (Girls who code, 2022).



Figure 3: Percentage of women in computer science (Girls who code, 2022).

The decline in female engagement started around the same time as the personal computer became a household product. The earliest personal computers were not considered to be much more than toys. The owner could play simple games on them and maybe do some work from home. According to Henn (2014), these toys were almost entirely marketed toward males. The ideology that computers were created for men and boys became the narrative about the technological revolution. In the 1990s, Jane Margolis, a researcher who interviewed several hundred computer science students in America, discovered that parents were more likely to buy home computers for boys than for girls – regardless of whether the girls found computers fascinating (Henn, 2014).

According to Fullerton, Fron, Pearce & Morie (2008), a central challenge in the quest for a greater gender equity in video game development is that women would be more inspired to become game developers if they played games they find pleasurable. Including more women in game production will most likely result in more video games that are appealing to girls. In a 2005 study, Heeter et al. concluded that girls tend to favour video games more if they are

produced by an all-female team instead of an all-male team (Heeter et al. 2005). An example of this is the production of the video game *Sims*. The development team that produced *Sims* were made up of 40 percent women. The demographic of *Sims* players are more often females than males.

2.4.2 Stereotypical gender roles

There has always been a difference in male and female stereotypes. Male figures have often been perceived as strong, powerful, and leaders. Female figures, however, have often been perceived as “the others” (De Beauvoir 1945/2015). These social structures might have originated from the genders’ physical appearance. Biologically, males grow more muscles and grow taller than most females, and this is one of the reasons males were seen as powerful leaders for thousands of years (Glick & Fiske, 1996, p. 491). This stereotype has transitioned into the world of video games, where females are often depicted in roles such as “sexualized sidekicks” and “damsel in distress”. The discrimination in gender roles might be a product of a male-controlled industry.

Due to the popularity of video games and the increased accessibility of technology, the video game culture plays a critical role in the mainstream social culture (Koh & Das, 2017). A study conducted by Statistics Norway in 2019 shows that roughly 50% of the gaming community was made up of women. According to Dietz (1998), characters in a video game have the potential to build the players’ perception of gender roles in real life. When playing a video game, players have the tendencies to compare themselves with in-game characters. Players use video games to learn about social behaviours, appearances, and roles. Through many video games, boys can determine that males are superior to their female counterparts. At the same time, girls may experience that their social role is to maintain their beauty and sexual appeal (Dietz, 1998).

Even though the gaming community consists of roughly 50 percent women, the female identity in gaming culture is still depicted in a sexist environment with outdated gender roles and as a tool for male game figures. When referring to a sexist environment, a female character can often

be described as a sexual object, damsels in distress, and irrelevant to the storyline (Koh & Das, 2017). Several studies have concluded that in gaming culture, female gamers are considered to be “fake and illegitimate gamers” who are constantly bombarded with comments about being unskilled, exploiting their gender, and being insulted for being women (Vestå, 2021; Koh & Das, 2017; Butt & Dunne, 2017).

2.4.3 The lack of identification

During a six-year period from 2014 to 2020, the amount of female game developers saw an increase of almost 50 percent. The total amount of female game developers rose from 22 percent in 2014 to 30 percent in 2020 as shown in figure 4 below. A more diverse distribution of game developers worldwide has increased the amount of playable female game protagonists. A study from 2020, shows that female playable protagonists were at nine percent in 2015. By 2020 this number had risen to 18 percent.

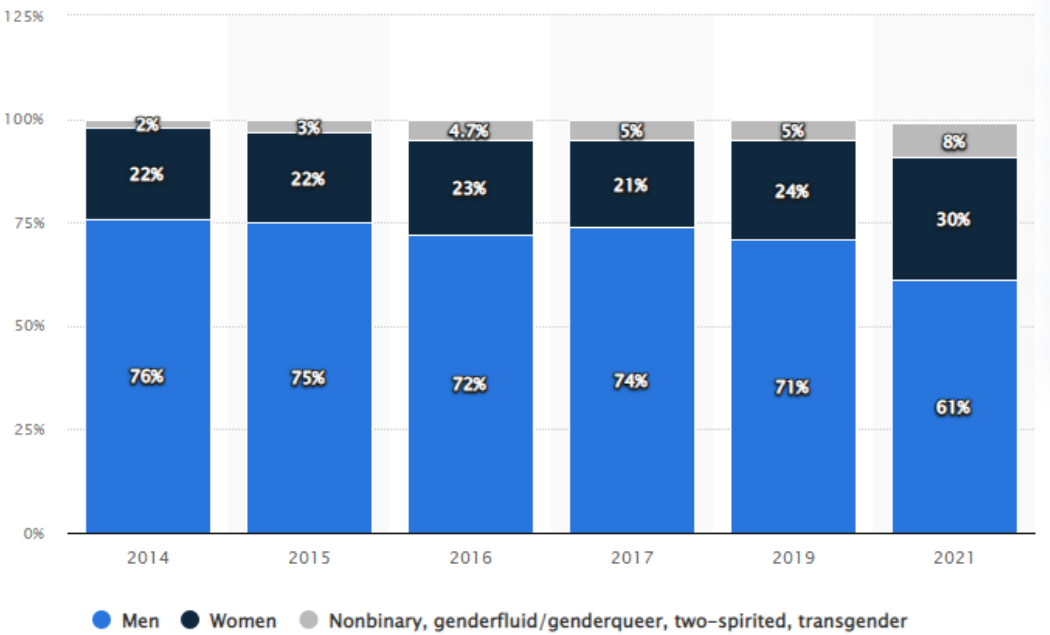


Figure 4 Distribution of game developers worldwide from 2014 to 2021, by gender.

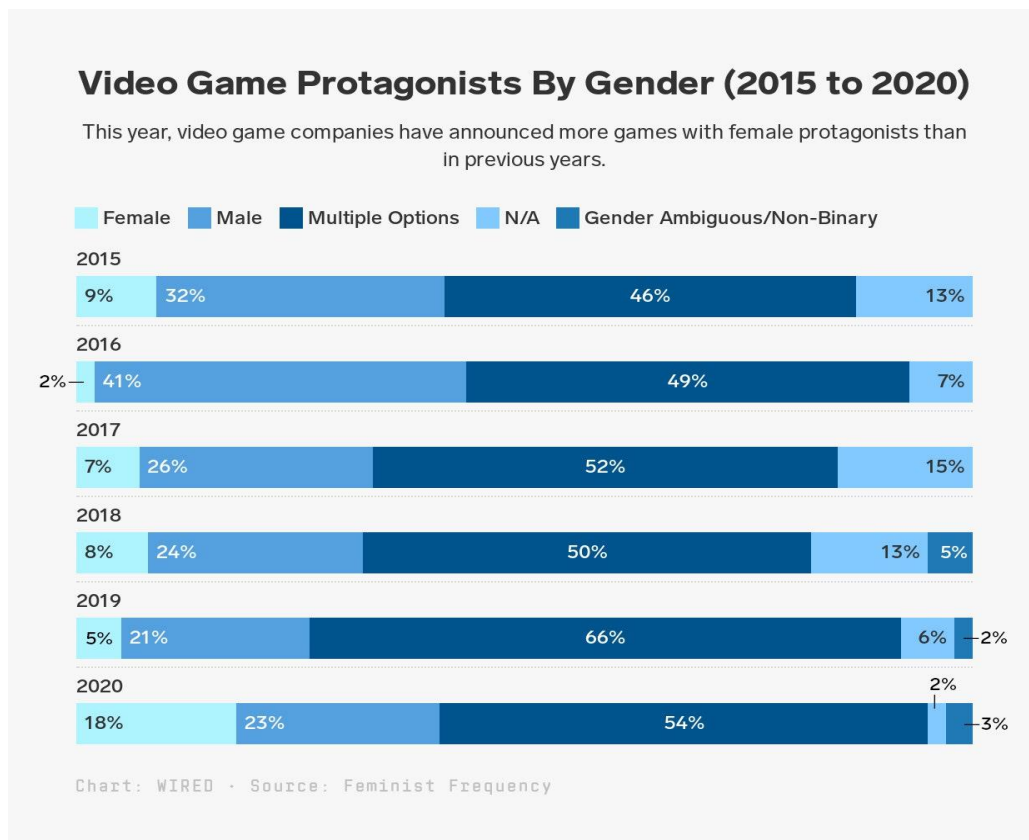


Figure 5 Video game protagonists by gender (2015-2020)

Everyone has their role models. Most people pick their role models in their field of interest and what they dream is possible to achieve. This is a conscious process for some, but most people choose their role models unconsciously. After Magnus Carlsen started dominating the world scene with his exceptional skills in chess, the Norwegian chess association reported a 30 percent increase in memberships ². Why should the video game industry be any different? The lack of playable figures females can identify themselves with can change how we look at ourselves and the possibilities we can achieve. The non-profit organization *Girls Who Code* reported that 2/3

² Menne, E. (2015) *Mener Magnus Carlsen har forandret Norge*. Retrieved from: <https://www.budstikka.no/nyheter/mener-magnus-carlsen-har-forandret-norge/149450/>

of girls aging from six to twelve are interested in game development. In the age group of 18-20, this number has shrunk down to 4 percent ³.

Boys are more likely to be exposed to video games they enjoy. The three factors of a lack in gender diversity presented above are all making it harder for females to be interested in video games. Why should a woman or girl have to endure the combination of a sexist environment, lack of self-identification and a male-dominated field of interest in order to play video games?

³ Lønningen, P. (2016) *Engelig våger spillbransjen å satse på kvinnelige spillfigurer*. Retrieved from: <https://www.gamer.no/artikler/endelig-vager-spillbransjen-a-satse-pa-kvinnelige-spillfigurer/349166>

3 Game Overview

Life is Strange is a video game spread across five episodes, released episodically throughout 2015. It is developed by Dotnod Entertainment, and the game is the first volume in the *Life is Strange* series. The video game is considered a graphic adventure and story-based video game. *Life is Strange* can also be thought of as a straightforward video game that the players can either play solo or with friends and family, and it is considered a casual video game since it requires no previous knowledge or game mechanics to play. The video game targets young, primarily female adults in their late teens since the main characters in the video game are almost entirely female.

In *Life is Strange*, the player decides the story. It is a video game where the player can choose who and what to interact with. Since it is a story-based video game, there can be no winner or loser, only different storyline outcomes. It has an open structure where the player can change and interact with the storyline.

The video game can be played on several different platforms. It was initially designed to be played on a windows computer, PlayStation 4, or Xbox One, but it was later released as a mobile game. It is continuously updated to be played on newer game consoles. When playing the video game, it is crucial that the player can experience the visual and audio effects the game provides. The game is best played with headphones but can also be played with a speaker if there is more than one player. To control the main character, the player can manoeuvre throughout the game environment by using a joystick, mouse, and keyboard or a touch screen for mobile and tablet players.

There is no game mechanics needed in order to navigate throughout the game environment, meaning that a non-gamer can efficiently complete the storyline without having any prerequisites. The player can only communicate with non-playable characters (NPCs) in the video game. Interacting with NPCs further builds on the story and the character arc of the game.

The game takes the players on a journey throughout a teenage high-school student's fictional world and environment. The game can be considered a virtual reality game because it is an illusion the player is navigating through, and the player gets a sensory impression through the games surroundings, colours, and audio (Ellingsen, 2020). *Life is Strange* qualifies as an immersive video game that takes hold of the player through several elements; the player's relationship with the main character, the player's need for exploration.

Life is Strange is the first game in the *Life is Strange* game series. The sequels introduce new main characters, new game locations, and new adventures to be explored. This is the second video game from Dotnod entertainment with a female protagonist.

The creative elements of sound and visual effects are central instruments in the game for the player to understand the story the protagonist is going through. For example, in scenes where the protagonist is scared, the audio of the game changes so that the player can hear the protagonist's breathing and heartbeat. The game uses colour as a visual effect where it reflects the story, and one can see the colours match the mood of the protagonist.



Picture 1: Chloe and Max from *Life is Strange*

The main protagonist of the video game is Maxine (Max) Caulfield, a teenage high school student who studies photography in the fictional town of Arcadia Bay. Max considers herself a

shy eighteen-year-old girl who discovers she can reverse time after a traumatic experience in the school bathrooms. In the story, Max is reunited with her former best friend, Chloe Price, and the duo begins to investigate the disappearance of their fellow student, Rachel Amber.

