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English

Exploring the Impact of Video Games on English Language Skills

A Criteria-Based Material Analysis on How Gaming Can Be Incorporated into a Task-Based
Language Learning Approach to Second Language Learning

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Abstract

This essay explores the potential of video games as an extramural activity for enhancing English second language (L2) learning. With the increasing popularity of video games among students, this study investigates whether video games can be considered task-based language teaching (TBLT) materials and explores the synergies between gaming and classroom learning. By analyzing interactive elements in two video games, *Baldur's Gate 3* and *Fortnite*, the research identifies how these games facilitate language acquisition through engagement with complex narratives and social interaction. Key findings suggest that video games not only support the development of communicative competence but also offer valuable opportunities for teachers to integrate extramural gaming into their teaching practices, making learning more relevant and engaging for students. This study advocates for the thoughtful inclusion of video games in educational settings, highlighting their potential to bridge the gap between leisure and educational pursuits and enhance language proficiency in enjoyable, contextualized scenarios.

Keywords: Video games, Gaming, Language acquisition, Communicative competence, Communicative language teaching, Task-based language teaching, Baldur's Gate 3, Fortnite, Learner autonomy, Extramural English

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Introduction

When people think about how students acquire English as a second language (L2), I believe many would first think of activities in an L2 classroom. However, much of this progress happens outside of a school setting. In their spare time, students interact with the English language through various means such as browsing on the internet, chatting with friends in English, listening to music, and watching television, to name a few. One activity that has become increasingly popular with young people over the last two or three decades is playing video games. Video games tend to be designed with English as the primary language, and besides a few select languages, such as Chinese or Japanese, it is rare to see games being translated. When gamers play games online, English tends to be the most viable option for communicating with other gamers worldwide. As video games have become more common as an afterschool activity, and considering that they differ in their multimodality from other forms of media, I want to take a closer look at the relationship between video games and L2 learning in this study.

Pia Sundqvist (2011) uses *extramural English*, referring to any contact young learners may have with the English language when not at school. Extramural English is often an activity that L2 learners engage in without the intention to learn and just to have fun, although the learning can be both incidental and intentional, considering the term refers to all contact with the English language that is not school-related (p. 107). Extramural English builds on the concept of *learner autonomy* (Sundqvist, 2011, p. 107), which, according to Joseph Siegel (2022), is an approach to learning where the teacher and school materials take a backseat and instead, the learner themselves become the one directing their learning. This can be done by involving the learners in the forming and planning of classroom activities, allowing them to present and work with their ideas, as well as applying their language skills and interpreting English outside of the school setting. Central to this approach is first, that the learners are active and in control of their learning, and second, that L2 education prepares learners for the outside world (p. 159-161). Siegel (2022) points out that the approach recognizes that the end goal for L2 education is for learners to build the confidence to interact with and use the L2 in various non-institutionalized settings. By engaging with English outside the classroom, learners naturally take charge of their language acquisition (p. 161-164). The connection between extramural English and learner autonomy lies in the fact that when learners interact with the English language outside of school, choosing how to interact with it based on personal interests and needs, they exercise autonomy.

As extramural English is a broad term involving many different activities, it is hard to say what extramural English activity would be most effective for L2 learners. However, according to Sundqvist and Liss Kerstin Sylvén (2016), activities that require the learner to be active or productive while relying on their language skills generally seem to have a greater impact on the learners' proficiency than activities where the learner can remain passive or rely on receptive skills alone. One activity that is especially useful as it allows for various aspects of proficiency to be tested is video games (p. 187-188). According to Sundqvist and Sylvén (2016), video games as an activity can involve various L2 skills. Often, more than one skill is being used simultaneously; such skills include listening, speaking, reading, writing, and interaction (p. 187). Considering that such a broad spectrum of L2 skills can be practiced through video games, gaming seems to be a promising extramural activity for L2 learners. Therefore, I have chosen to focus my study on video games as an extramural English activity.

