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Ilona Huszti
Doctor of Philosophy (PhD), Associate Professor
Department of Philology, Ferenc Rákóczi II Transcarpathian Hungarian College of Higher Education, Berehove, Ukraine
ORCID ID 0000-0002-1900-8112
huszti.ilona@kmf.org.ua

Enikő Nagy-Kolozsvári
Master of Arts (MA), Senior Lecturer
Department of Philology, Ferenc Rákóczi II Transcarpathian Hungarian College of Higher Education, Berehove, Ukraine
ORCID ID 0000-0003-1844-8674
nagy-kolozsvari.eniko@kmf.org.ua

Márta Fábián
Master of Arts (MA), Associate Professor
Department of Philology, Ferenc Rákóczi II Transcarpathian Hungarian College of Higher Education, Berehove, Ukraine
ORCID ID 0000-0002-5549-1156
fabian.marta@kmf.org.ua

DIGITAL AND NON-DIGITAL GAMES IN YOUNG LEARNER EFL CLASSROOMS AT WARTIME IN UKRAINE

Abstract. The present study aims to investigate the gaming habits of young learners (YLs) in the process of learning English as a foreign language and examine the role non-digital or conventional and digital games play in teaching English to young learners. It examines both conventional games used in the classroom and digital games played outside of formal instruction. Reasons for playing these two types of games were elicited from the children who were additionally asked about the preferences concerning playing games alone (solitary play) or with peers (collaborative play), in the English classroom or beyond it, i.e. preferred contexts for gameplay (classroom vs. home). The survey was conducted in Ukraine in a particularly challenging period in February and March, 2023, marked by the aftermath of COVID-19 and the subsequent declaration of martial law in the country. An online questionnaire was designed to collect data from our participants aged 10-13. The questionnaire was then administered to the children, and a total of 175 completed questionnaires yielded valuable results that formed the foundation of the study's analysis. Findings revealed that in the current war-torn Ukraine most frequently preference is demonstrated for conventional games which are played within the structured environment of the English classroom. These games were perceived by YLs as a means offering them to alleviate the burdens of everyday stress while simultaneously facilitating lively and engaging peer interaction in English. Conversely, digital games were preferred for home-based play primarily due to their inherent entertainment value, essentially bringing them pleasure and enjoyment. One of the most crucial implications to be gleaned from this research lies in the urgent need for educators to actively integrate age-appropriate and educationally sound digital games and applications into their existing EFL curricula. By strategically incorporating these digital tools, educators can effectively supplement formal language instruction, fostering a more multifaceted and engaging learning experience for their young learners.

Keywords: digital games; non-digital/conventional games; extreme circumstances; young learners.

1. INTRODUCTION

The problem statement. The investigation detailed in this paper was carried out in a context that is characterized as one with extreme circumstances. It is the westernmost county, Transcarpathia in Ukraine, where after the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian war on 24 February, 2022, martial law was introduced and it is still in effect about two and a half years

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after its declaration. Children in Transcarpathia (Zakarpattia) study mainly English as a foreign language, the weekly number of lessons vary between 2 and 3. A lesson is 45 minutes long. Table 1 shows the number of weekly English lessons in state schools of Forms 5, 6 and 7 [1], where the research was conducted. The situation in which EFL classes were held during the time of the research was far from ideal, or even normal: children and teachers had to adapt and conform to the daily air raid alarms and the screaming sound of the sirens meaning that all the participants of the educational process had to move to bomb shelters and stay there until the alarm ended. In addition, the situation was worsened by the frequent and long power shortages throughout the country. At times, children stayed in the shelter with their teachers for only an hour, at other times this could last for two or three hours [2]. Teachers had to continue teaching in such extreme circumstances. If the Internet was available in the shelter, the children could use their digital devices for educational purposes. However, when the net was not available, the English teachers could apply some conventional games to teach the language to their learners.

Table 1

Number of EFL lessons per week

Form	Age of YLs (years)	Number of weekly lessons
5	10-11	3
6	11-12	2
7	12-13	2

Note: one lesson lasts 45 minutes

No empirical research has been carried out yet investigating the playing habits of Transcarpathian Hungarian young learners in the EFL classroom, therefore this paper is believed to fill this gap in the academic literature.

Analysis of recent studies and publications. Young learners are defined in the academic literature as children aged 5-15 years of age learning a foreign language [3]. This view is also supported by Mihaljević Djigunović and Nikolov [4, p. 515], who consider that YLs are "learners who learn a FL in instructed settings in their elementary education (usually starting around 6–7 years of age) up to the middle of high school (or secondary school in some contexts) when learners are 14–15 years old". This age group is fond of playing in and out of the English classroom. Therefore, teachers try to apply games in their teaching process in order for the learners to benefit from them, primarily, to improve their vocabulary, or develop their language skills of listening and speaking. Wright, Betteridge and Buckby [5, p. 1] believe that a game is "an activity which is entertaining and engaging, often challenging, and an activity in which the learners play and usually interact with others". Experts believe that game-based learning (be it conventional or digital) has numerous advantages over traditional foreign language instruction without games. They motivate, increase interest, engage learners and provide them with opportunities to use the language [5]. In addition, Chapelle [6] claims that games ensure risk-free, non-threatening environment for children where they can freely experiment with the language.

Raskova [7] conducted a quasi-experimental survey among Indonesian young learners to measure the effects of games on English vocabulary acquisition. She found that the experimental group outperformed the control group on vocabulary tests, which led her to the conclusion that games can be a powerful tool in learning English vocabulary for young learners.

We distinguish between non-digital and digital games. Non-digital ones, also referred to as traditional or conventional, are activities that have been enjoyed for hundreds of years. Often needing both physical movement and playing with others, these games encourage creativity and using imagination. Board games, card games, puzzles, or outdoor games are all examples of

traditional games [8]. On the other hand, digital games are played on electronic devices like computers or smart phones. Versatility and variety are mentioned as key advantages of digital games by Anderson [8]. Digital games for educational purposes are often referred to as serious games [9]. Wei [9] characterises them as non-entertainment games. A study by Tsai and Tsai [10] suggests that digital games can be a powerful tool to boost students' motivation and vocabulary learning. In the contemporary era dominated by technology, interactive digital games and educational applications have emerged as valuable pedagogical tools within English language classrooms. Platforms like Kahoot! [11] and Duolingo offer gamified language assessments and exercises that target a variety of learning styles and provide immediate feedback, thus enhancing the overall learning experience.