With Max's new superpower, she gets heart-breaking and disturbing premonitions of future events in Arcadia Bay. Max has to utilize her new superpower to stop her friends and loved ones from a destructive destiny. Max must learn about the implications of her superpower and understand the consequences of interfering with time and space.

During the story, Max and her friends must deal with everyday life struggles that one can expect from an ordinary high school environment. High school teens do not always make the best decisions, putting Max in several interesting situations. The player has the ability to make choices for Max, and each choice will enact the butterfly effect. The actions of the player will shape the storyline of the game as it unfolds, but they can also reshape it once they are allowed to go back in time. The choice-based interaction in *Life is Strange* allows the player to experience multiple endings and completely different stories.

The video game deals with several real-life obstacles and topics. Themes such as suicide, bullying, mental illness, domestic violence, and the loss of loved ones makes the player experience emotions that can be traumatic for some and enlightening for others. According to the developers, In order to protect some of the players, *Life is Strange* deals with these real-life obstacles in a respectful and life-like manner (GDCVault, 2016). Here are two examples of how *Life is Strange* deals with difficult topics:

Chloe asks Max to end her life. In a later episode of the game, Max has the option of saving Chloe's dad from a car accident. If the player chooses to do so, the butterfly effect will change the outcome so that Chloe gets in the accident instead. As a result of the accident, Chloe ends up in a wheelchair where the doctors notice that Chloe has a deadly respiratory disease. The player gets to experience their best friend losing their will to live. Max can see the medical bills and Chloe's illness having an impact on her and her family. Through a lot of dialogue and emotions, the player is asked to choose whether or not to accept Chloe's offer to end her suffering.

In episode two, the player must convince one of Max's friends, Kate, not to take her own life by jumping from the school roof. Kate has been a victim of cyberbullying after a private video of her went viral. Max spends a lot of time in episodes one and two getting to know Kate, making it a more emotional experience for the players. When Max confronts Kate on the school roof, she loses her power to go back in time so that the following dialogue and actions are permanently going forward. The player is locked into a dialogue where Max has to talk Kate out of committing suicide. According to the game developers, they wrote this scene to enlighten the difficult choices and feelings surrounding suicide (GDCVault, 2016).

In both of these situations, Max will have to make choices that will have both short- and long-term consequences. The developers want the players to understand that in order for people to grow up, they must accept that one has to stop looking back trying to fix everything and instead accept that life is strange and continue going forward (GDCVault, 2016).

Once released, the video game received some criticism for its overuse of teenage slang but was praised for its immersive character arc and tackling taboo subjects, as mentioned above. During the release year, the game received over 50 awards and nominations, some of them are the award for best story, best game, and adventure game of the year (IMDB). The game is also received overwhelming praise from players across the world. One player review on IMDB described her time with *Life is Strange* like this:

To be honest, first I didn't expect much from "Life Is Strange" (2015) after I picked this on my PS4 just recently. I thought it will be OK flick, without much "action". After finishing all 5 episodes I can safely say - this has to be one of the most unforgettable experiences I've ever had while playing video games. "Life Is Strange" is an amazing experience. While playing this game I felt like i was watching a great movie in which I could make decisions. Decisions that later in a game brought me to tears... (IMDB, 2017).

The setting of *Life is Strange* makes the video game suitable for students in the Norwegian upper secondary school. The videogame graphics matches other games also released in 2015, and the storyline is easy to follow and relatable for teens.⁴



Picture 2: Max and Chloe in front of a train

⁴ . Links to playthroughs and streamer reactions are presented in the 5th appendix.

4 Method

This chapter presents the methods for data collection. It lays out the motives for the chosen method, presents the research design, selection of informants, and the methods for data analysis. Finally, the chapter addresses issues concerning reliability, validity, and research ethics.

Research method is all about how the researcher wishes to proceed in order to seek an answer to the research question. The importance of being transparent with the research and its findings is crucial by creating a system to show documentation and maintaining a level of credibility in the research (Christoffersen & Johannessen, 2012). This chapter will explain how the thesis has proceeded to examine and illuminate the participants' experiences.

4.1 Research design

When doing research on students in school, one moves into the field of social science. According to Cohen, Manion, Morrison & Bell (2011) there are two different perspectives in social science – an objectivistic and a subjectivistic perspective. In the book *Research methods in education*, Cohen et al. (2011) describe how the two different perspectives are relevant when researching in a classroom with students. “The choice of problem, the formulation of questions to be answered, the characterization of pupils and teachers, methodological concerns, the kinds of data sought and their mode of treatment, are all influenced by the viewpoint held” (Cohen et al. 2011, p.6). In order to decide the methodology in this research, I had to know what I was supposed to research.

In an objectivist perspective, people are often identified as a product of their social circle or their surrounding environment, while knowledge is objective and unchangeable. Subjectivist perspective differs from the theory of objectivist perspective where people are observed as free and creative beings that interpret the world we live in differently. Knowledge is considered something subjective and individual. The importance of subjective and individual experiences is highly appreciated in the subjectivist perspective (Cohen et al. 2011).

When researching in an objectivistic perspective it is more common to step into the field of quantitative research, while the subjective approach is slightly more skewed towards qualitative research (Cohen et al. 2011). Research is not bound to be either qualitative or quantitative. The researcher can choose the best elements of each category that is best suited

for the study. Qualitative research methods are usually more flexible, while quantitative research is more predetermined (Christoffersen & Johannessen, 2012). This master's thesis will benefit of elements from both objectivist- and subjectivist perspectives by mixing elements from them both.

Objectivist and subjectivist research are different, where one leans toward quantitative- and the other towards qualitative research. By looking at the strength of these two perspectives, I have chosen my preferred choice of research methodology. The goal of the study is to understand why students have different experiences while gaming. Since the research takes place with a whole class of students, it is easier to examine the perception of the students through a questionnaire. A questionnaire is often used in a quantitative methodology, and since I seek to understand the reasoning of the students' perception, the questionnaire must contain qualitative elements.

Mixing qualitative and quantitative research elements is often referred to as a "mixed methods" research design. (Gleiss & Sæther, 2021, p.32). Combining these design methods gives me a greater understanding of the research topic and research problem than these design methods can provide on their own. When using mixed method research, it is easier to focus on the whole picture and their causes of effect (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007, p. 32). In my master's research, the quantitative part will give me the opportunity to do research on a larger group of students. At the same time, the qualitative part gives me the opportunity to go in-depth on the answers of the students.

4.2 Choice of participants

All empirical studies must contain some type of data. This information may result from extensive research on the topic at hand, or it may be based on a selection of participants. The selection of participants differs depending on whether the study is qualitative or quantitative. One of the most significant distinctions in participant selection is whether the participants are representative. A representative sample would indicate that the data are representative of the entire population and are, therefore, generalizable. In quantitative and qualitative studies, a non-representative sample of participants can both be used. This sample cannot be generalized to a larger portion of the population (Blikstad-Balas & Dalland, 2021).

The most important requirement for participation in my study was that participants be of the appropriate age. Participants in my study would not be representative of the entire population, but rather of their own class.

Participants were chosen for this study based on the research question presented in Chapter 1 of this thesis. This is also known as "purposeful selection" (Blikstad-Balas & Dalland, 2021). The term "purposeful selection" refers to the selection of participants who meet certain criteria that make them suitable for this study. The criteria for participation were established prior to the selection of participants. Since I had a direct relationship with the school, I chose to contact them directly and ask if they were willing to participate in the study (Gleiss & Sæther, 2021).

4.3 Intervention

The study was based on an intervention in a 10th grade classroom. In a classroom setting, an intervention is usually performed when there is a change in the traditional classroom methods where the researcher conducts quantitative research on a larger group of subjects. Intervention-based studies are particularly relevant where the purpose of the research is to test a hypothesis about the previous known research and an assumed factor for this research (Øgreid, 2021).

The purpose of the intervention was to test out a relatively new video game in the classroom of a Norwegian 10th grade class to see if girls' perception of gaming as a storytelling media would change in a positive direction and if all involved parties are left with a mutual understanding about how an empirical change could be positive for the participants.

4.4 Data collection

The study was originally designed to have data collection over the course of two surveys. The first questionnaire was identical to the questions presented in *Barn og Medier 2020* (Medietilsynet 2020). The reasoning behind this was to map the experiences in the classroom before the intervention took place.

The second questionnaire was designed to be more qualitative based in its questions. The participants were asked to answer the same questions as in questionnaire 1, with additional qualitative questions that were supposed to give a detailed answer to their experiences. After getting the results from the second questionnaire, my supervisor and I concluded that the questions in the second questionnaire were inaccurate, and the qualitative answers were not

detailed enough. From this conclusion a third questionnaire were created in order to collect more detailed qualitative data.

4.5 Survey

The main source of data was collected by the means of a survey. There are several types of surveys (Cohen et al., 2007): structured, semi-structured, and unstructured surveys. A simple rule to keep in mind is that the more participants in the study, the more structured the survey must be. Unstructured surveys are dedicated to a small group of participants for whom the researcher can ask open-ended questions. A semi-structured survey is a mixture of structured and unstructured surveys. This collection method is well suited for a small group of participants, where the researcher can maintain the structure and focus of the survey and at the same time, ask more open-ended questions to the participants (Cohen et al. 2007, p. 474). A questionnaire is a term used to describe a fixed set of questions when asking an individual, while a survey is a process used when collecting data from a larger group of individuals. For example, in the first and second surveys the participants were asked questions that were very structured-focused:

Gaming er sosialt *

Enig

Verken enig eller uenig

Uenig

Vet ikke

In the third questionnaire the participants were asked questions more suited for a semi-structured survey:

2. Hva syns du om karakterene i spillet? *

The background for my research is the survey conducted by the Norwegian Media Authority, as presented earlier in the thesis. This survey used a structured survey to get a quantitative overview of the media experiences for students in Norwegian schools. I made the decision to use parts of the same questionnaire and give the students the opportunity to answer more qualitatively, e.g., in the form of «justify» and «give an example».

4.6 Data analysis

4.6.1 Thematic analysis

My data collection method was mixed methods with qualitative and quantitative elements. I decided to do a thematic analysis of the data material I received through the survey. Braun and Clarke (2008, pp. 83-84) distinguish between two types of thematic analysis: inductive and deductive. My research project is a deductive approach because I have coded the collected data against my problem that had been determined in advance (Braun & Clarke, 2008, p. 83-84).

To explain thematic analysis, it is necessary to understand the six phases presented by Braun & Clarke. I have continuously reviewed the six phases; Get to know data - Generate codes - Find topics - Check topics - Define topics - Writing the analysis.

In phase 1, it was necessary that I familiarized myself with the collected data, and that I reviewed the results several times and write down thoughts and ideas (Braun & Clarke, 2008, p. 87). Since I used surveys and questionnaires, it means that I had to understand the answers the students have given me in the collection methods.

In the second phase, I produced codes based on the data. A code is a description that makes it possible to understand the data collected. For me, this meant that I had to categorize the answers from the surveys in order for it to be shown in visual data or diagrams (Braun & Clarke, 2008, p. 87).

In phase 3, I have collected all the codes I found in phase 2 for possible topics. For me, this meant that I had categorized the codes into topics that were similar to those from the original survey by the Norwegian Media Authority (2020) (Braun & Clarke, 2008, p. 87). To make sense of the amount of qualitative and quantitative data collected, I used coloured sticky notes to mark the different codes.

The last phase is about writing the analysis chapter. When writing the analysis chapter, I was able to draw common threads throughout the research to this point. The researcher must be able to show connections with the problem and relevant theory and research. Here it is important that the analysis is produced so that it is possible for the reader of the thesis to understand the data material collected (Braun & Clarke, 2008, p. 87).

4.7 Quality of the study

According to Grønmo (2016), the results of a study are more trustworthy if its quality is graded. This includes analysing the study's negative and good features, as well as reviewing the study's results and methodological decisions. Validity and reliability are evaluated to determine the quality of a study (Postholm & Jacobsen, 2018). It is impossible to obtain 100% validity and reliability across distinct research projects. In spite of a study's high dependability, its validity may be low (Grønmo, 2016). In this chapter, I will reflect on these principles as they relate to my study, as well as the research ethical decisions I took before and throughout the course of my investigation.

