

**REACTION PAPER ON RESEARCH ARTICLE OF AFFECT AND
WILLINGNESS TO COMMUNICATE IN DIGITAL GAME-BASED
LEARNING BY HAYO RENDERS AND SORADA WATTANA (2015)**

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In the research article "Affect and willingness to communicate in digital game-based learning", Hayo Renders and Sorada Wattana (2015) first described the benefits of digital games on students' affective barriers in learning a second language and willingness to communicate as an example of other researchers' Anyaegbu et al (2012) and Peterson's (2012a, 2012b) previous studies investigating those aspects and trying to find answers to the following questions: How do students truly react to the use of games? What effect does gaming have on students' self-perceptions as learners, and how does this influence their learning habits? Then, authors found those earlier investigations exploratory, restricted in scope, and focused mostly on empirical and descriptive data. Thus, Render and Wattana want to fill these gaps in their research by reporting on the adoption of online games and their impact on English language learners' WTC in English (MacIntyre et al, 1998). Additionally, they decided to conduct the study in formal education in Thailand, a context that has received little attention so far. Their study answers the question: what is the impact of Thai EFL students' participation in digital games on their WTC in English (Reinders, Wattana, 2015)? I agree with the ideas and motives about game-based learning's benefits on L2 learners' nature and motivation drawn by this article's research, which was carefully conducted by reinforcing with the necessary resources.

Before conducting their full-scale study, they carried out a pilot study to see the potential of CALL in the form of computer games to promote some of the factors that influence WTC (Reinders & Wattana, 2011) and I think it is effective to determine the feasibility of the main study's essential components as impacts of the MMORPG 'Ragnarok Online' on learners' interaction and WTC in English that explored in a genuine English classroom environment. Sixteen university students participated in three 4-hour and 30-minute computer gaming sessions. Researchers employed questionnaires as a research method and used them to identify students' WTC levels during gameplay. According to the results, positive impressions of WTC, less fear while conversing in English, good self-conversational ability, and high intensity of English usage were all indicated as



benefits of participating in the game. We can see from pilot study that learners benefited from the game's lower stress situations and were therefore eager to take advantage of the possibilities to utilize their second language.

In their subsequent study, they focused more precisely on learners' experiences of playing digital games and their WTC in English. Researchers operationalized WTC in their study as a learner's intention to begin or engage in L2 communication at a certain time in a specific environment. In this context, intention first refers to a desire to communicate in L2, followed by feelings about speaking L2 in terms of self-confidence (which includes both low anxiety and satisfactory self-perceived interactional language competency), and finally L2 communication frequency. The study involved thirty Thai EFL students studying in IT in their third year who were participating in a 15-week university course called English for Information Technology that aims to develop all-around talents and practice English communication skills. It was devised and supervised by one of the investigators. The students possessed varying degrees of target language competency. The course covered six units. Participants revised at the completion of each unit by completing the quest on a computer game called "Ragnarok Online" during normal instructional time. Researchers modified the gameplay by generating six quests that were relevant to the language learning context as well as the curriculum, and hosted it on a private server in the CALL laboratory (Reinders & Wattana, 2011).

As a research method to analyze the data, researchers used:

- **Observation in the CALL laboratory** to observe the chatting of the participants during the game and get control over who could access the game. But I think it is unethical to secretly monitor students' chat messages and violate their rights as well as their privacy. If they were warned about this, they would be less likely to show potential results, but it would be more appropriate if one researcher observed himself as a participant in the game.
- **Interview** A total of 30 interviews, including a discussion of their communication experiences, were conducted with five randomly chosen (utilizing the random number generator) students at the end of each game. A total of 30 interviews, including a discussion of their communication experiences, were conducted. Only in the last interview did they describe their impressions of the WTC in English while interacting in the game. By asking primarily open-ended questions, interviewers allow respondents to extend their comments in directions that investigators would not have anticipated (Campbell, McNamara, & Gilroy, 2004:99). They were interviewed in their L1 for 15–30



minutes in an informal manner to help them feel at ease and eager to discuss their experiences and perspectives. I think that the interview method was really effective, but there was only a limited number of participants involved in it. However, the research would be more accurate and reliable if all 30 students were interviewed to get the actual data.

- **A questionnaire** to identify all 30 participants' WTC in English, not only throughout the game but also in the class. If we look at the questionnaire, the results of this method are not given in detail, with only general findings. Researchers are required to provide detailed results of their questionnaires.

To analyze the data, the researchers digitally recorded the interviews and transcribed verbatim the recordings and that gave them the opportunity to analyze in detail without any detail losses. The interview data was reviewed line by line by both researchers using grounded theory (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007) to seek pivotal points and discover symbols, which were then organized into ideas. Key factors such as conversation anxiety, considered communication proficiency, and motivation were established as fundamental concepts to develop a story (Reinders & Wattana, 2011).

One of the most important findings was that gaming reduced anxiety in all participants, including the one who did not love the game as much as the others. Participants stated that the atmosphere facilitated helpful contact and that the lack of an open, public space created a sense of anonymity. This indicated the potential of DGBLL to lower affective barriers such as anxiety about delivering a speech, fear of ridicule, making an error, reticence, insecurity, and low motivation in language learning that many learners experience mostly in classes. And this result, like the findings of research by Peterson (2012a) and Anyaebogu, Ting & Li (2012), Another conclusion showed that playing games encouraged students to take risks in L2 conversation through the game. One of the qualities of effective language learners has been recognized as the willingness to make errors and learn from them (Wenden, 1987). Finally, even though target language output is often low in EFL circumstances (Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997), Renders and Wattana's (2015) research found that participants reported they had interacted more in L2. Four of the five participants said they were more likely to speak during games because of this.

However, not all the results are good. One of the participants mentioned that the intensity of the communication was difficult. Her interview answers indicated that she required a longer time to prepare her replies and that the game's simultaneous character did not suit her. This conclusion is identical to





that of Anyaegbu, Ting, and Li (2012), who found that a minority percentage of subjects in their experiment disliked the game. Despite her concerns, she did believe that the gameplay had been a compelling method to study (Reinders & Wattana, 2011).

To conclude, in their research, Reinders and Wattana (2015) observed different beneficial aspects of CALL on learners' WTC in English through carefully chosen methods and strategies. They proved the potential and limitations of digital game-based language learning that had not been observed before. I believe that incorporating digital games into second language acquisition (SLA) might be beneficial because they give accurate, low-anxiety chances for students to practice all four areas: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Students recall words and phrases quickly and easily, also with deeper meaning when they learn while playing a game, as they are "utilizing" the language itself rather than "thinking" about the accuracy of the words and phrases they are producing. Before reading those articles, I used to think that game-based learning would be suitable for all language learners equally. But based on research conducted by Reinders and Wattana (2015), I concluded that some students need some preparation before playing a game. For example, teachers should introduce new vocabulary, language structures, and functions that they need through the game beforehand.

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