

Pixels and Personas: Exploring Immigrants' Linguistic Identity in Gaming Literacy

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Abstract

In light of increasing immigration trends, understanding the educational implications for English as Second Language (ESL) classrooms is crucial. This study underscores the often-overlooked role of gaming literacy within the broader multiliteracies framework, offering insights into its potential to support immigrant integration while preserving linguistic identities. By delving into the interplay between gaming literacy, immigrant identity, and sociolinguistics, ESL curriculum development and inclusive practices within immigrant communities should be significant in research (Cummings, 2000). These findings hold significant implications for addressing linguistic barriers, reshaping ESL pedagogy, and promoting digital literacy to foster inclusion and belonging among immigrant populations.

This research investigates how video games influence identity formation and linguistic adaptation within English-speaking host societies by exploring the intersection of gaming literacy and immigrant integration. By addressing the research question, “How does gaming literacy influence identity formation and integration processes among immigrant communities, and what role does it play in shaping their cultural and linguistic adaptation within the English-speaking host society?” the aim is to uncover how gaming literacy may serve as a tool for preserving linguistic identities while facilitating integration. Examining the benefits and drawbacks of video games for ESL students, their impact on linguistic and cultural identities, and their integration with other digital literacies elucidates how gaming literacy can enhance language learning and foster a sense of belonging.

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This study adopts a theoretical research methodology, laying the groundwork for subsequent qualitative research. The theoretical framework examines existing literature on gaming literacy, ESL education, and immigrant integration, synthesizing insights to propose a model for integrating gaming literacy into ESL pedagogy. Future qualitative research will involve empirical data collection through surveys, interviews, and classroom observations to validate and refine this theoretical model.

Keywords: Gaming literacy, English as a Second Language, Immigrant education, Multiliteracies framework, Linguistic identity

Intersections Between Gaming Literacy and ESL

The digital gaming industry has existed for a significant amount of time. The study of digital games as human artifacts, which are used mainly for (but not restricted to) entertainment purposes, also follows this continuum (Cruz, 2022). This means that, as digital games began to have more space in people's lives, interest in studying them also grew. Shaffer et al. in their 2005 publication, had already commented on how computers were redefining the ways of learning, pointing out that video games were (and still are) an excellent example of how this is true.

Gaming literacy is based on the dichotomy of real-fictional worlds. These virtual worlds promote or question what exists inside and outside digital games (Alvermann, 2008; Apperley & Beavis, 2013; Shaffer et al., 2005; Toh & Lim, 2022). This implies that it is not enough to play. It is necessary to think about why people see news relating players to crimes and violence (Beavis & O'Mara, 2010), why most players are still white men while marginalized people do not see adequate representation (Toh & Lim, 2022), and why the majority of digital games are still published in English (Apperley & Beavis, 2013).

For Shaffer et al. (2005), these fictional worlds make gaming literacy and using digital games as a learning tool valuable. A benefit of video games is how their affordances facilitate feedback in a safe space, which allows trial and error to be seen as an incentive rather than a reason to give up (Toh & Lim, 2022) while also questioning previous paradigms and concepts. The "richness and complexity of video, computer or digital games" (Apperley & Beavis, 2011, p. 130) fosters infinite possibilities for learning and teaching.

Thus, thinking about gaming literacy within the educational scenario is rethinking the historical-cultural and socio-political issues that surround and are perpetuated in digital games. Once again, they are not just made for consumption and entertainment but significantly influence players and their lives.

The paradox of digital games – in which new futures are thought of at the same time that stereotypes are perpetuated – is one of the factors that corroborates their interest in the educational area.

Although the literature on video games in education precedes the term “gaming literacy,” a common question seems to permeate all research on their implementation in education. The question is logical and practical: If all research points to more benefits than problems, why are digital games not yet as prevalent in the school scenario?

The authors themselves give the answer, which is more objective than it seems. The truth is that even though games have the potential to trigger changes in education and break with the traditional system, teachers, parents, and the school community in general, are not ready to put them into practice because not everyone “would know what to do” with them (Shaffer et al., 2005, p. 110).

In ESL instruction, the theoretical framework of gaming literacy is a lens through which to explore the intersection of language learning, cultural integration, and digital technology. Immigrant learners bring diverse linguistic backgrounds and cultural experiences to the ESL classroom (Cummings, 2000) in a way that shapes their engagement with video games. As learners and cultural participants, they should be considered assets.

For instance, by integrating immigrant perspectives into game selection and design, educators can create inclusive learning environments that honor students' cultural identities and promote cross-cultural communication (García, 2009). Gaming literacy practices, such as analyzing game narratives, discussing cultural representations, and collaborating in multiplayer gaming environments provide opportunities for language practice, critical thinking, and social interaction. Moreover, gaming literacy empowers immigrant learners to participate actively in their language-learning journey as they develop digital literacy skills, problem-solving abilities, and collaborative competencies through gameplay.

Specific examples illustrate the impact of gaming literacy on ESL learners. Games like *Pokémon Go* (Strømman, 2021) and *The Sims* (Hibarino & Cruz, 2020) have successfully promoted language acquisition and cultural integration. *Pokémon Go*, with its open-world format and collaborative gameplay, encourages communication and teamwork, providing a platform for ESL learners to practice language skills in a context that mirrors real-world interactions. *The Sims*, on the other hand, offers scenarios that mimic daily life, allowing players to navigate social situations, practice language in context, and explore cultural norms within a safe, virtual environment.

While gaming literacy presents numerous benefits, it is essential to acknowledge its limitations in ESL teaching and immigrant integration. Not all games

are suitable for educational purposes, and there can be a disparity in access to gaming technology among immigrant learners. Furthermore, the potential for reinforcing negative stereotypes and the need to select games that promote positive cultural representations carefully cannot be ignored. Future research should explore diverse gaming genres and platforms, considering the varying accessibility and cultural relevance to different immigrant communities.

Final Considerations

Gaming literacy emerged as a much more established concept than initially expected. Although the first articles that use the term are not from before the beginning of the 21st century, gaming culture and its impact on people's lives has been discussed for some time. Thus, literacy within the universe of digital games investigates not only reading in the broad sense of the word, but the relationship of this artifact with issues such as representation, power relations, hidden agendas, and the intersection of communicative modes in the formulation of meaning.

This was an essential step in reflecting on what, ontologically, digital games do in people's lives. By "doing," we consider any uses of games so that the ontology of gaming literacy resides in the very existence of games as a tool or human artifact, creating and remixing worlds, different realities, and experimental opportunities. It is an opportunity for player agency, which reinforces that games are epistemologically designed to learn something, whether it is in-game commands, the history of a place, new skills, or a language.

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