4.8 Validity

Validity is the quality of the data material and the interpretation and conclusion of the researcher. Therefore, validity is determined by the cohesiveness of the study's unique components. The study must consider whether the methodology and selection of participants are sufficient to answer the research questions. In a social constructivist tradition, the relationship between the research question, data material, and conclusion must be considered. Since a social constructivist tradition and a positivist tradition have different conceptions of validity, it is necessary to search for high validity in different ways. By being reflective and critical about the strengths and weaknesses provided by various research methods could be considered a high validity (Gleiss & Sæther, 2021).

Postholm and Jacobsen (2018) distinguish between internal and external validity. Inner validity refers to the validity of the conclusions we draw based on the research. This relates primarily to two aspects: causality and conceptual validity. Both of these aspects were relevant in my study. The casual relationship between exposure to story-based video games and girls'

assessment of video games' ability to portray stories. Conceptual validity refers to whether the investigated and analysed reality matches to the ideas and theory employed in this context (Postholm & Jacobsen, 2018). Throughout my research, I employed several theoretical notions and established frameworks derived from prior studies. For instance, I utilized Tanskanen's (2018) model for immersion in video games via storytelling.

Postholm and Jacobsen (2018) define external validity as the extent to which something is generalizable. That is, the extent to which the conclusions and findings of the study can be applied to other situations. Regarding the findings I have provided, this study will determine if they can be applied to an unstudied context. In my thesis, I studied the video game *Life Is Strange*. This game is story-based. Given the fact that this is a story-based game, I can argue that it addresses the research issue I have chosen to investigate for my thesis. Even though this study only examines one game, the same conclusions can be drawn for other games and narrative structures.

As previously stated, I have chosen to test a story-based video game as part of my research. The fixed game selection has both advantages and disadvantages. I can say that the study is somewhat generalizable due to the fact that the game I selected was narrative-driven and more geared toward women. For instance, I know what attracts the girls in the research group to story-based games. A positive aspect of my study is that it can be generalized to a certain extent. There are numerous other story-based video games on the market. My findings may not be generalizable to the nation as a whole due to the fact that almost all children have a unique relationship with video games.

Another thing I cannot say anything about is how teachers want to use games in their practice. Through my study, I can tell what potential story-based games have on the research group's desire to continue with story-based games. For example, the students answered what they liked about the game *Life Is Strange*. Through this data, teachers can to a certain extent understand which elements should be present for the students to like games as a narrative method. In this study, I have not considered how games can be used in school, or what a possible teaching scheme will look like - since this may be different for each teacher.

4.9 Reliability

According to Grønmo (2016), reliability refers to the extent to which the findings of the study project can be trusted. Reliability is also associated with consideration of how the researcher and/or the study may have affected the outcome (Postholm & Jacobsen, 2018). The ideas of validity and reliability are connected; a task is not valid if it is not reliable (Cohen et al., 2017)

Grønmo (2016) identifies two categories of reliability: stability and equivalence. Stability refers to the extent to which data obtained using the same collection method at a different period correspond (Grønmo, 2016). In my investigation, stability will be maintained through the usage of a video game developed for the topic of my study. I have used a video game that is seven years old, and since the video game industry is continually growing, it is possible that the stability of other, more recent video games has changed. According to Grønmo (2016), equivalency refers to the degree to which two independent data sets correspond to one another simultaneously. In my study, for instance, I evaluated and interpreted the survey results myself, but I also enlisted the aid of study-related friends and relatives to determine whether their interpretations of the survey results matched mine.

Since I collect data before and after the intervention, it will be imperative that I appear transparent in the analysis phases so that any findings are discovered. This study was arranged on a small group of Norwegian secondary school students. Since the research took place in a school classroom, it can be difficult for others to reconstruct the study and receive the same result (Gleiss & Sæther, 2021, p. 203). In a local classroom, there are several factors that can change the outcome when reconstructing the study. Every classroom has different prerequisites when it comes to video games.

In the social constructivist tradition, researchers want their data to be reliable, but they define reliability differently than in the positivist tradition. Instead of striving for objectivity, these studies will always be subjective in favour of the researcher; therefore, it is impossible to eliminate the researcher's bias entirely. Instead, they value studies that include all relevant perspectives in their analysis, while recognizing that the researcher will interpret the data in their own way (Gleiss & Sæther, 2021).

Local results can differ from national results. In a national survey, the data indicate the average result, but each classroom and student are unique. In the survey presented by The Norwegian Media Authority (2020), more than 3,400 participants from 51 schools are included. These schools have varying results, with some having students who respond more positively to the statements than others. Consequently, the data presented in this thesis are only applicable to the class in which the research was conducted. However, it is arguable that the results could be representative of classrooms in other Norwegian schools (Christoffersen & Johannessen, 2012). Social constructivist researchers are also concerned with and account for their own research methods. The objective is not to make the study repeatable to other researchers, but rather to make the research as transparent as possible so that others can reflect on the decisions made in the study (Gleiss & Sæther, 2021).

4.10 Research ethics

When conducting research, it is essential that the thesis relates to some important ethical points, but when researching on students there are more strict ethical codes. Students must always be protected against being identified through research. The questionnaires I have conducted were designed to protect the identity and privacy of the participants. Therefore, the only information I hold about the participants is the number of girls and the number of boys who partook in the research. Since the questionnaire is anonymous, the need to report the research project to the Norwegian Center for Research (NSD) was not necessary (Gleiss & Sæther, 2021, p.158).

When introducing students to video games, it is important that the age limits on the games do not exceed the age of the students. If some students are below the age limit, there must be consent and signed documents from the parents well before continuing with the research. In the case of *Life is Strange*, the research participants were of age, and therefore such a document was not necessary.

One of the foundations of research ethics concerns the need for informed consent. Informed consent indicates that participants have been provided with sufficient information about what it entails to participate in the research project. Øgreid states that even if the participants of the study are under the age of 15 and their parents give consent, it is anticipated that I also obtain

consent from the students. All of the participants in this study were beyond the age of 15, but since I have no information about them, the informed consent form was distributed to all parents in the class (Øgreid, 2021). Participants are considered informed when they understand the purpose of the research, why they were selected to participate, how their participation will contribute to the final research, what they will be asked to do, how the data will be collected, stored, and used, what right do they have to be informed of the findings of the study, and how to withdraw their consent if they no longer wish to participate in the study (Øgreid, 2021).

The first six questions focus on providing participants with information about the research prior to the intervention and ensuring that they understand this information. The seventh question is more difficult than the previous six. It centres on the participant's right to withdraw their consent and end their participation in the study at any point during the process. Even if participants are informed of their right to withdraw from the study, it can be difficult to implement throughout the duration of the research (Øgreid, 2021). In my study, participants could withdraw at any point during the intervention; however, it would be impossible for me to delete data provided by a participant who subsequently withdrew after data collection was complete. Due to the participants' complete anonymity, their responses cannot be traced back to them individually.

It was made clear to those who participated in this study that neither their participation nor their responses to the surveys would affect their assessment in the subject.

Since the video game deals with several taboo subjects, it is important the researcher and the teacher are equipped with the knowledge to deal with the exposure to such topics. The teacher and I had been in contact prior to the research phase in order to discuss if the class was used to talk about the emotional topics the video game can portray. The teacher acknowledged that some of the topics could potentially awaken traumatic experiences for some students but ensured that the class was able to take part in the research.

The data collection in this thesis was done through the means of internet surveys. I chose to use the internet survey site *Nettskjema* developed by the University of Oslo. Using internet surveys comes with its own advantages and disadvantages. Some of the advantages of using internet surveys is that they reduce the overall cost of the study and increasing the efficiency of the data

collection (Cohen et al. 2018). According to Cohen et al. (2018) the data is more likely to be authentic and honest, when using an internet survey. (Cohen et al. 2018). The disadvantages of internet surveys can be that the data can be fake. Using internet surveys makes it easier to deliberately give false and incorrect data and identifying the individuals who deliberately provide false data is hard because of the anonymity of the individuals.

4.11 Sources of error

In this research, there are some sources of error that one must be aware of. The time period between the first questionnaire, the intervention, and the last questionnaires was spread across a few weeks. This means that the participants had recently stopped playing *Life is Strange* before the final two questionnaires. By having the questionnaire in such a close proximity to the intervention, the participants might not have had time to experience other sources of experiencing stories, and therefore the result could have been different if the two components of the study were spread further apart.

I was not present during the questionnaires or the intervention, hence I cannot ensure that everything went exactly as planned. I had to trust the teachers and other people who knew there was an intervention going on to not lead the participants' answers in any direction.

The intervention and questionnaires from this research were conducted in a singular classroom. By having the research in only one classroom, with a small number of participants, a single person's opinion could significantly impact the final results.

4.12 Before the intervention

As a first step in the study, it was necessary to determine how the local classroom compared to the national standard and whether girls and boys experience video games as a medium for stories differently. Before the intervention began, the teacher and I discussed if the participants' class were familiar with using video games in the classroom. The teacher believed the participants' to be experienced with video games but not in a school setting. The participants were in an active classroom, with the boys being the most familiar with video games through their social circles and interests.

By mapping the participants' interest in video games, I could anticipate the participants' responses in advance and create a hypothesis regarding the intervention before it had begun. Having a hypothesis helped me have focus on creating surveys and a questionnaire that would be suitable for the participants to answer.

5 Findings and discussion

As explored in Chapter Three, *Life is Strange* is a story-based video game that takes the players on a journey through the explorations of a female high school student in America. The game consists of many features and themes that can attract young and adult players. Even though the game possesses elements that may engage players, it does not mean that everyone finds the game interesting. In order to understand if the intervention performed with the participants was successful in making girls experience gaming as a good medium for stories, we need examine the results from the surveys and questionnaire and discuss them in light of the theory presented in Chapter Two.

5.1.1 Similar to the national standard

In the national report conducted by the Norwegian Media Authority, its reported that 30 percent of girls between the age of 15-18 believe gaming is a good way to experience stories. This is an apparent increase from the 13–14-year-old group, where only 15 percent felt that gaming is a nice way of experiencing stories. The report also states that the most games played at the same age for girls are (in descending order) *Hay Day*, *Minecraft*, *Sims*, *Candy Crush*, *Grand Theft Auto*, and *Fortnite*. This can be shown in the figures presented below.

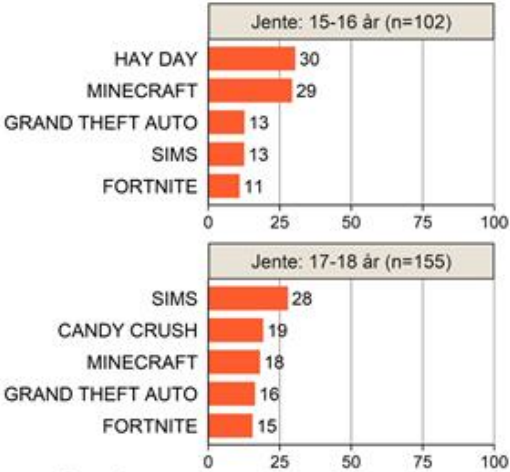


Figure 6: games played by teenagers from The Norwegian Media Authority

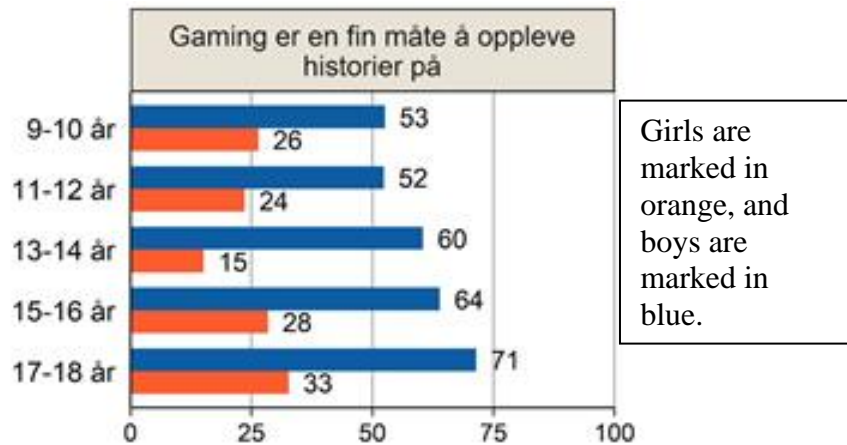


Figure 7: Gaming is a nice way of experiencing stories

The responses from the participants in my study were quite similar to the national report. The teacher told me that the participants have had experiences with video games before, and this is reflected in the first questionnaire conducted before the intervention, as presented below. In the local classroom, the percentage of girls who believe video games to be a nice way to experience stories was 36 percent – 4 out of 11. This is a 6 percent jump from the national standard, which is relatively similar, considering the small sample of respondents. The most played games by the participants were *Wordle*, *Chess*, *SIMS*, and *Fortnite*.

