Computer games give a boost to English

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Liss Kerstin Sylvén, associate professor in Subject Didactics specializing in Languages, University of Gothenburg. Credit: The University of Gothenburg

If you want to make a mark in the world of computer games you had better have a good English vocabulary. It has now also been scientifically proven that someone who is good at computer games has a larger English vocabulary. This is revealed by a study at the University of Gothenburg and Karlstad University, Sweden.

The study confirms what many parents and teachers already suspected: young people who play a lot of interactive English computer games gain an advantage in terms of their English [vocabulary](#) compared with those who do not play or only play a little.

The study involved 76 young people aged 10-11. Data was collected via questionnaires and a so-called language diary. This was used to list all encounters with the English language outside [school](#), such as using the computer and playing digital games. Among other things, the study investigated whether there was any correlation between playing digital games and motivation to learn English, self-assessed English linguistic ability and strategies used to speak English.

Major difference between the genders

The results indicate that there is a major difference between the genders when it comes to computer gaming. Boys spend an average of 11.5 hours a week playing, while girls spent less than half that time, 5.1 hours. Girls instead spent far more time (11.5 hours) than boys (8 hours) on language-related activities online, primarily on Facebook.

The computer games that appear to be most effective for the development of English vocabulary are those known as Massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPG), a genre of role-playing computer games in which a large number of players interact with one another in a virtual world.

"As a player you simply have to be able to understand what's being said, to read English and to interact yourself by both writing and speaking English," says Liss Kerstin Sylvén, Associate Professor at the University of Gothenburg, who conducted the study together with Pia Sundqvist, Senior Lecturer in English at Karlstad University.

English outside school important

The results from the study underline the results from other studies conducted by both researchers. Regular gamers have a significantly better English vocabulary than others.

"The importance of coming into contact with English outside school, for example by reading English or, as in this case, by playing computer games, means a lot in terms of young people's English vocabulary. It also has positive effects on what happens at school in the classroom. The subject of English at school and the English that the young people encounter and use in their leisure time are not two separate worlds," says Liss Kerstin Sylvén.

The article entitled Language-related computer use: Focus on young L2 English learners in Sweden has been published in the journal *ReCall*.

 More information: Link to the article: journals.cambridge.org/action/… Id=S0958344013000232

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