Clements [12] claims that both parents and teachers agree that children need playing games in order to undergo healthy mental and physical development. Tatli [13] conducted research among 464 children in grades 5-8 in Turkey, investigating their preferences for conventional and digital games. She found that gender played an insignificant role in children's digital game preferences, while the variables 'having a computer' for girls and 'having an available internet connection' for boys appeared to be crucial predictors for game preferences. In sum, Ascione and Tafuri [14, p. 1] concluded that "gamification and game-based learning strategies can improve students' academic performance, engagement and motivation".

We have found few studies that would describe teaching English in contexts similar to the one in Ukraine at present. Researchers usually speak of teaching English in difficult circumstances [15], or in 'under-resourced' contexts [16], [17], [18] in economically underdeveloped countries. Certain researchers, however, carried out investigations in contexts of conflict and crisis [19], [20], [21]. These studies mainly focused on how teachers reacted to the psycho-affective challenges they and their learners had to cope with. For instance, Okpe [20] researching language teachers' practices in Nigeria where education was affected by terrorist attacks, found that teachers applied 'restoration strategies' with the help of which they tried to restore children to their former psychological state within the frame of a combination of English lessons and counselling. The context in which Alyasin [19] conducted a study was a Syrian refugee camp school in Turkey where an English teacher was asked about her challenges and coping strategies. The findings show pedagogical practices that the teacher has developed based on her previous experiences and the constraints and demands of the context in which she functions as an English teacher. In all such contexts and circumstances, games can play a crucial role in motivating learners.

The research goal. To get insights into the ongoing processes in the EFL classrooms and in order to better understand them, we have decided to collect empirical data to support or refute our hypotheses, namely: 1. Children enjoy conventional games more than digital games because of the live interaction they involve; and 2. In the new Ukrainian reality (in the time of frequent air raid alarms and/or power outages through December, 2022 and January, 2023) it is more convenient to use conventional games than digital ones in the EFL classrooms. Thus, the purpose of the article is to investigate the preferences and effectiveness of conventional and digital games in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms in Ukraine, particularly during times of crisis (e.g., air raid alarms, power outages). The research aims to:

- provide empirical evidence to support or refute the stated hypotheses,
- offer insights into the factors influencing learners' game preferences,
- develop practical recommendations for EFL teachers on game selection and implementation,
- contribute to a deeper understanding of the role of games in language learning and teaching.

To achieve the above aims, the following research questions were asked:

1. How do children's gaming habits, including daily duration and preferred gaming partners, relate to their engagement with digital games for language learning?

2. What are the most popular digital games used by children for language learning, and how do these choices reflect educational objectives and student preferences?

3. What role does language preference (e.g., English, Hungarian, or Ukrainian) in digital games play in children's language acquisition?

4. What are children's attitudes towards digital versus conventional games for language learning, and how do these attitudes vary according to gender?

2. RESEARCH METHODS

2.1. Participants

The participants in the survey were children aged 10–13 learning English as a foreign language in grades 5–7. In total 175 respondents, 104 (60%) girls and 71 (40%) boys filled in the questionnaire. According to the respondents' answers, 109 (62%) of them attended village schools while 66 (38%) went to urban schools. In terms of type of school, the responses show that the majority of children, 99 (57%), studied at grammar schools, while 76 (43%) went to lyceums. Only 11 (6%) of the respondents started to learn English when they were aged 1–3, 72 children (41%) started at age of 4–6 while most of them, 92 (53%) children started foreign language learning aged 7–8.

2.2. Instrument

To collect quantitative data and address the research questions, a self-administered questionnaire was designed. Given the specific circumstances in the country, we determined that a standardized questionnaire might not effectively address our research objectives. Consequently, we developed a custom questionnaire grounded in the relevant literature. The language of the questionnaire was Hungarian, the mother tongue of the children, to ensure clarity and ease of understanding.

The instrument comprised 23 items, incorporating both closed-ended and open-ended questions. Additionally, it included a three-point Likert scale, providing a simple yes or no option to facilitate comprehension for the young respondents. The questionnaire was divided into two main sections.

The first section focused on the learners' demographic information, such as age, gender, school grade, and type of school attended. The second section explored the use of both conventional and digital games. It investigated various aspects, such as the social context of gameplay (e.g., who the children played with), the languages used during gameplay, the specific games played during English lessons, and the children's favourite games. Furthermore, this section examined the learners' preferences between conventional and digital games, their reasons for enjoying conventional games, and their motivations for engaging with digital games.

By employing this comprehensive and contextually tailored questionnaire, we aimed to gather insights into the children's gaming habits and preferences, as well as the potential pedagogical implications for language learning in the unique environment of Transcarpathia.

To ensure content validity, a pilot test was conducted: the instrument, i.e., the questionnaire, was reviewed by four experienced researchers and fellow teachers. Based on their suggestions, several modifications were made to enhance the questionnaire's clarity and comprehensibility for children.

To determine which elements of games children prefer for language learning, a multi-item Likert scale was designed. To verify the internal consistency reliability of the scale, the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was calculated. The results confirmed that the 18-item scale exhibited a high level of internal consistency, with a Cronbach's Alpha value of .803.

The questionnaires were completed online with the help of a professional survey platform in January and February, 2023. A total of 175 responses were received, giving a response rate of 43%. This is an exceptionally good result in the current situation in Ukraine, amidst long and frequent power cuts, which shows that children of this age group can be quickly reached in this way. The questionnaire was available and fillable on any digital device, as it was digitally optimized. Completion of the questionnaires was entirely anonymous and voluntary, with completion taking 15–20 minutes on average.

To process the data, SPSS v22 statistical program and Microsoft Excel were used.

3. THE RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To investigate whether children prefer digital or conventional games for foreign language learning, it is essential to first understand their current gaming habits, particularly in the challenging context of Ukraine. This exploration provides a foundation for discerning their preferences and the potential implications for language learning.