The Swedish National Agency for Education states in the upper-secondary school syllabus for English, under purpose, that education should “bidra till att eleverna utvecklar språklig medvetenhet och kunskaper om hur man lär sig språk i och utanför undervisningen”, which roughly translates into “contribute towards students developing language awareness and understanding how to learn language in and outside of the education” (Skolverket, 2022, p. 1)¹. Considering that The Swedish National Agency for Education emphasizes the importance of students learning about how they can learn language outside of their education, understanding how popular extramural activities, such as gaming, can improve students' L2 skills should be useful for teachers attempting to help their students reach this goal. The Swedish National Agency for Education also state within the same part of the syllabus that “Eleverna ska ges möjlighet att, genom språkanvändning i funktionella och meningsfulla sammanhang, utveckla en allsidig kommunikativ förmåga”, which roughly translates into “The students should be given the opportunity, through language use in functional and meaningful contexts, to develop an all-rounded communicative ability” (Skolverket, 2022, p. 1). As Sundqvist and Sylvén (2016) highlight that video games engage multiple language skills simultaneously, including listening, speaking, reading, writing, and interaction. This aligns with The Swedish National Agency for Education (2022) goal for students to develop all-rounded communicative abilities through language use in functional and meaningful

¹ All translations of quotations from the English subject syllabus are mine.

contexts. Video games challenge learners to make use of various language skills and provide a context which immerses the player in scenarios where they must understand and use English in real-time, often adapting to the dynamic, interactive nature of gaming environments.

This study examines how English can be acquired by playing video games and if these games develop communicative skills that can transfer to other contexts. The research questions the study seeks to answer are: is it possible to view video games as task-based language teaching (TBLT) material, and can there be synergies between gaming and classroom learning?

Background

As an examination of how playing video games supports the development of language acquisition and communicative competence will be made in this study, there is a need to define what is meant by these terms. Siegel (2022) describes ‘language acquisition’ as the process of meaning-making, in which a language learner develops their language skills similarly to how they would have learned their first language as a child. It happens when the learner is not paying conscious attention to language forms and structures, but rather when the learner is unconsciously acquiring certain aspects of an L2 when being naturally exposed to the language in uncontrolled, authentic settings and interactions (p. 28-29).

It can be difficult to define ‘games’ as a term. Jeff Kuhn (2018) explains that, although there is not one universally agreed upon definition for the term, there are four defining traits generally agreed upon by game designers and game researchers. These four traits that should be present for something to be called a game are the following: voluntary participation, rules, a feedback system, and a goal (p. 1-2). Kuhn (2018) explains that games, like books or movies, can be used in the classroom. Different forms of media are helpful learning tools as they allow students to explore and interact with new ideas and perspectives, while exploring a story or a context that they may otherwise not encounter. What makes games stand out from other forms of media that may encourage learning is that, as a player, the learner will have to make choices and actions, making them an active agent in the learning process (p. 6-7). This active participation that learners engage in while gaming makes it relevant to explore which competencies are trained when the learner acts as an active agent.

As for defining ‘communicative competence’, according to Lana Loumbourdi (2018),

‘communicative competence’ is a term that highlights how only putting words in their correct form and order is not enough to communicate in a language. Social and cultural contexts affect how language users communicate with each other. When communicating, language users may use different strategies such as paraphrasing, clarifying, explaining, and using gestures and mimicry to communicate effectively. Being able to both know and use a language while keeping sociocultural norms in consideration is what indicates that a language user has developed communicative competence (p. 1-3).

Besides the terms that need to be defined to understand this study fully, there is also a need to define the concepts of CLT and TBLT, as these approaches to teaching languages are central to the chosen method. According to Siegel (2022), Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is a broad language teaching method that addresses and supports present-day communicative needs and involves several different strategies and approaches. Within CLT, there is a focus on ensuring that all aspects of communicative competence are taught and practiced to prepare L2 learners to use their L2 in the real world. CLT recognizes grammatical competence but integrates it into a broader framework where actual language use and fluency gained through interaction are considered more important (Siegel, 2022, p. 53-54). This holistic approach to language learning contrasts with the focus on grammatical/linguistic competence, which has generally been seen as the most important aspect of language teaching in the past (Thornbury, 2018, p. 183-188). L2 learners must practice adapting their language with different people and settings in mind, as this skill is needed to use their L2 outside of the classroom successfully. The ability to navigate between the variations of a language used in different social contexts and relationships shows that a language user has developed sociolinguistic and pragmatic awareness. To practice these skills, there is a focus on authentic communication in CLT classrooms and practicing discourse features. Both discourse features that are used in informal contexts, such as catching up with a neighbor, and formal contexts, such as applying to a job, should be practiced so that the students can further develop their communicative competence and be ready for various situations in which they may need to use their L2. Strategic competence is also focused on within CLT classrooms as it is thought that this will help students process and produce messages and deal with communication breakdowns. Strategic competence within CLT could be explained as the learner's ability to adapt, use alternative methods, and maintain communication despite gaps in language knowledge (Siegel, 2022, p. 54-55).

