

Risk Taking in Language Learning and the Advantage of Using Video Games as an Educational Tool (Poster)

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Abstract

Risk taking is an integral part of the language learning process (Horwitz, 2001), as previous literature demonstrates that language risk taking (LRT) is positively associated with many factors necessary for successful language acquisition (Cervantes, 2013). In the current study, participants (N = 526) performed a foreign vocabulary memorization task, followed by a questionnaire designed to measure several important aspects of their experience: anxiety, self-confidence, and task motivation (Shatz, 2014; Zafar & Meenakshi, 2011). Participants also responded to questions gauging their risk taking, both in a generalized (Munichor, Erev, & Lotem, 2006), and in a language related context (Ely, 1986).

Multiple regression analysis of the data found that participants' age, gender, and native language were all significant predictors of their LRT ($p < .0005$, $R^2 = .034$). Participants were then divided into three groups based on a tertiary split of their LRT rating. A multivariate analysis of covariance using age, gender, native language, and instruction group (since the data set was used for an additional study, participants received different sets of goal-oriented instructions) as covariates, found that there was a significant difference between the LRT groups across performance, anxiety, self-confidence, and task motivation ($p < .0005$). The difference was significant for all variables except task motivation. Bonferroni-adjusted pairwise comparisons further explored the relationship between these variables, indicating the LRT has an exponential relationship with performance and self-confidence, and an inverse exponential relationship with anxiety, all of which are advantageous to language learning.

These results provide several practical insights into risk taking in the language learning process. First, they identify individuals who are predisposed to risk aversion, and who therefore require additional encouragement to be more risk taking. Second, they suggest that teaching a language in the learner's target language facilitates risk taking over learning it in their native language. Finally, these findings demonstrate the positive relationship that risk taking has with other pertinent factors in the language learning process

The importance of enabling and encouraging risk taking in the language learning process highlights one of the primary benefits of using video games in order to aid language acquisition. This stems from the fact that video games create a relatively safe environment, which encourages learners to take risks in their target language, thus enabling them to learn the language more effectively (Cheng, Su, Huang, & Chen, 2014; Peterson, 2009; Rama, Black, van Es, & Warschauer, 2012). Overall, these conclusions frame video games as a viable and effective educational tool.

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