We deemed it crucial to ascertain the amount of time children devoted to computer and phone games each day under the current circumstances in Ukraine. As illustrated in Figure 1, the majority of children spent a considerable amount of time engaging with digital games. More than half of the respondents reported playing for 1-2 hours daily, while one third of the children were engaged with playing for over 3-4 hours. Notably, 7% of children spent more than 6 hours a day in front of a screen, which is particularly thought-provoking.

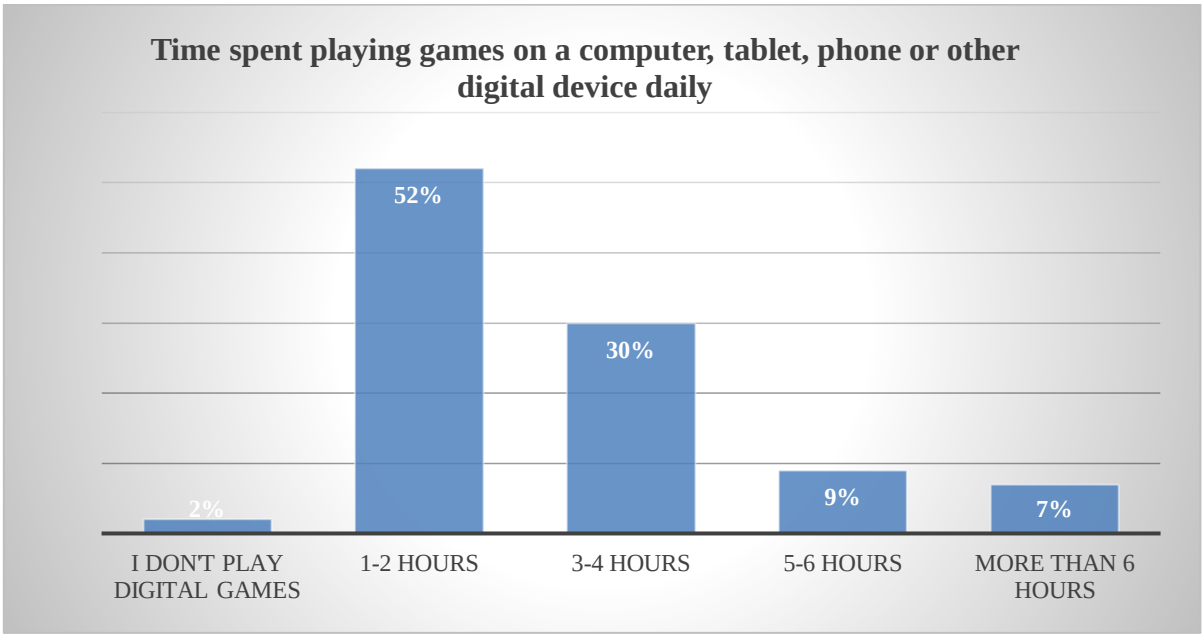

Figure 1. Playing games on digital devices

To address the research question "Do children prefer digital or conventional games for foreign language learning?" it is essential to examine the contextual factors and the social dynamics associated with game playing among children.

Digital games can enhance social skills through various prosocial games that encourage cooperation and communication with other players via text or voice chat. Recognizing the significance of these social aspects, we investigated children's preferences regarding their gaming partners. Our findings indicate that children predominantly enjoy playing with friends (39%), while slightly fewer prefer solitary play (29%). Additionally, 19% of respondents consider their siblings to be their best gaming partners, and 6% engage with other, potentially unknown online players. Notably, only 1% of children play online games with their parents and another 1% with other family members, such as cousins, uncles, or aunts. A small percentage (2 – 5%) of learners do not engage in digital games at all, which can be attributed to parental restrictions, limited access to technology especially in economically disadvantaged households, or personal preferences. The detailed results are presented in Figure 2.

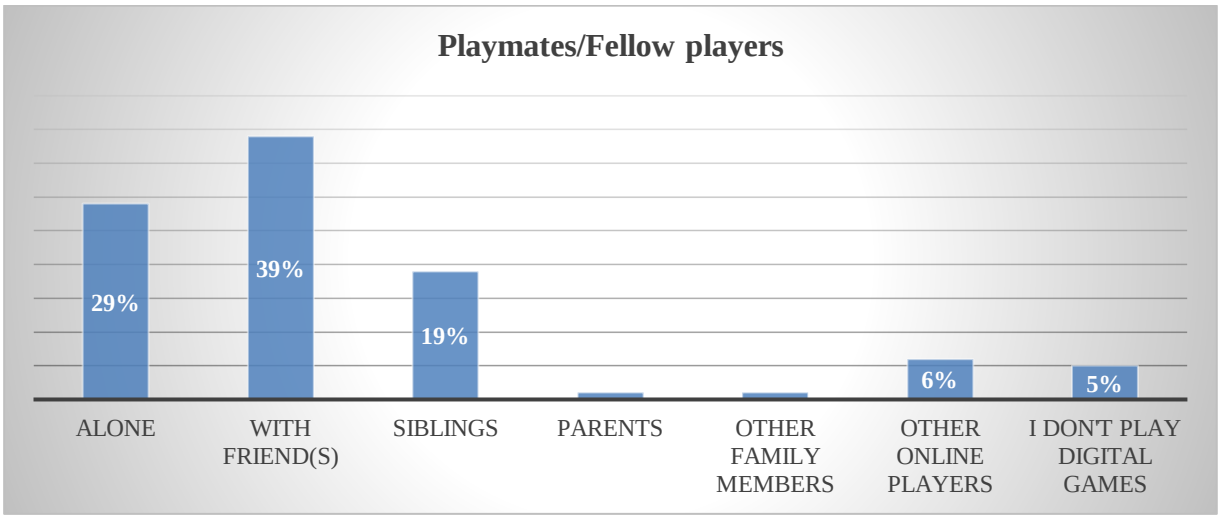

Figure 2. Playing alone or with others

The data further reveal that English is the predominant language used by children when engaging with digital games, with 127 respondents indicating its use. This preference for English over Hungarian, the native language of the majority of the respondents, underscores the significant exposure and attraction to English-language games, which are more abundantly available and popularized through the Internet and advertisements. Additionally, 99 learners reported using Hungarian, 23 preferred Ukrainian, 8 used Russian, 6 utilized German, and 5 indicated that they did not engage with digital games at all. This distribution highlights the diverse linguistic environment facilitated by digital gaming, with a notable emphasis on English language acquisition among young learners.

