

# INCIDENTAL FOREIGN LANGUAGE ACQUISITION THROUGH VIDEO GAME NARRATIVES: AN INFORMAL LEARNING PERSPECTIVE

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**Problem Statement.** The growing ubiquity of video games as a leisure activity has prompted researchers to reconsider the boundaries of language learning environments. While formal instruction remains central to foreign language education, a significant portion of learners' linguistic development occurs outside the classroom – through exposure to authentic language in digital media. Video games, particularly those of narrative genres, represent a rich and largely underexplored context for incidental foreign language acquisition: the unintentional learning of linguistic material as a by-product of engagement with another activity [1, p. 25]. Despite a substantial body of research within Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL), the mechanisms through which game narratives facilitate incidental acquisition remain insufficiently examined from a pedagogical perspective.

**Objectives.** This paper aims to examine video game narratives as an informal learning environment conducive to incidental foreign language acquisition, and to assess the pedagogical implications of this phenomenon for foreign language instruction.

**Methods.** The study draws on a qualitative longitudinal observation of three participants aged 9–20 (2019–2024) who engaged with English-language video games (World of Warcraft, Elder Scrolls Online, Red Dead Redemption, among others) without formal instructional support. The observation was complemented by an author-designed survey (n=77) examining self-reported language gains among video game players. Findings were interpreted through the theoretical framework of incidental learning [1] and second language acquisition theory [2].

**Results.** The longitudinal observation demonstrated that sustained engagement with narrative-driven video games stimulated the incidental acquisition of vocabulary, idioms, and culturally specific expressions. Participants reported that motivation to follow the storyline prompted active dictionary use and a gradual reduction in reliance on machine translation. Notably, one participant who subsequently enrolled in a university translation program attributed a significant portion of their pre-academic linguistic competence to game-based exposure; however, the absence of systematic grammar instruction was identified as the primary limitation of this informal learning context.

Survey results corroborate these findings. Among respondents who played video games in English, 79.5% reported acquisition of fixed phrases and idioms suitable for practical use; 77.3% reported improved listening comprehension; 72.7% reported growth in reading ability. Narrative genres – single-player RPGs and adventure games – yielded the highest levels of textual engagement: 52.3% of players in these genres reported full immersion in the game text, attending to every word and line of dialogue. This pattern is consistent with the conditions identified in the literature as most conducive to incidental vocabulary acquisition: high motivation, meaningful context, and repeated exposure to authentic input [2, p. 335].

**Conclusions.** Video game narratives constitute a viable informal learning environment for incidental foreign language acquisition, offering authentic linguistic input, sustained motivation, and low-anxiety conditions for language use. However, the absence of systematic grammatical instruction in game-based contexts produces competence gaps that require correction through formal teaching means. The pedagogical potential of video game narratives is therefore most fully realized in combination with structured classroom instruction. Future research should focus on developing frameworks for the purposeful integration of game-based informal learning into foreign language curricula.

## REFERENCES

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