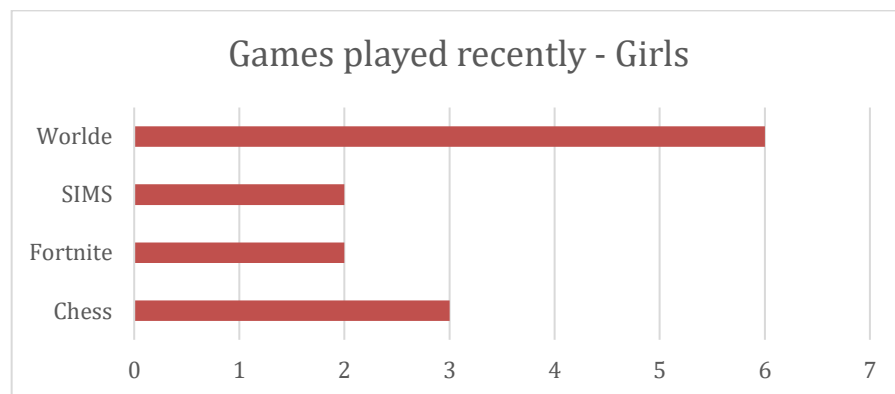


Figure 8: Games recently played by the girls in the study

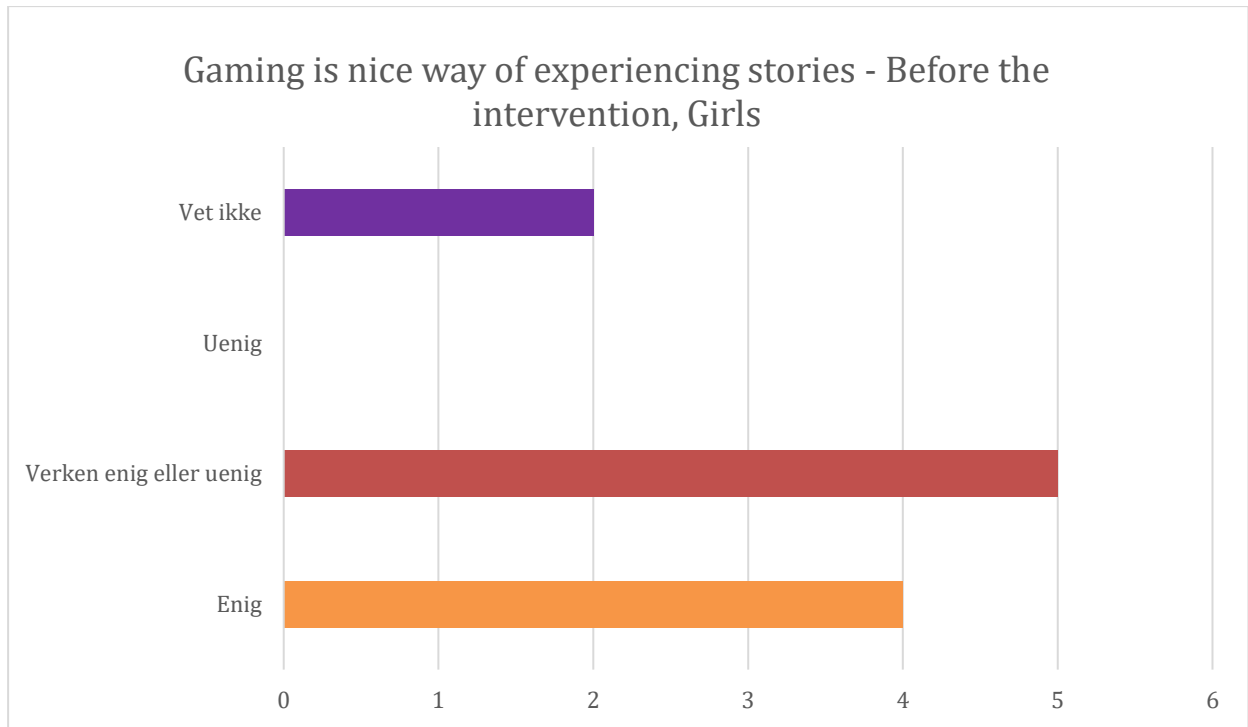


Figure 9: Gaming is nice way of experiencing stories - Before the intervention

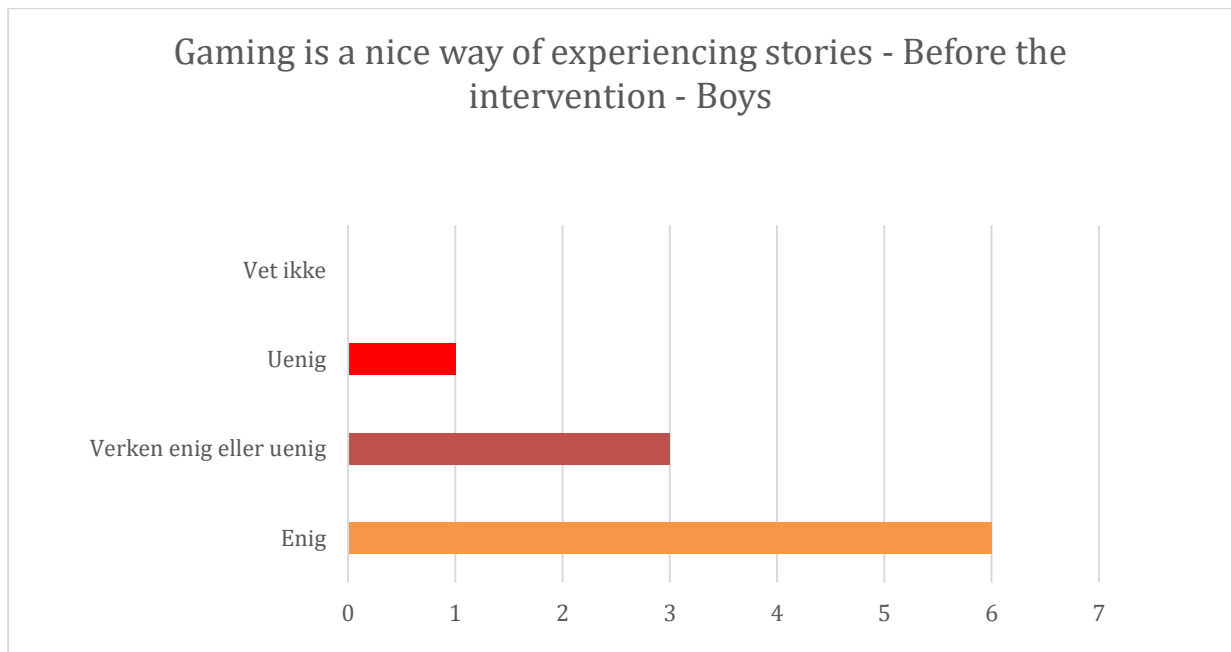


Figure 10 Gaming is a nice way of experiencing stories - After the intervention

The percentage of participants who thinks gaming is a nice way of experiencing stories was similar across the two questionnaires. The other similarity was that in both studies, the participants named the games they play the most, and games such as *Sims* and *Fortnite* were present in both studies. With the exception of *Grand Theft Auto*, none of the listed video games were story-based– indicating that the participants have not played many story-based games recently.

Can the low number in percentage be caused by not having any experience playing video games in a school setting? The teacher stated that the class has not adapted video games as a tool for learning - yet. In the Norwegian curriculum (LK20), it is stated that the students should “read, discuss, interpret and reflect on English language fiction and texts”. ‘*Texts*’ is such a wide term and can therefore be interpreted in many different ways. If the teacher does not have the experience with video games, it might be hard for the teacher to introduce video games as a type of text in the classroom.

5.2 After the intervention

When the participants finished the intervention, they were asked to participate in two additional questionnaires. The first questionnaire provided the researcher quantitative data on whether the participants have had a change of heart and now find gaming as a nice medium for telling stories. The second questionnaire would give qualitative data about the recently played video game.

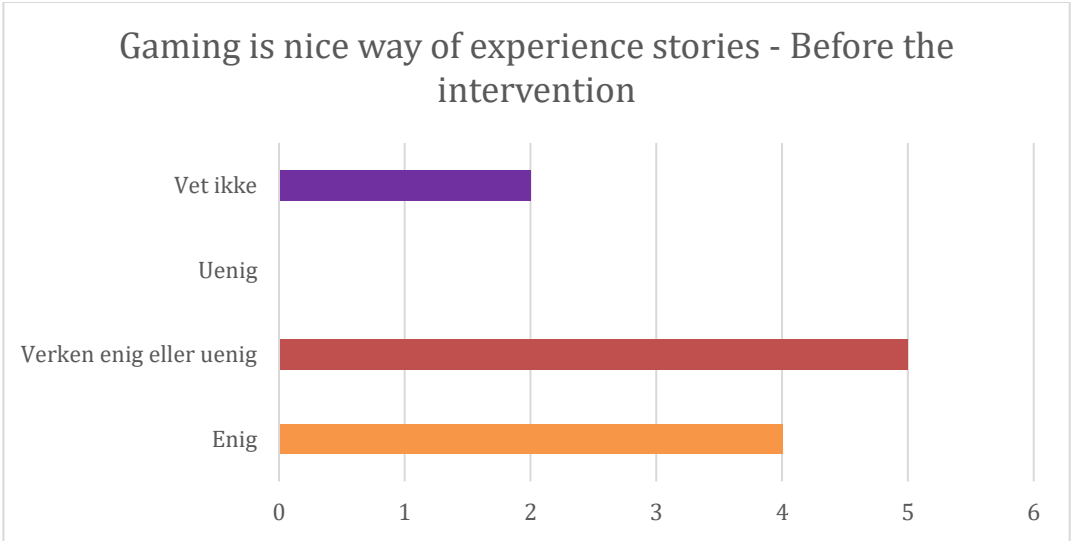


Figure 11: Gaming is a nice way of experiencing stories - Before the intervention

As established in figure 13, the percentage of female participants who found gaming to be a nice way of experiencing stories was 36.4 percent before the intervention. In the second questionnaire, this number had risen to 72.7 percent. That is an increase of 100 percent. This means that after the intervention, the percentage of girls who believe gaming is a nice way of experiencing stories was even higher than for the boys (at 66.7 percent) (Appendix 1).