The inquiry shifted focus to the integration of digital games within educational settings, specifically exploring their utility in facilitating foreign language acquisition, particularly English. Participants were queried regarding their engagement with digital games during English classes at school and their usage of such games at home for language learning purposes. Findings revealed that a substantial majority, comprising 83% of respondents, reported abstaining from digital game usage during English lessons. On the other hand, a small percentage of the group—17%—admitted using video games as a component of their language-learning regimen.

Another purpose of the investigation was to identify the digital games most frequently utilized by children during English lessons at school. A notable 74% of respondents indicated a complete absence of such activities. Conversely, a small number of respondents (26%)

reported engagement with specific games, with 17% (N=29) favouring WordWall, followed by 7% (N=12) selecting Duolingo. Additionally, three children mentioned using Hello-Talk and Xeropan, while two preferred Kahoot, and one favoured Rosetta Stone. Approximately 5% of participants cited other games without specifying them.

The subsequent section of the questionnaire solicited participants' preferences for digital games, with Table 2 presenting a summary of these preferences ranked by frequency.

Table 2

Digital Games Played by Children

Digital games	Frequency of occurrence
Roblox	46
Minecraft	29
Duolingo	15
None	14
Fortnite	13
Pubg	12
WordWall	12
Toca Boca	5
Standoff	5
Rocket League	4
Wordsearch	4
Fifa21	3
Need for Speed	3
Farming Simulator	3
Terraria	3
Race Master	3
Decor life, Fall Guys, GTA5, FreeFire, Genshin Impact, Subway Surf	2
Among us, Call of Duty, Car parking, Crafting and Building, Craftman, Gardenspace, Hangman, HelloTalk, Hill, Home Desing, Hungry shark evolution, Kahoot, PixelPlanet, Plants and Zombies, Quiz Planet, Quizzland, Shadow Fight, Stardew Valley, Text or Die, Tomb of the Mask, World of Mystery, Xeropan	1

Roblox was the most frequently mentioned game among children (i.e. 46 learners liked this platform the most). This was followed by Minecraft with 29 mentions. It must be highlighted that while Minecraft is excellent for solo play, Roblox has a wider range of mini-games and multiplayer options. Roblox is more of a complete gaming engine than just a single standalone game. Therefore, they are not fully comparable. Duolingo was mentioned 15 times, while 14 children indicated that they did not have favourite digital games. Fortnite was mentioned by 13 children, while 12 learners were fans of Pubd, and another 12 liked WordWall.

Our study aimed to provide insights into the current educational practices in Ukraine. Specifically, we investigated the frequency of digital and conventional game usage during English lessons in Hungarian schools. Contrary to global trends, our findings, depicted in Figure 3, reveal a divergence shaped by the ongoing conflict and associated circumstances. In this context, teachers prioritize conventional games, citing their stress-alleviating effects, mood-enhancing qualities, and facilitative role in language acquisition through playful engagement, amid daily challenges. According to our survey results, a majority of young

learners refrained from engaging with digital games during school hours. Specifically, 63% of respondents indicated no participation, while 25% reported infrequent involvement, and 10% acknowledged weekly participation in such activities.