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is one of many methods derived from CLT (Siegel, 2022). TBLT centers around the L2 learner and prioritizes creating authentic experiences with the L2 for them by making the learner engage in various tasks. The tasks should be designed to scaffold language learning among individuals and groups, and as a method, TBLT relies heavily on student interaction. In a TBLT classroom, students are typically challenged with a task, such as planning a vacation, and to complete the task, they have to use their L2 skills without initial direct language instruction from the teacher. Following the students' effort to complete the task, the teacher can provide targeted feedback to enhance language usage, introducing new vocabulary and language structures. Using the input from the teacher, the students can then attempt to complete the task again while aiming for improved fluency and accuracy. This lack of prescribed language at the start of a learning activity is a key principle of TBLT to encourage interaction, cooperation, and the successful transfer of meaning over strict accuracy. Another important key principle of TBLT is that there should always be a final "product" or task goal set before the start so that the learner knows what they are working towards when doing the task. When students work towards finishing a task and accomplishing a goal, relying heavily on their own personal experiences and proficiency in the target language, it is thought to give room for a broader array of language in practice compared to traditional grammar-focused learning. TBLT has been praised, for example, by Jack C. Richards and Theodore S. Rogers (2014), as a method because of its motivational qualities and flexibility, allowing teachers to tailor a curriculum to diverse needs. Activities within a TBLT classroom can be organized so that the students are first challenged with smaller, easier and more manageable tasks which lead up to larger, more involved and complicated tasks. This progression helps ensure that students can stay motivated as it limits the risk of students feeling overwhelmed early on and creates a sense of accomplishment as they gradually become able to finish increasingly difficult tasks (Siegel, 2022, p. 56-57). The tasks used within TBLT should be designed to mirror real-world interactions and aim for a tangible outcome that promotes meaningful communication. This way of working with L2 promotes language skills in context, with tasks designed to engage a variety of linguistic aspects, and ensures that tasks have a definitive endpoint and a shared result (Siegel, 2022, p. 57-58).

Moving on, let us bring our attention to the connections between L2 learning and gaming. James Paul Gee (2007) discusses how playing video games can support learning, including language learning, by leveraging natural human learning processes effectively utilized within

well-designed video games. According to him, humans must continuously practice what they are learning to master it eventually. He explains that the principle of practice is deeply integrated into the design of good video games. Unlike traditional educational environments where practice might often be disconnected from real-world applications, video games embed practice within engaging, meaningful activities that players are motivated to participate in. This approach helps ensure that the skills developed are relevant, retained, and refined over time. Video games make practice enjoyable by incorporating it into the gameplay, which is not explicitly recognized as practice by the player, thus avoiding the tedium typically associated with repetitive tasks. This type of masked practice is crucial for language learning, where repeated exposure and use of language constructs are necessary to achieve fluency (p. 65-67). Furthermore, video games maintain player engagement through what Gee (2007) calls the "regime of competence." This concept involves presenting challenges within the player's ability to overcome but still require considerable effort. Gee brings attention to the cyclic nature of skill acquisition in video games, where players routinely master a skill, are challenged to rethink it under new circumstances, and then master a new level of skill (p. 67-68).

Gee (2007) also brings up situated meaning and learning, elaborating on how the design and narrative structure of video games, like *Deus Ex*, provide a uniquely interactive and immersive learning environment that could be particularly effective for language learning. He distinguishes the narrative experience of video games from traditional media like books and movies by emphasizing the active role of the player in shaping the story. Unlike passive viewers or readers, video game players interact with the game environment and make choices that influence the outcome and progression of the story. This level of interaction and decision-making embeds players deeply within the narrative and the language of the game, providing a rich context for language exposure and usage (p. 78-81). Gee (2007) explains how in video games like *Deus Ex*, players encounter language naturally as they navigate the game world, read documents, listen to conversations, and make choices based on the information they gather. This method of encountering language mimics real-world language use much more closely than structured language lessons. Players must understand and use language effectively to advance in the game, encouraging the practical application of language skills in various contexts. Moreover, video games require players to engage with language actively and continuously, which can improve retention and understanding. The repetitive nature of gameplay, where players may need to revisit certain scenarios or

conversations, helps to reinforce language structures and vocabulary in a way that is engaging and contextually grounded (p. 78-87). Gee (2007) also emphasizes that video games provide a personalized learning experience. Each player may encounter different aspects of the game's language based on their unique choices and play style, which can cater to personal learning needs and preferences (p. 80-82).