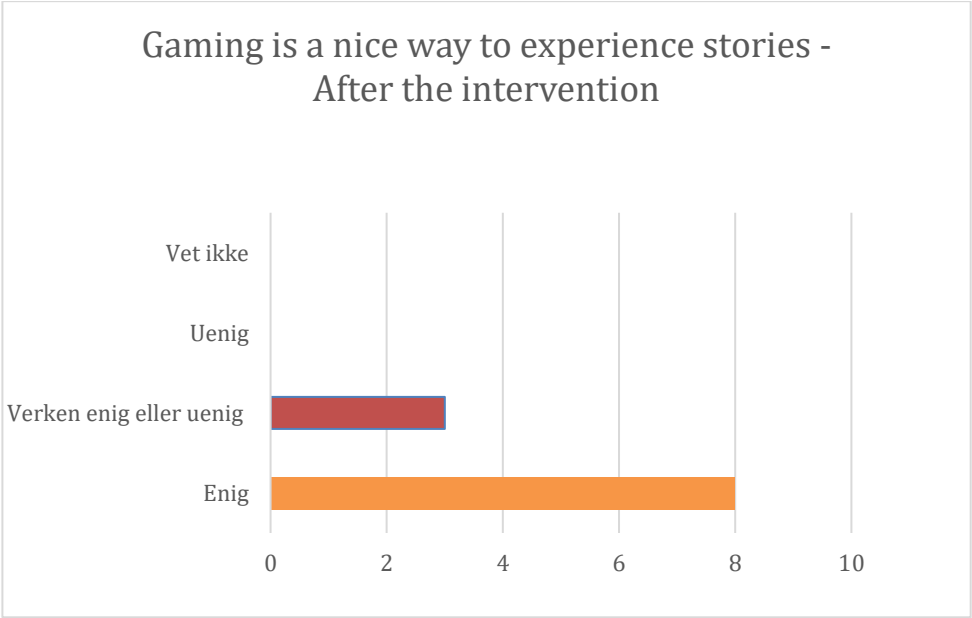


Figure 12: Gaming is a nice way of experiencing stories - After the intervention

This rapid increase came out higher than anticipated. My hypothesis was that the percentage would increase, but not overtake the boys’ opinions. In order to make sense of the quantitative data, we have to look at the qualitative results. Is the increase in the girl’s opinion reflected in the answers when questioned about *Life is Strange*?

5.2.1 Gaming as a social event

In the research surveys from the Norwegian Media Authority and the questionnaires in this research the participants were asked different opinions regarding video games. Some of the topic they were asked about was if they feel gaming is social and if gaming improves their English skills. In the first questionnaire the percentage of girls’ who thought of gaming as social was 18 percent, with 36 percent responded negatively.

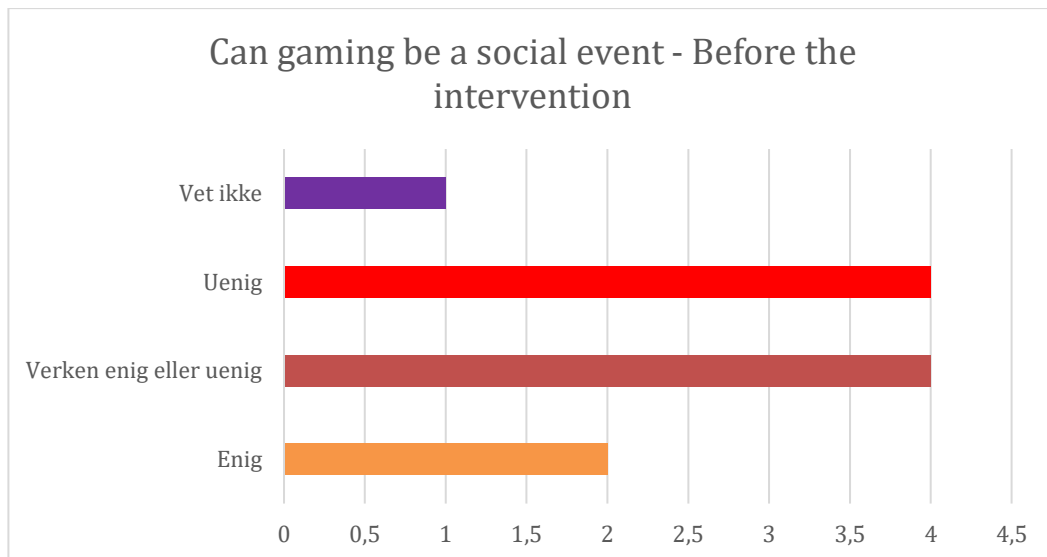


Figure 13 Can gaming be a social event - Before the intervention

This result was lower than the national standard presented by the Norwegian Media Authority. In their survey the result of girls who find gaming social was 46 percent in the same age group. The cause of this might be that the girls have only experienced games where the player is isolated from the social circle. Games such as *Sims*, *Minecraft* and mobile games are typically not considered social.

After the intervention 27 percent of the girls believed gaming could be social, with only one participant answering that they feel gaming is antisocial – compared to four participants before the intervention. When asked why the girls answered the way they did, four of them stated that gaming can be social if there is a feeling of cooperation involved.

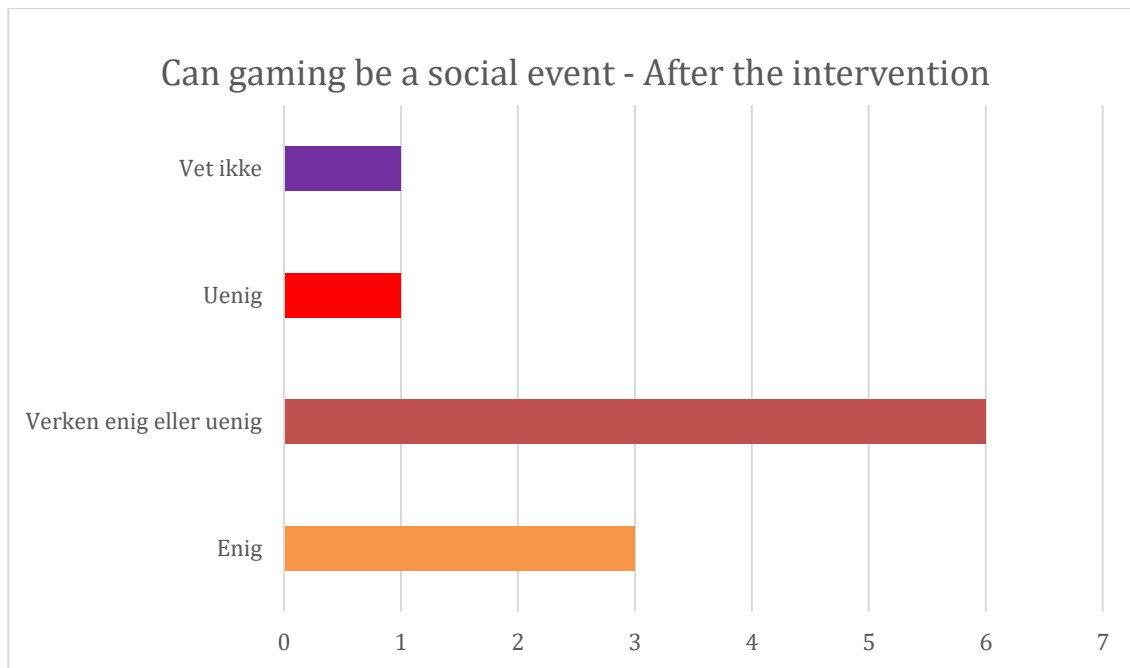


Figure 14: Can gaming be a social event - After the intervention

In the intervention the players did cooperate in pairs when playing *Life is Strange*. By playing in pairs the participants had to agree on the choices and actions of the main protagonist. This is reflected in the answers of two participants (All citations are translated from Norwegian and the original quotes can be found in Appendix 3):

I liked that in the game you could choose which decisions to make. When we played it, it was not the same story that the other groups had when they played. It was also easy to play, and since we sat in groups, it was social as well. We had to agree on what to do. When we did not agree we had to do stone-scissors-paper.

The game was a game that was easy to play. We played it in groups and it created discussion and a good atmosphere. I think the game was good because it was easy to play.

In these statements the participants explain that they found the game easy to play but also focus on cooperation. By cooperating with the group, they were able to make in-game decisions together. Another participant stated that the game caused the group to cooperate and set up several discussions on which in-game actions they should follow. The ability to make decisions in game is one of the three elements of the theory of self-determination, which leads to increased intrinsic motivation (Gagne & Deci, 2005).

By playing *Life is Strange* as a group with friends or classmates there might be some challenges. Since this is a game that tackles very emotional and hard-hitting topics, the groups must be carefully planned by the teacher. The players should be supportive toward each other and create a safe environment where it is possible to discuss the topics presented in the video game.

5.2.2 Exposure to language through gaming

As mentioned in Chapter One, the report *Barn og medier* (2020) concludes that 55 percent of Norwegian youth believe that gaming makes them better at English. The report does not include the background of the participants. Can the youth be learning English through gaming without knowing it?

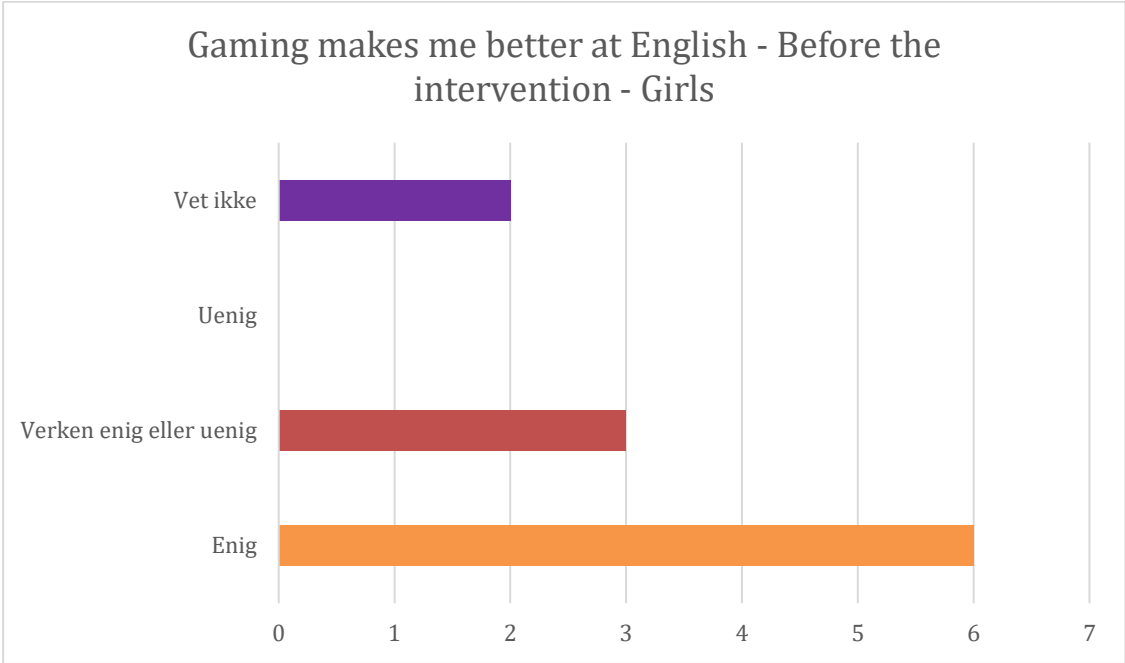


Figure 15: Gaming makes me better at English - Before the intervention

Before the classroom intervention in this study, 6 out of the 11 girls agreed with the statement. This is very similar to the results produced by the Norwegian Media Authority. The first questionnaire before the intervention, like *Barn og Medier*, does not specify any reasons or description of how the girls experience gaming when it comes to language proficiency.

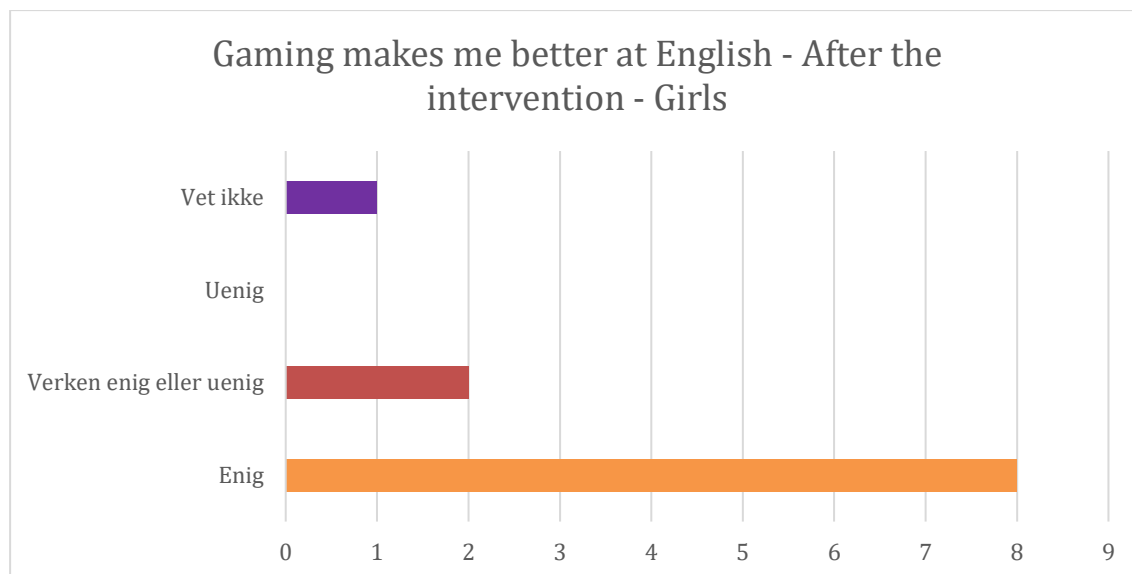


Figure 16: gaming makes me better at English - After the intervention

After the classroom intervention, the number of girls who agree that gaming makes them better at English had risen to 8 out of 11 girls. The second questionnaire shows that the girls reacted positively to the video game. Still, in order to understand why their attitude towards gaming as a language tool had changed, we have to look at the qualitative answers given in the third questionnaire. Do they describe directly or indirectly that gaming makes their English skills better?