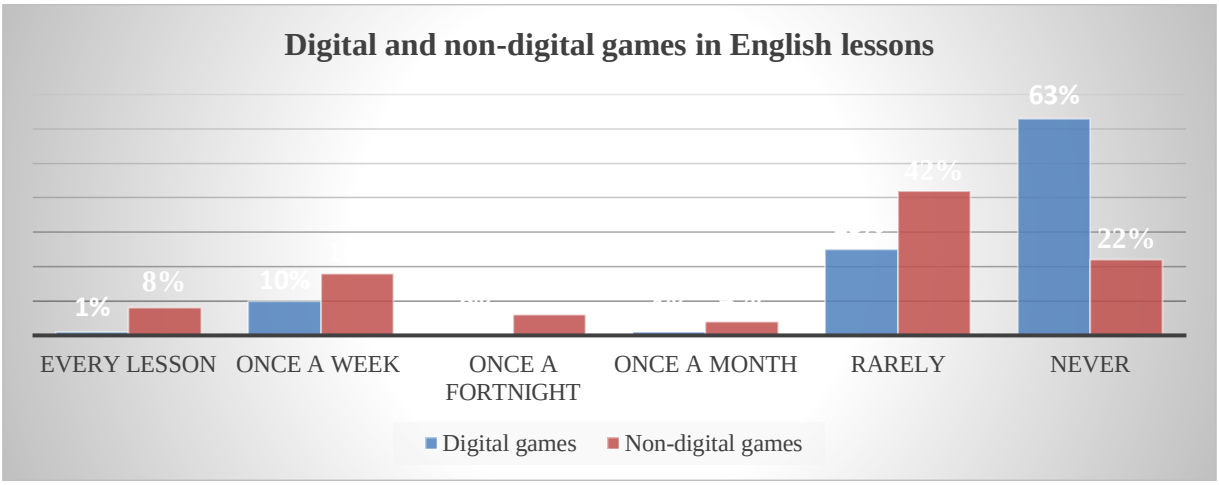

Figure 3. Frequency of playing games in the English classroom

There could be several reasons for not using digital games during the English lessons. First of all, digital games can be highly engaging, and learners might get distracted from the main learning objectives. Focusing on the game rather than the lesson content can hinder the effectiveness of teaching. In addition, another significant reason can be the limited access to digital devices or the Internet. Relying heavily on digital games could create a disparity in learning opportunities between learners. Furthermore, if the primary goal of the English lesson is to develop specific language skills, digital games might not align well with this objective. Another problem can be that digital games often have predefined content and may not provide the flexibility for teachers to customize the learning experience to match the specific needs of their learners. Not all of the games are designed with educational objectives; therefore, some games might not provide meaningful language learning experience. Nor should we neglect the fact that teachers and parents might be concerned about the amount of screen time children are exposed to. Relying heavily on digital games could lead to too much time spent in front of a screen. Another important factor that needs to be considered is time-management. Incorporating digital games into lessons requires careful planning and long preparation which might be challenging for teachers. It is also possible, that some teachers might adhere to more traditional pedagogical approaches that prioritize direct instruction, practice, and assessment methods. It is important to emphasise that, in addition to the reasons just described, the war in Ukraine is also having an impact on educational activity. When there is war in a country the safety and well-being of children and teachers is a primary concern. Resources, including electricity and internet access are often limited or disrupted, making it challenging to implement digital games during the lessons. Moreover, during times of war, there is a heightened emphasis on building and maintaining real connections. Traditional teaching methods that support interpersonal relationships, communication, and emotional support might be preferred over digital interactions.

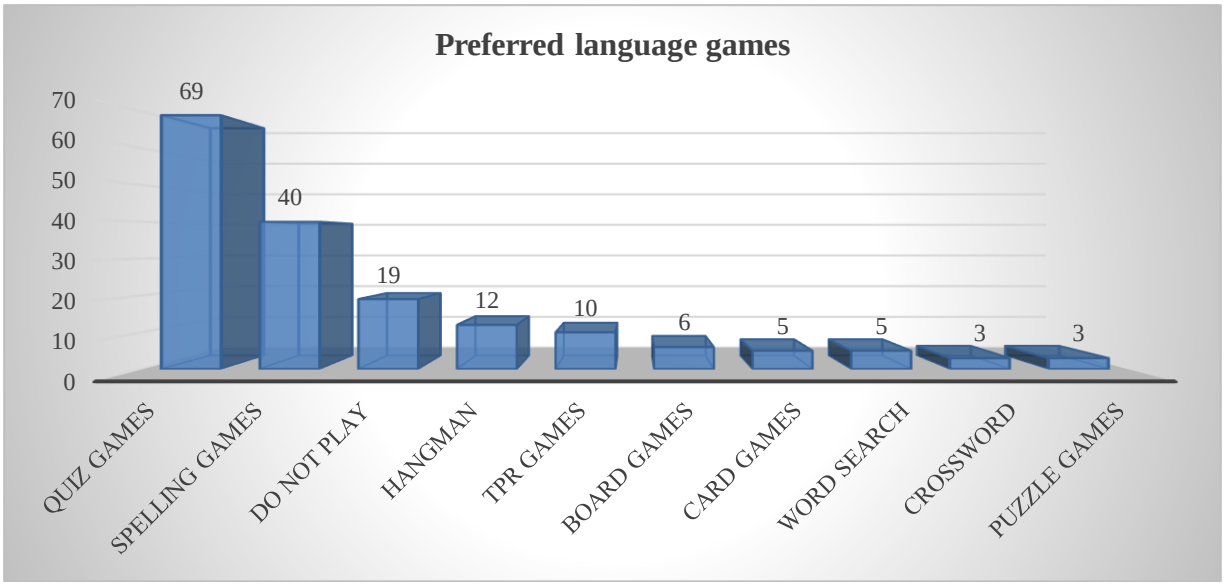

Figure 4. Conventional game preferences of learners

Our study also aimed to ascertain children's preferences for conventional games. According to participant responses, quiz games emerged as the most favoured category, with 69 children indicating a preference for them. Following quiz games, spelling games were mentioned by 40 learners, while 19 children reported abstaining from conventional game play altogether. Other popular choices included Hangman, Total Physical Response (TPR) activities, board games, card games, word searches, crosswords, and puzzle games. The variability in children's game preferences may be influenced by factors such as individual interests, cognitive development stages, and social interactions.

Quiz games likely garner popularity due to their characteristic inclusion of diverse questions spanning various topics, which necessitates the application of general knowledge and critical thinking skills. This intellectual stimulation contrasts with traditional spelling games, potentially explaining their appeal. Moreover, quiz games often facilitate group play or interaction with others, fostering a social dynamic that includes elements of competition, cooperation, and the enjoyment derived from sharing knowledge and answers with peers.

Our objective also included finding out if children play digital language learning games at home in their free time. A majority of children (73%; N=127) said that they did play language learning games, while 27% (48) did not play such games at all.

Another important issue is the preference between digital and non-digital games. A larger proportion of children, 58% (N=101), preferred digital games, while 42% (N=74) of pupils preferred conventional games. This preference can be influenced by many different things. First of all, digital games can provide interactive and dynamic experiences that can be engaging for children. They usually provide immediate feedback and rewards, which can be also enjoyable for children. Another factor is the age in which we live; it is usually referred to as digital age, where technology is an integral part of our daily life. Digital games are naturally appealing to children. Besides many other possible factors, peer pressure can also play an important role. If digital games are popular among a child's peers, they might be more motivated to play in order to fit in or share common interests.

In order to investigate the differences in the preference of digital and conventional games between boys (N=71) and girls (N=104), an item-by-item, independent-samples t-test was conducted. According to the results, there is no significant difference between the two groups regarding playing digital and conventional games.

In addition, we intended to find out the attitude of the learners towards digital games. When asked why it was good to play digital games, most children (35%) answered that they gave pleasure. The second most voted answer (33%) is valuable for EFL teachers because it shows that children are aware of the importance of communication with native English-speaking players. Getting awards makes playing games attractive for 23% of the respondents, while 19% see them as an opportunity to practice English during the school holiday. Figure 5 summarizes the results.