Another interesting aspect that Gee (2007) discusses is the social and collaborative aspects of video gaming and how these elements can significantly enhance language learning. Gee references Jean Lave's (1988; 1996) theory of socially situated cognition, which is the idea that learning effectively occurs through active participation in communal practices rather than traditional, isolated academic exercises (Gee, 2007, p. 203). This theory is particularly relevant to video gaming, where learning (including language learning) is embedded in social interaction and collaboration among gamers. Lave's idea that learning involves transforming identity as individuals adopt new roles and skills through participation in community practices, is mirrored in the multiplayer video gaming experience. Playing video games online requires gamers to interact, negotiate, and collaborate in languages other than their native tongue, fostering L2 acquisition through practical use and social interaction. Video games that involve a social aspect can function as dynamic "communities of practice" in which players continually have the chance to learn from each other. These communities are not just about playing together but also involve shared problem-solving, strategizing, and communicating in the game's language, which can be crucial for L2 learning. When gamers work together, sharing knowledge and strategies, they use the target language to communicate and collaborate, thereby practicing and improving their language skills (Gee, 2007, p. 203-208).

Previous research

Several studies have investigated the connection between playing video games and L2 learning. One such study was conducted by Alice Chik (2012), who at the time was active as an assistant professor in the Department of English at City University of Hong Kong. Chik interviewed and investigated 34 English teachers and 10 Chinese undergraduates learning English as a foreign language, providing insight into their different perspectives on digital games as a means of L2 learning. Chik's study showed that teachers who do not engage in video games tend to view digital games narrowly, considering only the in-game texts as sources of linguistic input and viewing gameplay as an isolated activity unrelated to broader

language learning goals. On the other hand, the study showed that gamers could identify three aspects of gaming that they believed had contributed to developing their L2 skills. The first aspect is in-game texts, just like the teachers had expressed, which serve as the prime language input while gaming. It is expressed that what makes in-game texts differ from, for example, a text from a book is their multimodal nature combining visual, textual, and auditory elements. The second aspect is online gaming platforms, which allow gamers to engage with peers worldwide, providing authentic opportunities for practicing and learning English. The third aspect that was identified by gamers is discussion forums, which represent an extension of the gaming experience into broader language learning, where gamers exchange gameplay strategies and language tips. Furthermore, the study showed that gamers' engagement with language learning extends into their personal and social lives, as their interests in certain game genres lead them to explore related non-game materials such as books or articles. For instance, a gamer interested in historical games might be inspired to read history books, thereby gaining additional language exposure (Chik, 2012, p. 108-112).

A study conducted by Hayo Reinders and Sorada Wattana (2012) provides insight into how gaming can support communicative competence but also highlights possible challenges that language learners may face when playing video games. At the time when the study was conducted, Reinders was active as Head of Learner Development at Middlesex University and Wattana was active as a lecturer at Dhurakij Pundit University in Bangkok. The participants in the study were ten male and six female fourth-year undergraduate IT students from a university in Bangkok. The study shows that video games can become a 'psychologically secure environment' where learners feel less embarrassed or anxious about making mistakes. According to the authors, this security and the gamers' motivation to clear a game lead to games becoming environments that can enhance learners' willingness to communicate in English. The study also highlights that gaming often requires quick responses, which can help develop fluency. Players also noted vocabulary development as a benefit of gaming. The study points out a noticeable difference in challenge when comparing voice- and text-based chats in games. Voice chat is more challenging and mirrors real-time, face-to-face communication, possibly making it more difficult for L2 learners due to its immediacy. Text chat allows more time to process language, which can be beneficial for reading and constructing responses, leading to more communication and complex discourse. The study also highlights how active participation in games requires considerable cognitive effort, which may cause learners to focus more on meaning than grammatical accuracy.

According to the authors, this cognitive load might explain why language production in games does not always lead to improvements in linguistic complexity or accuracy. The study showed a variation in how much individual learners benefit from gaming. Some participants felt their communication skills improved, while others, especially those who did not actively initiate conversations, saw less improvement. The study suggests that commercial games can be adapted for L2 learning; however, it is important to be aware of what kind of gameplay would be most beneficial for learners (Reinders & Wattana, 2012, p. 182-185).