What I liked most about the game was that it was very chill. When we played the game it did not feel like it was homework or anything like that. It was easy to play the game because we understood everything that was said.

What I liked about the game was that the action was very easy to understand. We did not have to concentrate so much when we played it to understand what happened.

Many of the participants agreed that the game was enjoyable, easy to understand and follow. They describe the game as a chill experience and that it did not feel like they were playing it because they had to. A text that is not difficult to read and understand is, according to Vicary (2013), is the first principle for extensive reading. Playing through a video game that is easy to understand and where the students understand the text is contributing to a pleasurable game experience making it more likely that the participants would return to the video game on a later occasion. The participants described their experience with the video game as an extensive

reading experience and according to Blair (2013) an extensive reading experience has a contribution to language proficiency. After playing *Life is Strange*, some of the participants knew they were increasing their English proficiency, and most of the girls describe the game as an extensive reading experience in their in-depth answers.

As pointed out previously, two of the girls bought the sequel of the video game series. The second and the third principle for extensive reading states that there should be a vast variety of reading material available and that the students should be able to choose texts based on their own interests. Since two of the participants bought the video game sequel at home, it shows that *Life is Strange* made an emotional impact on them and made them motivated to continue playing through the story. This finding is supported by Plass, Homer & Kinzer (2015), who state that when a student is emotionally connected to the story, they are more likely to be intrinsically motivated to continue reading.

5.2.3 Relatable stories

Participants find it easy to relate to *Life is Strange*. The setting of the game correlates with the known environment and the same age group as the participants of this research. The students described that they could easily identify with the main characters of the game.

I think the people in the game were very relatable to me. They were girls my age and I could recognize myself in several of them. I liked that it was very realistic persona, like Chloe.

The characters in the game went to school. It was easy to understand the problem being dammed. Since the main character was a girl, it was easy to decide what she should do when we could turn back time.

This participant describes the characters as exciting. She backs this statement with explaining that the similarities between themselves and the in-game characters were crucial for the story to be relatable. She expresses that Chloe, one of the main characters of the game, is depicted as a realistic persona. By portraying realistic characters, it is easier for the players to see themselves in the position of Max, the main protagonist. When dealing with issues that are relatable to the participants it can be more interesting and life-like.

The agency-based element of the game made the game more interesting for the participants. The freedom to choose their own direction in the game, helps make the game-story more

personal for the players. Turley (2018) tell us that its easier for the students to decode the text when they [the players] choose their own directions. This interpretation connects *Life is Strange* directly up to the Norwegian curriculum (LK20).

I think the characters in the game were exciting. They were my age and the problems being alleviated were easy to understand. Since they were my age, it was more fun to play the game.

The participants experienced *Life is Strange* as an interesting video game. One of them states that the characters were easy to understand because the themes of the game were easy to identify herself with. The in-game characters were written to her demographic and therefore easier to associate herself with. The ability to understand the main characters and identify with them is also described by one participants like this:

I really liked that there were two lesbian main characters in the game, since I myself am a lesbian it was cool. almost every game i've seen, it's just boyish girls. The people were very different but they fit together.

By having in-game characters that suit the players' demographic makes it easier for players to understand the topics and choices one must make in game. The participants also states that the gender of the protagonist and the environmental similarity of the game helped them feel a sense of relatability, which according to Plass, Homer & Kinzer (2015) is important for engagement and wanting to return to the game.

5.2.4 Girls want more games like *Life is Strange*

In the report from the Norwegian Media Authority, the female participants were asked to mention games they have played recently. As seen in point 5.1.1 the participants only mentioned one story-based video game, *Grand Theft Auto*. This game is rated R for the high prevalence of violence, drug abuse, harsh language, and nudity. Consequently, *Grand Theft Auto* is not suitable for educational use. The storyline of the game is not relatable for Norwegian teens either, especially young girls, who will encounter a male-dominated and sexist game environment.

In the final questionnaire conducted in the classroom for this research, the participants were asked if they want more games like *Life is Strange*. All the female participants were positive to the idea of having more story-based games such as *Life is Strange*.

I think there should be more games because I think it was more fun to play this game than to watch movies and read other stories. It was good that you could decide the choice in the game yourself. Then it was not the same as everyone else got. There were some choices that were difficult to choose from, but it went well.

Yes. I think there should be more games like life is strange. I do not play much computer games, but life is strange was very fun and sad at the same time. The story of the game made us cry because it was so sad sometimes.

These participants stated that the agency-based narrative and that the player could personalize the narrative in their liking were crucial for them to enjoy it. Because of this element the participants were able to differentiate their story from their classmates' story. They answer that some of the choices were hard and emotional to make.

I think it was a very good game. The game was immersive, and we wanted to play the game instead of doing other subjects. It was a story that was sad and at the same time very fun to play. There should be more games like this because almost all games are aimed at guys. Life is strange was directed more towards us I felt. I do not think all the boys liked the game, but we liked it very much.

This participant remarked that the game made her feel immersed, and that it was refreshing to be able to play a game designed for girls. She mentions that the majority of games they are exposed to are designed for boys and that not all boys enjoyed the game as much as the girls.

It is important that both boys and girls feel they have options when it comes to video games in the classroom. In a comment made on the second questionnaire, one of the boys stated that they had played through *Life is Strange* in school and that he thought the game was “a boring story about a girl”. When asked to name where the boys have recently experienced a story through a video game, only four named *Life is Strange*. Three out of these four mentioned that they have other video games at home they would rather play to experience a story (Appendix 3). Finding a game that girls enjoy playing is a good step in the right direction, but when the boys feel the

game is not as exciting, this could damage the boys' motivation for video games in the classroom.

These findings strengthen the belief that personal interest is important for the players to enjoy the game-story of certain games. The girls describe the game as enjoyable and relatable, while the boys describe it as boring and uninteresting. If the goal is to ensure that everybody has the opportunity to experience a story through video games, the solution might be to let the students choose their own video games from a range of varied story-based video games that the teacher has chosen to be appropriate. This way the students will be more motivated to continue reading and therefore have a positive experience playing games. This finding is supported by Krashen (2004) and Rimmereide (2013) who point out that students who pick their own literature are more motivated to continue with the texts.

Looking at the definition of game presented by the Oxford dictionary, one may assume that all games are competition-oriented. When analysing the different video games recently played by the participants, it may seem as if the male participants are more competition oriented than the girls. If that is the case, there might be a connection to why there is an overwhelming amount of competition-based video games. In a male dominated field, it is easier for males to develop games that other males would find enjoyable.

Norway is one of the countries where the scepticism to competition in the educational system is highest. It is not uncommon that Norwegian teachers claim that competition creates exclusion and losers (Grande, 2021). Competition is widely used in teaching, but more teachers want to move away from a competition-based educational system. Teachers want competition-oriented activities to be replaced by more social aspects and focus on cooperation.

If it is the case that boys are more competitive than girls one could claim that the education system is more girl-friendly than before where soft values are given priority before competitive skills. This development creates a lot of challenges because a more girl-friendly school system increases the dropout of guys and may also represent a barrier to introduce computer games into the school system as such.

In contradiction to the most famous computer games, *Life is Strange* does not have a particular goal or winning focus. The result in the end is depending on the choices taken by the

participants. *Life is Strange*, therefore, does not qualify as a progression-style game, because the storyline does not follow a linear line. Rather, as an emergence-type game the player can choose their own path and create their own narrative. This is according to Klug & Lebowitz (2011) and Turley (2018) presented as a good video game to be used as an alternative to traditional literature. This reflects also the answers given in this research.

Some of the comments in the questionnaire support this:

What I liked best about the game Life is Strange was that it was easy to understand. I do not really like computer games, but this was more like a movie and story we could change while we played. The game was fun to play and got increasingly sad I think, but it was good. The game was not that complicated to play. The game was very relatable and suited me well.

I think the game was very good. it was a story that was fun to play. I would rather play this game than watch a movie, because here I could decide what should happen. When you went back in time to change something that had happened, we chose alternatives that were even worse. It was sad, but we still had fun.

I liked the game because it was easy to play. We could play it on the ipad and it was easy. We made Max's decisions and explored what we wanted to explore. I liked that it was a story we could change by going back in time.

What we liked about the game was that it was very good because it contained a lot of good and chill music, similar main characters and an atmosphere that was sad but good. The game was calm and not like we have to be gamers to be able to play it. We liked that.

Yes, there should be more games like life is strange. I think it was good to play a game that was not boring or difficult. It didn't really feel like a game, but more like a story or a movie. My friend and I downloaded the sequel to the iPad to continue playing

Whereas typical video games are referred to as competitive, *Life is Strange* is here described as an ongoing story.

Answers from appendix 3 also confirm that 77 percent of the target group has concluded that gaming can be a good way to experience stories. To me this also indicates that the girls who are not using video games regularly can enjoy games that are more based on interactive storytelling where their own choices have an impact on the result of the game.

5.2.5 Immersive text

The way you live your life, the results you achieve and the success you have are all depending on the decisions you make in life. *Life is Strange* gives the player a tool to organize their decisions where they can actually see the consequences – and in addition, the game makes it possible to return to their milestones and change their choices – where the players can see what could have been different. Compared to real life it is hard to switch back in time, but often one is aware of decisions made that could have led to another result in the past. In this way *Life is Strange* is relevant both to learn from the past and also to indicate what future decisions could bring – without having a fixed answer.

The participants of the study describe the video game as an emotional journey. *Life is Strange* impacted the participants by presenting the readers with life-like situations and hard choices. The possibility of reversing time in order to make different decisions give the participants a feeling of responsibility. Two of the participants describe their experience with the game like this:

*When you went back in time to change something that had happened, we chose something that was even worse, the outcome made us **sad**, but we laughed it off.*

*It was a story that was **sad and funny**.*

*The story of the game **made us cry** because it was **so sad** sometimes.*

The words are marked in bold by me and highlight the emotional connection to the game. The participants explain that the story had an emotional effect on them while playing the game. The feeling of sadness and laughter is common when the players are immersed in the storyline. The emotional responses the players had after making decisions matches the theory of immersive reading presented by Hsu, Conrad & Jacobs (2014).

Since the participants' experienced *Life is Strange* as an immersive game it is important to control the environment around the players. As mentioned in Chapter Three, the game deals with topics that can be difficult and emotional for the players to encounter. Some of the topics in the game can lead the player to experience traumatic emotions from their past or present, for example, losing your best friend, suicide, and emotional and physical abuse. Therefore, it is important to follow up the players in the wake of these emotional moments of the game if used in an educational situation.

As a learning tool, *Life is Strange* combines a lot of elements at the same time. The most important educational element is that decisions have consequences. It makes the gamer reflect on the decisions made in the game, that could also be relevant in their own lives. The mix of impressions from graphic presentation, sound, emotional and realistic presentation as a whole, show how technology can be implemented to figure out the connection between decisions and results.