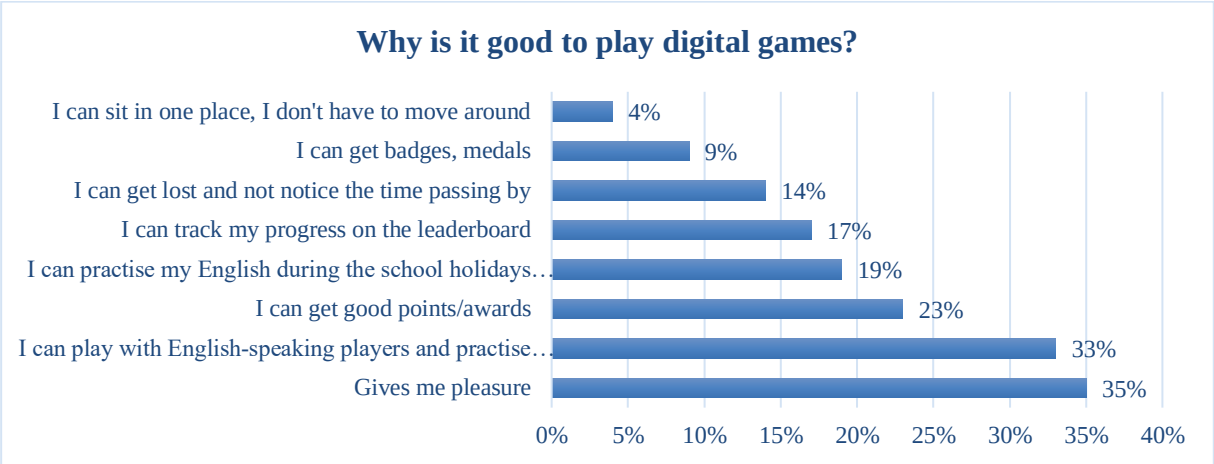

Figure 5. Reasons for playing digital games

Learners were also asked about the positive sides of conventional games. In their view, the best thing is that they do not strain their eyes and they are thought-provoking.

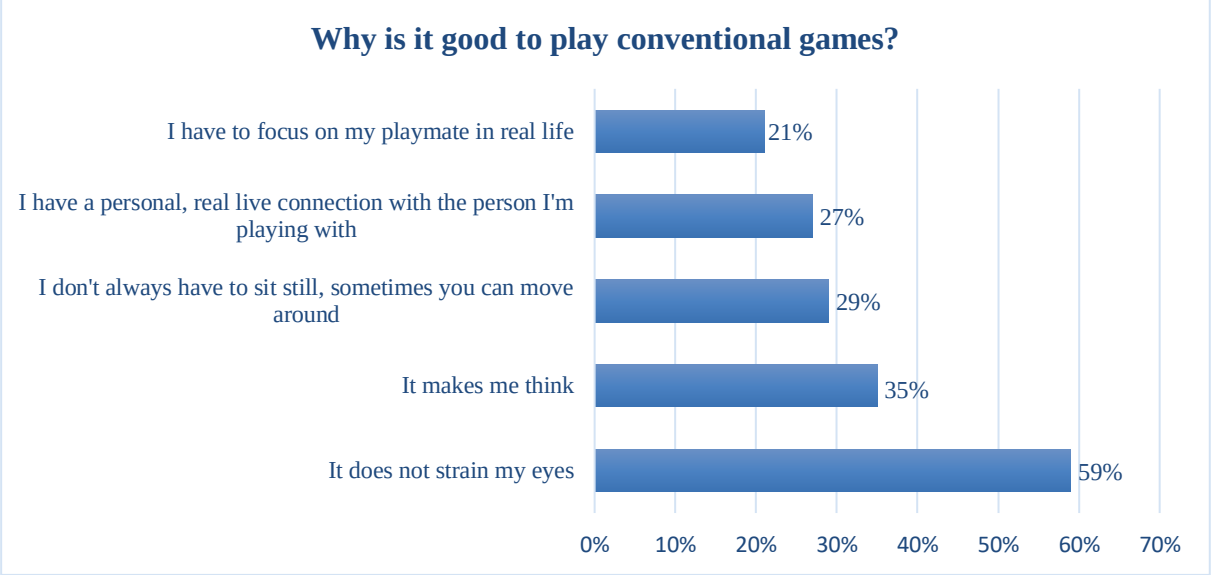

Figure 6. Benefits of playing conventional games as perceived by learners

The final question of the survey aimed to understand the types of games that learners prefer. We used a scale consisting of 18 items that explored various features children appreciated in games. These items were analysed using a statistical technique called Principal Components Analysis (PCA) in SPSS v22.

Before conducting PCA, we assessed whether our data was suitable for factor analysis. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure was found to be 0.70, which exceeds the recommended threshold of 0.6 [22], [23]. Additionally, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity [24] yielded a statistically significant result, indicating that our data had enough common variance to proceed with PCA.

PCA revealed seven components with eigenvalues greater than 1, explaining 21.8%, 9.9%, 8.2%, 7.0%, 6.2%, 6.2%, and 5.6% of the variance respectively. Upon examining the scree plot, we observed a clear break after the fourth component. Following Catell's [25] scree test, we decided to retain these four components for further analysis.

In total, these four components accounted for 47.1% of the variance. Component 1 contributed 21.8%, Component 2 contributed 9.9%, Component 3 contributed 8.2%, and Component 4 contributed 7% to the overall variance. To aid interpretation, Promax rotation was conducted on these components.

The factor analysis revealed four distinct dimensions related to different aspects of games that children prefer. The first dimension relates to the content of the games, the second dimension focuses on self-development aspects, the third dimension is associated with the mode of gameplay, and the fourth dimension revolves around the specific attributes of games.

The results show a very positive image of children that they mostly like games in which they can learn something new. It points to the children's natural interest and desire to learn, which must be handled with great care by teachers. Playing in groups, i.e. social interaction is also important for them. Making decisions and thinking are also crucial factors mentioned by learners. But if we look at the question from a different perspective, children like repetitive games the least. They do not prefer games played with avatars and do not actually like playing alone (*cf*. Figure 7).