In the book *Digital Games in Language Learning and Teaching*, linguists Sundqvist and Sylvén (2012) present a discussion about patterns regarding gaming and L2 learners based on three empirical studies. All studies were conducted in Sweden, the first study being conducted by Sylvén in 2004, the second study being conducted by Sundqvist in 2009 and the third study being conducted by both authors in 2010. Their discussion provides insight into how video games can support second language (L2) learning by emphasizing the role of extracurricular activities in enhancing vocabulary acquisition. Their studies reveal a difference between the games that boys and girls choose to play, which can lead to differences between these genders in the benefits one can get from gaming. Boys often engage in complex, multiplayer games that fall under the *massively multiplayer online role-playing game* (MMORPG) genre, which require extensive use of language and cognitive skills and might provide richer language learning experiences. In contrast, girls typically play simpler, often single-player games, which may not offer the same level of language engagement. This suggests that the type of game played can influence the effectiveness of learning English as a second language, with more complex games potentially offering greater benefits. A pedagogical implication of the results presented from their studies is that the authors advocate for acknowledging and incorporating students' extracurricular language activities into the classroom. This approach could help bridge the gap between varying levels of English exposure among students and create a more inclusive and effective learning environment. It is suggested that by integrating interests such as gaming into the learning process, teachers could enhance motivation and learner autonomy, potentially transforming language learning into a more engaging and relevant practice. Within the discussion, the authors acknowledge that studies on L2 learning and gaming can be problematic due to the self-reported nature of many research methods, such as language diaries. However, the authors support their findings by correlating questionnaire data with these diaries, reinforcing the credibility of gaming as a beneficial tool for language acquisition. In conclusion,

Sundqvist and Sylvén presents a compelling argument that video games are not only viable tools for enhancing L2 vocabulary and language skills, but also that video games could be leveraged to improve educational outcomes in language learning (Sundqvist and Sylvén, 2012, p. 200-204).

Sundqvist and Sylven (2016) state that “it is our experience that teachers who are knowledgeable about gaming are well prepared for groups of learners that can otherwise be rather challenging to teach” (p. 130). They also bring attention to the investigation made by Chik (2012), explaining that it shows that teachers who do not know much about video gaming tend not to see a connection between L2 learning and playing video games. On the other hand, gamers could see various connections between their L2 skills and what they learned by playing video games. Considering the possibility that teachers can better teach their students who engage in video games if they understand gaming better, it should be relevant for the teaching mission to bridge the gap between teachers' and gamers' understanding of the connection between video games and L2 learning. Reinders and Phil Benson's (2017) study on language learning beyond the classroom (LBC) is worthy of attention to further back up the idea that this topic would be relevant for teachers. LBC lines up with Sundqvist's extramural English, as they both are terms describing out-of-classroom scenarios in which a learner can develop their L2 and be autonomous. One example of LBC that is brought up within the study is playing video games (Reinders and Benson, 2017, p. 570). Reinders and Benson (2017) state that their research indicates that what is being done within the classroom should be linked to students' LBC activities. This is because doing so promotes learner-centredness and autonomy, as well as agency and identity within the learners. It is also because by doing so, a teacher can make their lessons feel more connected to the learner's world and personal life outside of school as the learner's interests, experiences, and development take center stage in the classroom (p. 571). However, Reinders and Benson (2017) also recognize that links between LBC activities and classroom teachings are often not being made. Students tend to see the classroom as a separate setting for their language learning, and teachers tend to see the classroom as the most important setting in which students learn a language, with LBC only supporting what the learners learn at school. Teachers' attitudes toward the relationship between LBC and L2 learning will impact their students' learning. If the teacher does not understand the L2 activities that their students engage in outside of school it can lead to them failing to capitalize on the skills and knowledge that students bring to the classroom (p. 571-572).

Sundqvist and Sylvén (2016) provide some examples of how they believe that teachers can work to assist and utilize the skills of their students who engage in extramural gaming. They encourage teachers to introduce students who may have trouble further developing their L2 skills to gaming as an activity that could help them and that they might enjoy. If they find gaming fun and rewarding, they might keep doing it and have found an extramural activity to help them with their L2. If the teacher does not know much about video games, they could ask students who already engage in extramural gaming to tell classmates about their hobby, creating an instance of peer-to-peer scaffolding. Sundqvist and Sylvén also bring up the fact that there were teachers they had talked to who brought up that their students would learn nonstandard language through engaging in video games which would then be something the students would bring to the classroom. In cases like this, Sundqvist and Sylvén suggest that teachers can use instances of nonstandard language in video games as teaching moments to discuss different registers and styles of communication, making students more aware of how they can adjust their language to be in line with formal English. This includes teaching when certain expressions are appropriate or inappropriate. One activity that they suggest is that students could be asked to list words they encounter in games. Classroom activities could then focus on analyzing how these words are used in the context of the game and how they can be appropriately used in other, more general contexts. This would also create a chance to encourage the usage of dictionaries to understand words and how to use them better. This can help students learn the meanings, usage, and contexts of words found in games. Finally, Sundqvist and Sylvén bring attention to the fact that digital games, like "*The Sims*," have been adapted for use in L2 English classrooms and suggest that exploring and experimenting with such adapted games in educational contexts could be beneficial (Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2016, p. 171-172).