6 Conclusion

Video games are a medium for telling stories differently to boys and girls because of the lack of gender diversity in video games. The video game that was presented in this thesis is a game with a female protagonist and the players see the world through her eyes and thoughts. After playing *Life is Strange*, the percentage of girls' who believed gaming to a nice way of tellings stories had risen from 36 to 73 per cent. *Life is Strange*, a video game that is marketed toward girls, had an emotional effect on participants, the girls describe the game's narrative as sad and funny. After the intervention, all of the girls answered that they wish there were more games like *Life is Strange*.

It is important that teachers familiarize themselves with different types of video games. Outside of the mainstream video games, there is a vast variety of video games available that are ready to be implemented in school. Before introducing video games in the classroom, teachers should be conscious of what type of game they are introducing just as if they were introducing a more traditional form of literature. Video games have different topics, role-models, stories, and settings.

It is necessary to conduct additional research on the relationship between girls and video games in order to comprehend why many girls experience video games differently than most boys of the same age. In education, are video games more suitable for boys than for girls? Will girls' interest in video games grow if women are not sexualized and discriminated against in the majority of the most popular games?

In an ideal world there would be no gender gap when it comes to how we experience video games. The fact is that games are a great source for entertainment and storytelling and the educational value is remarkable. Sadly, many girls do not find the genre as intriguing as the majority of boys do. There are a lot of issues standing in the way before the gender gap is equalised. One might ask the question if it is even appropriate to expose students to a literary genre that is so much more in favour of boys.

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8 Appendices



Appendix 1

Rapport fra «Spørreundersøkelse om dataspill - Jenter»

Innhentede svar pr. 7. mai 2022 01:09





Med fritekstsvar

Spiller du spill (for eksempel på PC, Playstation, mobil og nettbrett)? *



Svar	Antall	Prosent	
Ja	8	72,7 % 	
Nei	3	27,3 % 	


Er du enig eller uenig i disse påstandene?

Gaming er sosialt *




Svar	Antall	Prosent	
Enig	2	18,2 % 	
Verken enig eller uenig	4	36,4 % 	
Uenig	4	36,4 % 	
Vet ikke	1	9,1 % 	

Gaming gjør meg flinkere i engelsk *




Svar	Antall	Prosent	
Enig	6	54,5 % 	
Verken enig eller uenig	3	27,3 % 	

Uenig	0	0 %	
Vet ikke	2	18,2 % 	




Jeg lærer mye av gaming *

Svar	Antall	Prosent	
Enig	1	9,1 % 	
Verken enig eller uenig	8	72,7 % 	
Uenig	0	0 %	
Vet ikke	2	18,2 % 	

Gaming er en fin måte å oppleve historier på *

Svar	Antall	Prosent	
Enig	4	36,4 % 	
Verken enig eller uenig	5	45,5 % 	
Uenig	0	0 %	
Vet ikke	2	18,2 % 	

Jeg bruker mye tid på gaming *

Svar	Antall	Prosent	
Enig	2	18,2 % 	
Verken enig eller uenig	5	45,5 % 	
Uenig	3	27,3 % 	

Vet ikke	1	9,1 % 	
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Jeg bruker mye penger på gaming *

Svar	Antall	Prosent	
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<https://nettskjema.no/user/form/submission/report.html?id=257493>

1/2

07.05.2022, 01:10 Spørreundersøkelse om dataspill - Jenter – Rapport - Nettskjema

Svar	Antall	Prosent	
Enig	0	0 %	
Verken enig eller uenig	4	36,4 % 	
Uenig	6	54,5 % 	
Vet ikke	1	9,1 % 	

Hvilke spill spiller du mest? Skriv inn maks 3 svar. *

Rapport fra «Spørreundersøkelse om dataspill - Gutter»

Innhentede svar pr. 7. mai 2022 01:10

▪ Leverte svar: **10**

▪ Påbegynte svar: **0**

Antall invitasjoner sendt: **0**

Med fritekstsvar

Spiller du spill (for eksempel på PC, Playstation, mobil og nettbrett)? *



Svar	Antall	Prosent	
Ja	9	90 %	
Nei	1	10 %	

Er du enig eller uenig i disse påstandene?



Gaming er sosialt *

Svar	Antall	Prosent	
Enig	5	50 %	
Verken enig eller uenig	3	30 %	
Uenig	1	10 %	
Vet ikke	1	10 %	




Gaming gjør meg flinkere i engelsk *

Svar	Antall	Prosent
Enig	7	70 % 
Verken enig eller uenig	3	30 % 
Uenig	0	0 %
Vet ikke	0	0 %

Jeg lærer mye av gaming *




Svar	Antall	Prosent
Enig	2	20 % 
Verken enig eller uenig	8	80 % 
Uenig	0	0 %
Vet ikke	0	0 %

Gaming er en fin måte å oppleve historier på *

Svar	Antall	Prosent
Enig	6	60 % 
Verken enig eller uenig	3	30 % 
Uenig	1	10 % 
Vet ikke	0	0 %

Jeg bruker mye tid på gaming *




Svar	Antall	Prosent

Enig	4	40 % 	
Verken enig eller uenig	4	40 % 	
Uenig	2	20 % 	
Vet ikke	0	0 %	

Jeg bruker mye penger på gaming *

Svar	Antall	Prosent	
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<https://nettskjema.no/user/form/submission/report.html?id=257274> 1/2
07.05.2022, 01:10 Spørreundersøkelse om dataspill - Gutter – Rapport - Nettskjema

Svar	Antall	Prosent	
Enig	4	40 % 	
Verken enig eller uenig	3	30 % 	
Uenig	3	30 % 	
Vet ikke	0	0 %	

Hvilke spill spiller du mest? Skriv inn maks 3 svar. *

Appendix 2

Rapport fra «Spørreundersøkelse om spill etter spilt spill Jenter»




Innhentede svar pr. 8. mai 2022 23:30

- Leverte svar: **11**
- Påbegynte svar: **0**




Antall invitasjoner sendt: **0**

Med fritekstsvar

Spiller du spill (for eksempel på PC, Playstation, mobil og nettbrett)? *

Svar	Antall	Prosent	
Ja	6	54,5 % 	
Nei	2	18,2 % 	
Bare på skolen	3	27,3 % 	




Er du enig eller uenig i påstandene under og hvorfor er føler du det slik? **Gaming er sosialt** *

Svar	Antall	Prosent	
Enig	3	27,3 % 	
Verken enig eller uenig	6	54,5 % 	
Uenig	1	9,1 % 	

Vet ikke	1	9,1 % 	
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- **Hvorfor?**
samarbeid
- æ får snakke med folk
- vet ikke
- Gaming er sosialt når man samarbeider, men veldig mange sitter alene å gamer
- gamer ikke nåkka så veit ikje
- man må sammarbeide sammen
- de som gamer mye e ofte aleina
- vet ikke
- Jeg synes gaming kan være sosialt, men det kan også være usosialt.
- Mange sitt aleina å spille

Gaming gjør meg flinkere i engelsk *



Svar	Antall	Prosent	
Enig	8	72,7 % 	
Verken enig eller uenig	2	18,2 % 	
Uenig	0	0 %	
Vet ikke	1	9,1 % 	

- Hvorfor mener du gaming gjør deg flinkere i engelsk eller ikke?
les mye
- æ forstår ord bedre når æ høre dæm
- gamer nesten aldri
- Mye tekst
- Mye lesing og snakking
- les mye og høre masse ord
- føler ikke noe forskjell
- snakke mye og les mye
- Jeg lærer meg nye ord når jeg spiller spill eller ser andre spille spill
- vet ikke

Jeg lærer mye av gaming *




Svar	Antall	Prosent	
Enig	3	27,3 % 	
Verken enig eller uenig	8	72,7 % 	
Uenig	0	0 %	
Vet ikke	0	0 %	

Gaming er en fin måte å oppleve historier på *



Svar	Antall	Prosent	
Enig	8	72,7 % 	
Verken enig eller uenig	3	27,3 % 	
Uenig	0	0 %	
Vet ikke	0	0 %	

- **Hvor opplevde du en historie sist gjennom gaming?**
på skola når vi spilte life is strange
- på spillet life is strange vi spilte i klasserommet
- huske ikke
- I spillet Life is strange vi spilte på skola nettopp
- på skola
- kan ikke huske
- når vi spilte som Max i spillet life is strange. ble litt lei mæ sida historien va trist
- huske ikke
- på skola
- Jeg opplevde sist en historie på skolen når vi spilte et spill. spillet var mer som en bok enn et spill så jeg vet ikke om det gjelde
- vi spilte et spill på skola der va det en historie om ei jente

Jeg bruker mye tid på gaming *

Svar	Antall	Prosent	
Enig	2	18,2 %	
Verken enig eller uenig	2	18,2 %	
Uenig	7	63,6 %	
Vet ikke	0	0 %	

Jeg bruker mye penger på gaming *

Svar	Antall	Prosent	
Enig	0	0 %	
Verken enig eller uenig	2	18,2 %	
Uenig	9	81,8 %	
Vet ikke	0	0 %	

- **Hvilke spill spiller du mest? Skriv gjerne 3 svar. ***
mobilspill som wordle life is strange
- life is strange wordle elden ring
- vet ikke
- spille bare spill på skola
- life is strange wordle
- wordle?
- wordle life is strange sims
- spille ikke
- spille nesten ikke spill
- sjakk life is strange
- iphonespill sims life is strange

Rapport fra «Spørreundersøkelse om spill etter spilt spill Gutter»




Innhentede svar pr. 8. mai 2022 23:30

- Leverte svar: **9**
-
- Påbegynte svar: **0**

Antall invitasjoner sendt: **0**




Med fritekstsva

Spiller du spill (for eksempel på PC, Playstation, mobil og nettbrett)? *

Svar	Antall	Prosent	
Ja	7	77,8 % 	
Nei	1	11,1 % 	
Bare på skolen	1	11,1 % 	

Er du enig eller uenig i påstandene under og hvorfor er føler du det slik?

Gaming er sosialt *



Svar	Antall	Prosent	
Enig	4	44,4 % 	
Verken enig eller uenig	3	33,3 % 	
Uenig	2	22,2 % 	

Vet ikke	0	0 %	
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- **Hvorfor?**

- Snakke med folk æ ikke kjenne
- Samarbeide mye med andre
- samarbeide ilag og prate sammen
- like ikke å spille så mye
- synes det e kjedelig å spille
- synes man blir mer aleina hvis man spille mye
- spille mye med venna
- Når gang sosialt men det kan også være usosialt hvis man game aleina

Gaming gjør meg flinkere i engelsk *




Svar	Antall	Prosent	
Enig	6	66,7 % 	
Verken enig eller uenig	3	33,3 % 	
Uenig	0	0 %	
Vet ikke	0	0 %	

- **Hvorfor mener du gaming gjør deg flinkere i engelsk eller ikke?**



- snakke mye engelsk
- vet ikke
- Jeg samarbeider mye med teamet og må snakke mye engelsk til dem. Alle spill æ spille e også på engelsk, så man må kunne engelsk for å forstå.
- les masse tekst når man spille. snakke masse sammen også e alt på engelsk
- spille ikke nåkka
- les mye når man game
- vet ikke
- prate mye om ka vi skal gjøre og kordan
- lære og læs mye engelsk når man game

Jeg lærer mye av gaming *

Svar	Antall	Prosent	

Enig	4	44,4 % 	
Verken enig eller uenig	4	44,4 % 	
Uenig	1	11,1 % 	
Vet ikke	0	0 %	




Gaming er en fin måte å oppleve historier på *

SvarSvar	AntallAntall	ProsentProsent	
Enig	6	66,7 % 	
Verken enig eller uenig	3	33,3 % 	
Uenig	0	0 %	
Vet ikke	0	0 %	




- **Hvor opplevde du en historie sist gjennom gaming?**
på skola med life is strange og hjemme når æ spille elden ring
- på skola
- Spille veldig mye Elden Ring... der e det en bra historie å følge
- på skola iste når vi spilte life is strange men ellers så spille æ mye gta hjemme
- spilte litt life is strange men gidde ikke å spille mere
- hjemme når æ spille elden ring
- spilte life is strange på skola men likte det ikke
- hver dag æ kommer hjem å spille Elden ring
- spilte life is strange på skola og der va det en litt kjedelig historie om ei jente

Jeg bruker mye tid på gaming *

Svar	Antall	Prosent	

Enig	4	44,4 % 	
Verken enig eller uenig	2	22,2 % 	
Uenig	3	33,3 % 	
Vet ikke	0	0 %	

Jeg bruker mye penger på gaming *

Svar	Antall	Prosent	
Enig	2	22,2 % 	
Verken enig eller uenig	3	33,3 % 	
Uenig	4	44,4 % 	
Vet ikke	0	0 %	

- **Hvilke spill spiller du mest? Skriv gjerne 3 svar. ***
elden ring, FIFA, Fortnite
- wordle?
- eldenring
- gta fifa wordle
- .
- eldenring wordle fifa
- life is strange
- Elden ring, FIFA, GTA
- fifa fortnite

Appendix 3

Rapport fra «Spørsmål om Life is Strange - Jenter»

Innhentede svar pr. 26. april 2022 14:04

- Leverte svar: **9**
- Påbegynte svar: **0**

Antall invitasjoner sendt: **0**

Med fritekstsva

For en liten stund siden spilte dere igjennom et dataspill som heter *Life is Strange*. Nedenfor er det noen spørsmål relatert dette spillet. Jeg ønsker at dere svarer utdypende.