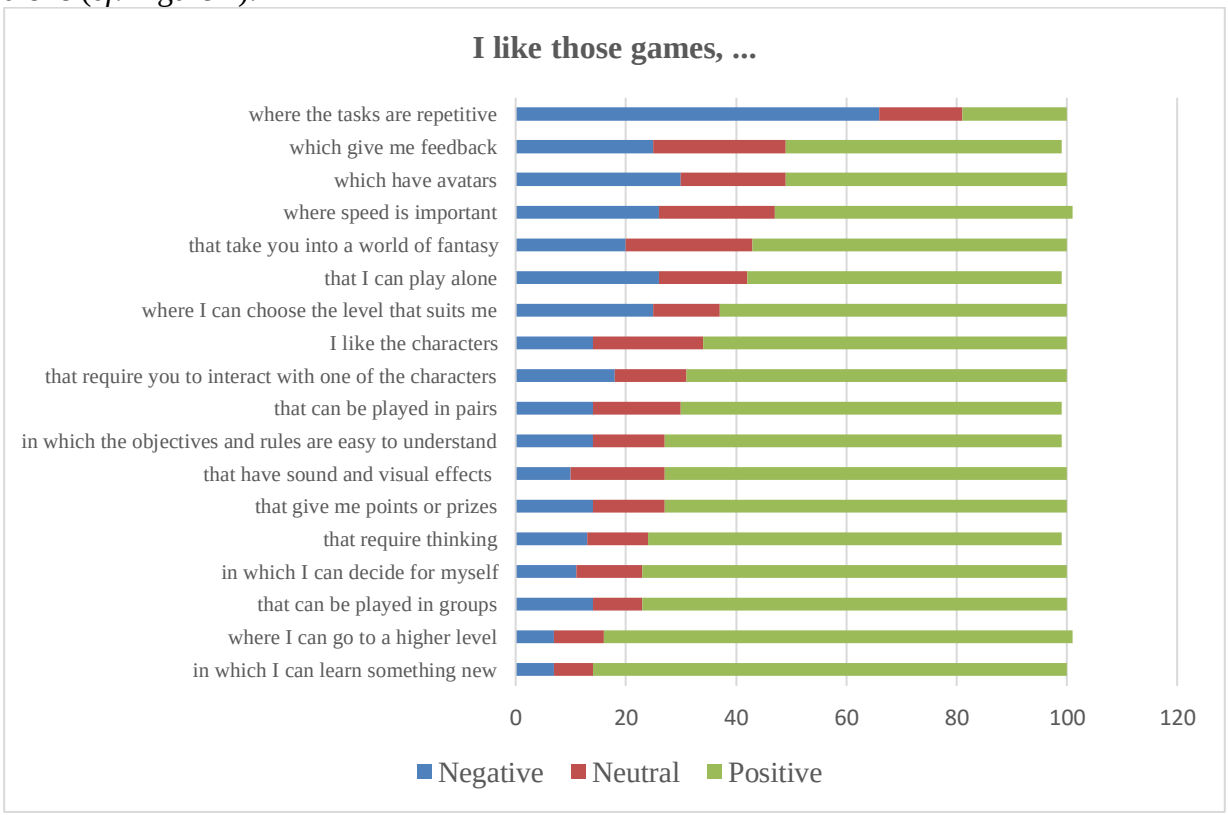

Figure 7. Characteristics of preferred games

To summarize the research results, the answers to the research questions can be articulated as follows.

1. How do children's gaming habits, including daily duration and preferred gaming partners, relate to their engagement with digital games for language learning?

Children in Ukraine spend a considerable amount of time on digital games, with over half playing for 1-2 hours daily and a significant portion playing for 3-4 hours or more. Most children prefer playing with friends (39%), while a notable number play alone (29%) or with siblings (19%). This high engagement and social dynamics suggest that digital games can be a potent tool for language learning, especially when they facilitate social interaction and cooperative play.

2. What are the most popular digital games used by children for language learning, and how do these choices reflect educational objectives and student preferences?

The most popular digital games among children for language learning are WordWall and Duolingo, with others like Hello-Talk, Xeropan, Kahoot, and Rosetta Stone being less frequently used. Roblox and Minecraft are also highly favoured, indicating a preference for games that offer both educational content and engaging gameplay. These choices reflect a blend of educational objectives and the children's preference for interactive, rewarding, and socially engaging experiences.

3. What role does language preference (e.g., English, Hungarian, or Ukrainian) in digital games play in children's language acquisition?

English is the predominant language used by children in digital games, with 127 respondents indicating its use, followed by Hungarian and Ukrainian. This preference for English underscores its dominance in digital gaming and its role in language acquisition, providing significant exposure and practice opportunities for learners. The use of multiple languages in games also highlights the diverse linguistic environment and the potential for multilingual language acquisition.

4. What are children's attitudes towards digital versus conventional games for language learning, and how do these attitudes vary according to gender?

A majority of children (58%) prefer digital games over conventional ones (42%) for language learning. Digital games are favoured for their interactive and engaging nature, immediate feedback, and alignment with the digital age. Boys and girls show no significant difference in their preference for digital versus conventional games. Children appreciate digital games for the pleasure they provide, the opportunity to communicate with native speakers, and the rewards they offer. Conventional games are valued for being less straining on the eyes and for their thought-provoking nature.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND PROSPECTS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Based on the research findings our hypotheses can be explained as follows.

Hypothesis 1: Children enjoy conventional games more than digital games because of the live interaction they involve.

The research indicates that while children spend a significant amount of time engaged with digital games (with over half playing 1-2 hours daily and one-third spending 3-4 hours), there is still a substantial appreciation for conventional games. The preference for gaming partners shows that children predominantly enjoy playing with friends (39%) and siblings (19%), which highlights the importance of live interaction. However, 58% of children prefer digital games overall, suggesting that while live interaction is valued, digital games' interactive and dynamic experiences hold a stronger appeal for most children. The positive aspects of conventional games, such as being thought-provoking and not straining the eyes, are acknowledged, yet the immediate feedback and rewards from digital games are more

compelling to many. Thus, the hypothesis is partially supported, indicating a nuanced preference that favours digital games despite the recognized benefits of live interaction in conventional games.

Hypothesis 2: In the new Ukrainian reality (in the time of frequent air raid alarms and/or power outages through December 2022 and January 2023), it is more convenient to use conventional games than digital ones in EFL classrooms.