1. Hva likte du med spillet Life is Strange? *

Det jeg likte best med Life is Strange var at det var en annen måte å spille et spill på. Vi kunne ta pause og fortsette der vi slapp neste gang vi skulle spille. Jeg synes det var mer motiverende å spille dette spillet enn å lese og andre oppgaver vi jobber med på og utenfor skolen. Vi hadde lyst å fortsette spillet.

Det jeg likte med spillet life is strange var at det var veldig enkelt å spille. Når vi begynte å spille spillet så var vi sånn "meh" men etter å ha spilt det ei stund så likte vi det mer og mer. Det var en fortelling som var veldig enkel å forstå seg på. Det begynte litt kjedelig, men når nå viktig skjedde så ble det veldig spennanes.

Jeg likte at i spillet så kunne man velge selv hvilke avgjørelser man skulle ta. Når vi spilte det så var det ikke samme historie som de andre gruppen hadde når de spilte. Det var også lett å spille, og siden vi satt i grupper så var det sosialt også. Vi måtte bli enige om hva vi skulle gjøre. Når vi ikke var enige måtte vi ta stein saks papir.

Det jeg likte med spillet life is strange var at det var et spill som var lett å spille. Jeg trengte ikke noen skills for å forstå meg på spillet eller spille det. Jeg likte også at det var en historie som var lett å følge med på.

Det jeg likte med spillet var at handlinga var veldig enkel å forstå seg på. Vi trengte ikke å konsentrere oss så mye når vi spilte det for å forstå hva som skjedde.

Det jeg likte best med spillet Life is Strange var at det var enkelt å forstå seg på. Jeg liker egentlig ikke dataspill, men dette var mer som en film og historie vi kunne endre på mens vi spilte. Spillet var artig å spille og ble mer og mer trist synes jeg, men det var bra. Spillet var ikke så komplisert å spille. Spillet var veldig relatable og passet meg bra.

Jeg likte spillet fordi det var enkelt å spille. Vi kunne spille det på ipaden og det var enkelt. Vi bestemte avgjørelsene til Max og utforska det vi ville utforske. Jeg likte at det var en historie vi kunne endre på med å gå tilbake i tid.

Spillet vi spilte på skola var veldig gøy. Jeg likte at spillet ikke var så veldig voldelig og mye action. Jeg likte at det var en historie vi kunne bestemme over. Vi måtte ikke gjøre det samme som de gruppene og det likte jeg veldig godt. Jeg synes historien i spillet var trist men samtidig artig.

Det vi likte med spillet var at det var veldig bra fordi det inneholdt veldig mye bra og chill musikk, likende hovedpersoner og en stemning som var trist men bra. Spillet var rolig og ikke sånn at vi må være gamere for å kunne spille det. Det likte vi godt.

Det jeg likte mest med spillet var at det var veldig chill. Når vi spilte spillet så var følte det ikke som det var lekse eller noe sånt. Det var enkelt å spille spillet fordi vi forsto alt som ble sagt. Det var gøy at det var to lesbiske hovedpersoner.

2. Hva syns du om karakterene i spillet? *

Personene i spillet var relatable på en måte som mange spill ikke er. Det var mange jenter i fortellingen som gjorde at det var bedre for meg iallefall. Det var lett å like karakterene, selv om det var litt klisje noen ganger.

Personene i spillet heter Max og Chloe. De er normale jenter i min alder. De kler seg som alle andre gjør og har samme problema som alle andre har. Det at de var jenter gjorde at de var veldig lett å se seg selv i, spesielt for oss som er jenter.

Hovedpersonen var ei jente og bestevennen var ei jente. Det likte vi. Det var veldig lett å forstå seg på personene. Sida de var jente og litt eldre enn oss så var det lett. Chloe og Max var som meg og venninna mi. Jeg var Chloe fordi jeg farger håret mye.

Jeg synes karakterene i spillet var spennende. De var på min alder og problemene demmes var lett å forstå seg på. Sida de var på min alder så var det mer gøy å spille spillet.

Jeg synes personene i spillet var veldig relatable for meg. De var jente i min alder og jeg kunne kjenne meg igjen i flere av dem. Jeg likte at det var veldig virkelighetslike persona, sånn som Chloe.

Karakterene i spillet gikk på skole. Det var lett å forstå seg på probleman demmes. Sida hovedperson var ei jente så var det enkelt å bestemme hva hun skulle gjøre når vi kunne snu tida tilbake.

Hovedpersonene i spillet var to jenter som var ganske enkel å forstå seg på. De er normale jenter med muligheten til å snu tida tilbake. Karakterene i spille var gøy fordi de ligner masse på folk i klassen også haha

Jeg synes personene i spillet var veldig enkle å forstå seg på. De var ganske lik normale jente. Jeg likte spesielt Max fordi hun er ganske lik meg. Jeg er også ganske sjenert som hun var. Det er ikke ofte du spille en person med så mange tanker og som er så sjenert som meg.

Personene i spillet var ganske likanes. De hadde stemmer som passet personene bra. Det gjorde at det var enkelt å følge med på historien. Jeg synes det var bra at det var personer man kan se seg selv i. Jeg har også venner jeg ikke har snakket med på lenge. Jeg likte veldig godt at det var to lesbiske hovedpersoner i spillet, siden jeg selv er lesbisk så var det kult. nesten alle spill jeg har set så er det bare guttegale jenter. Personene var veldig forskjellige men de passet ilag.

3. Synes du det burde være flere spill som Life is Strange? Hvorfor? *

Jeg synes det burde være flere spill fordi jeg synes det var mer gøy å spille dette spillet enn å se på film og lese andre fortellinger. Det var bra man kunne bestemme valg i spillet selv. Da ble det ikke det samme som alle andre fikk. Det var noen valg som var vanskelig å velge mellom men det gikk fint.

ja! Jeg synes spillet var veldig bra. det var en historie som var gøy å spille. Jeg vil heller spillet dette spillet enn å se på film, fordi her kunne æ bestemme hva som skulle skje. Når man gikk tilbake i tid for å endre nåkka som hadde skjedd, så valgte vi nåkka som var enda verre var trist men vi flirte.

Ja, jeg synes det burde være flere spill som life is strange. Spillet var et spill som var lett å spille. Vi spilte det i grupper og det skapte diskusjon og god stemning. Det var en historie som var trist og artig. Jeg synes spillet var bra fordi det var enkelt å spille.

Ja! Jeg synes det burde være flere spill som passer til å bruke på skola, spesielt for jenter. Spill som ikke alltid har mye skyting og skills for å kunne spille. Life is strange var også en veldig bra historie. Jeg følte det var som å se en lang film jeg bestemte over.

Jeg synes det burde være flere spill som life is strange fordi det er ikke nok spill som passer til jenter. nesten alle spill er til gutter. Jeg er ikke så glad i spill, men life is strange var et spill med en bra fortelling der vi ikke treng skills for å kunne spille. Historien var bra fordi det var enkelt å forstå og personene i spillet var relatable.

Jeg synes det var et veldig bra spill. Spillet var oppslukende og vi ville spille spillet istedet for å gjøre andre fag. Det var en historie som var trist og samtidig veldig gøy å spille. Det burde være flere sånne spill fordi nesten alle spill er rettet mot gutta. Life is strange var rettet mer mot oss følte jeg. Jeg trur ikke alle guttan likte spillet, men vi likte det veldig godt.

Ja. Jeg synes det burde være flere spill som life is strange. Jeg spiller ikke så mye dataspill men life is strange var veldig gøy og trist. Historien i spillet fikk oss til å

gråte fordi det var så trist noen plass. Vi kjøpte faktisk spillet Life is Strange after the storm på ipaden hjemme sånn at vi kunne spille det der også.

Jeg synes det burde finnes flere spill som er mer casual, sånn som life is strange er. Det var et spill vi kunne ta opp når vi ikke hadde noe å gjøre på skola uten å ha mistet noe av handlinga. Guttan spille så mye andre spill så æ likte at detta spillet var mer retta mot jenten.

Ja det burde være flere spill som life is strange. Jeg synes det var bra å spille et spill som ikke var kjedelig eller vanskelig. Det følte egentlig ikke som et spill, men mer som en fortelling eller en film. Jeg og venninna mi lasta ned etterfølgeren på ipaden for å kunne spille videre.

Ja jeg syntes det burde være mange spill som dette. Spillet var gøy fordi vi kunne gjøre hva vi ville i spillet.

Appendix 4.

Deltakelse i forskningsprosjekt om dataspillhistorier

Informasjon til foresatte på 10. trinn

Mitt navn er Jonas og jeg studerer ved Universitetet i Tromsø, Institutt for lærerutdanning og pedagogikk. I månedene Februar/Mars 2022 vil jeg begynne masterprosjektet mitt som skal se på hvordan 10.klasseelever opplever historiefortelling gjennom dataspill. Prosjektet er i hovedsak knyttet til engelskfaget, men kan bli benyttet i andre fag også. Dataspillet jeg har valgt ut å teste i skolen heter *Life is Strange*. Elevene skal først svare på en spørreundersøkelse før de begynner å spille, for deretter å gjennomgå spillet i grupper. Spillet håndterer med noen vanskelige temaer som for enkelte kan gjenopplive traumatiske opplevelser, som for eksempel overgrep i hjemmet, vold og selvmord.

Etter å ha spilt spiller skal elevene svare på en ytterligere undersøkelse hvor elevene blir bedt om å svare mer utfyllende på hva de likte med spillet og om spillet har endret deres syn på å bruke spill som en måte å oppleve fortellinger på.

Jeg vil at elevene skal vite minst mulig om hva det er jeg forsker på, dette er for å sikre mer pålitelige svar i undersøkelsene. Siden spillet håndterer noen vanskelige temaer, er det helt innafor å diskutere spillet hjemmet, men unngå å diskutere hva jeg ønsker å undersøke.

Å være deltaker i mitt forskningsprosjekt

Å være deltaker i dette prosjektet betyr at svarene elevene gir i spørreundersøkelsene før og etter å ha spilt dataspillet vil bli brukt som datagrunnlag for masterprosjektet mitt. Jeg vil ikke ha noen deltakerrolle i klasserommet og undervisningen vil være i regi av læreren.

Datamaterialet som kommer fra elevene

Alt av datamateriale som blir samlet inn gjennom spørreundersøkelsen vil være anonymisert slik at svarene ikke kan spores tilbake til hver enkelt elev. De eneste kjennskapet jeg har til klassen er antall elever og kjønnsdeling i klasserommet.

Siden ingen personvernopplysninger vil bli samlet inn av meg er det kun læreren og elevene som vil vite hva de svarer på de forskjellige spørsmålene. Jeg, min veileder og lesere av prosjektet mitt vil ikke vite hvem som har svart hva på de forskjellige spørsmålene.

Eleven står fritt til å kunne terminere sin deltakelse i prosjektet når som helst. Vennligst kontakt meg direkte hvis dere har noen spørsmål angående forskningsprosjektet.

Med vennlig hilsen

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Appendix 5

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