The study's findings show that the majority of young learners (63%) refrain from engaging with digital games during school hours, with teachers prioritizing conventional games. The ongoing conflict and associated challenges, such as limited access to digital devices and the Internet, make conventional games more practical. Conventional games are preferred for their stress-alleviating effects, mood-enhancing qualities, and their role in language acquisition through playful engagement, which is particularly crucial in a stressful environment. The frequent air raid alarms and power outages further complicate the use of digital games, making conventional games a more reliable and accessible option in the EFL classrooms. Therefore, this hypothesis is strongly supported by the research findings, as conventional games prove to be more convenient under the current challenging circumstances in Ukraine.

The findings of the research have supported the view that playing games, no matter whether conventional or digital, can increase young language learners' motivation to learn English. It has emerged from the study that while the majority of the YLs prefer digital games to the conventional ones, EFL teachers give priority to conventional games at the lessons. In spite of their drawbacks, in today's modern world, digital games play an increasingly important role in children's language learning, and teachers need to be more and more informed in this area to support their learners. The use of digital games in English language instruction could be a useful strategy for enhancing the efficiency of traditional English lessons while bringing life to them. Based on the results of our research, we believe that in the current war-torn situation in Ukraine, teachers prioritise conventional games over digital ones because they can help children to interact with their peers in a lively way, forgetting the stress of everyday life.

The study has also shown that English language teachers now need to put additional emphasis on introducing children to useful, age-appropriate digital games and apps that can develop language skills besides formal education. One of the findings to emerge from this study is that YLs prefer games that teach them something new, make them think or provide an opportunity to go to a higher level. Games requiring decision taking also proved to evoke positive feelings similarly to those that give prizes or have sound and visual effects. The least popular are the games with repetitive tasks.

Playing digital games, especially those that are social and collaborative, can lead to more prosocial behaviours. Another issue emerging from the study is that YLs give preference to games that can be played in groups or in pairs rather than alone. Communication with the native speakers of the target language and an opportunity to practise it during the holiday have been mentioned as benefits of the games. English is favoured by more respondents than the native (Hungarian) or the state (Ukrainian) language.

Nevertheless, the main reasons conventional games are valued for by the respondents are connected with no strain on eyes, live contact with the peers and physical movement. In spite of all the benefits and positive effects of the digital games on the language learners, attention should be paid to time spent in front of the screen as the physical and mental health of the children are the most important things in life. Almost half of the respondents play more than three hours a day, but some children spend more than six hours playing digital games.

We do not assume that all YLs are well-equipped to profit from digital games, thus in the next phase of our research, we intend to investigate how YL game engagement influences their foreign language learning in general and their language skills in particular. We understand and accept that game engagement does not necessarily guarantee learning; therefore, further

research is needed to establish the kind of relationship between these two issues, this way better understanding the connection between them.

The limitation of the study is that the children have not been asked about the effect of games on language skills because they are not yet cognitively developed enough at 10-12 years old to be able to judge. Neither did we have an opportunity to ask their parents about the way they see their children's playing habits and game engagement. Our intention is to further investigate these issues in the next phase of our research.

It is believed that this research has contributed to the ever-growing number of research on game-based learning conducted among young learners.

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ЦИФРОВІ ТА НЕЦИФРОВІ ІГРИ НА УРОКАХ АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ ЯК ІНОЗЕМНОЇ ДЛЯ УЧНІВ МОЛОДШОГО Й СЕРЕДНЬОГО ШКІЛЬНОГО ВІКУ ПІД ЧАС ВІЙНИ В УКРАЇНІ

Ілона Густі
доктор філософії, доцент кафедри філології
Закарпатський угорський інститут ім. Ференца Ракоці ІІ, м. Берегове, Україна
ORCID ID 0000-0002-1900-8112
huszti.ilona@kmf.org.ua

Еніке Надь-Коложварі
магістр філології, старший викладач кафедри філології
Закарпатський угорський інститут ім. Ференца Ракоці ІІ, м. Берегове, Україна
ORCID ID 0000-0003-1844-8674
nagy-kolozsvari.eniko@kmf.org.ua

Марта Фабіян
магістр філології, доцент кафедри філології
Закарпатський угорський інститут ім. Ференца Ракоці ІІ, м. Берегове, Україна
ORCID ID 0000-0002-5549-1156
fabian.marta@kmf.org.ua

Анотація. Мета дослідження – вивчити ігрові звички учнів молодшого й середнього шкільного віку в процесі вивчення англійської мови як іноземної та вивчити роль нецифрових або звичайних і цифрових ігор у навчанні англійської мови цієї вікової категорії учнів. Розглянуто особливості як звичайних ігор, які використовують у класі, так і цифрових, у які грають поза офіційним навчанням. Опитано учнів про їхнє вподобання щодо ігор наодинці (ігри на самоті) та ігор з однолітками (спільна гра) на уроках англійської мови чи за його межами, тобто бажані контексти для гри (клас проти дому). Опитування проведено в Україні в особливо складний період, а саме: у лютому та березні 2023 року, який відзначився наслідками COVID-19 та подальшим оголошенням воєнного стану в державі. Онлайн-анкету розроблено для збору даних від учасників віком 10-13 років. Анкету заповнено 175 респондентами. Отримано важливі результати, які лягли в основу аналізу дослідження. З'ясовано, що в охопленій війною Україні перевагу найчастіше надано звичайним іграм, які проводять у структурованому середовищі на уроках англійської мови. Ці ігри учні сприймали як засіб, за допомогою якого їм полегшено тягар повсякденного стресу, водночас сприяє живій та привабливій взаємодії з однолітками англійською мовою. Зазначено, що цифровим іграм надано перевагу для домашньої гри насамперед через їхню невід'ємну розважальну цінність, яка, по суті, приносила задоволення і насолоду. Одним із найважливіших наслідків цього дослідження є нагальна потреба активного інтегрування вчителями цифрових ігор і додатків, які відповідають віковій категорії учнів та мають освітній вплив, у свої чинні навчальні програми з англійської мови як іноземної. Стратегічно використовуючи ці цифрові інструменти, учителі можуть ефективно доповнювати формальне навчання іноземних мов, сприяючи багатогранному та цікавому досвіду навчання для учнів молодшого і середнього шкільного віку.

Ключові слова: цифрові ігри; нецифрові/звичайні ігри; екстремальні обставини; учні молодшого і середнього шкільного віку.

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