Material

In my analysis, I will be looking at the following games:

1. Baldur's Gate 3

Baldur's Gate 3 is a role-playing video game developed and published by Larian Studios (2023). It is part of the *Baldur's Gate* series, based on the Dungeons & Dragons tabletop RPG system and set within its Forgotten Realms universe. The game is known for its storytelling, character customization, and strategic combat. The gameplay of *Baldur's Gate 3* involves

both exploration and turn-based combat. Players can create an original character or choose a pre-made one, each with a unique backstory and abilities. The game allows for significant customization in terms of race, class, and skills, reflecting the diversity of options available in Dungeons & Dragons. Players navigate the game world by interacting with characters, completing quests, solving puzzles, and uncovering the narrative. The choices made by the player can significantly impact the story's progression and outcomes, adding a layer of depth and replayability. Combat in the game is turn-based, requiring tactical thinking and careful positioning. Players must manage their party's abilities and coordinate their actions to be effective against foes. The game also incorporates elements of the environment and interactive objects that can be used strategically during battles. *Baldur's Gate 3* supports single-player and multiplayer modes, allowing players to experience the adventure solo or cooperatively with others, which adds another layer of strategy to the game.

2. *Fortnite*

Fortnite is a free-to-play multiplayer game developed by Epic Games. It falls under the battle royale genre, where players compete against each other to be the last person standing in a steadily shrinking play area. The gameplay of *Fortnite Battle Royale* involves up to one hundred players, who can play solo, in duos, or squads of up to four people. The game starts with players skydiving from a flying bus onto a large island. Once landed, players must scavenge for weapons, items, and resources while avoiding being eliminated by other players. The playable area gradually decreases, forcing players into closer quarters and more frequent encounters. A distinctive feature of *Fortnite* is its building system, which allows players to construct walls, ramps, floors, and roofs using collected resources. This adds a strategic element to combat and mobility, as players can create fortifications for defense or use structures to navigate the terrain quickly.

Method

To conduct my research on how playing video games promotes language acquisition, I used criteria-based material analysis as my method and evaluated interactive activities within the chosen games. According to an article by Tomlinson (2012) developing principled criteria that are derived from a deep understanding of how languages are most effectively acquired, and using such criteria to evaluate material, can ensure that relevant and effective materials are chosen for the intended purpose in which the material will be used (p. 146-149). In this study I used established criteria for TBLT to evaluate whether interactive activities within

video games line up with TBLT as an approach and therefore could be used as TBLT material. In the analysis different gameplay aspects in *Baldur's Gate 3* and *Fortnite* were thoroughly described and connected to previous research on the relationship between L2 learners and gaming, to then be evaluated according to each criterion.

Rod Ellis (2012) has, within his TBLT research, formulated four key criteria to evaluate if an L2 activity can be seen as a legitimate “task”. These were chosen as the criteria to be used in my research to evaluate interactive activities within video games. The criteria are as follows: “1. The primary focus should be on ‘meaning’ (by which is I mean learners should be mainly concerned with processing the semantic and pragmatic meaning of utterances).

2. There should be some kind of ‘gap’ (i.e. a need to convey information, to express an opinion or to infer meaning).

3. Learners should largely have to rely on their own resources (linguistic and nonlinguistic) in order to complete the activity.

4. There is a clearly defined outcome other than the use of language (i.e. the language serves as the means for achieving the outcome, not as an end in its own right).” (Rod Ellis, 2012, p. 198).

As the term ‘gap’ is somewhat ambiguous, a further explanation of the term was needed. Ellis (2012, p. 200) specified the term, following Prabhu (1987), as “information gaps, opinion gaps and reasoning gaps” - asking for information, discussing a common solution, and deriving new information, respectively. When criterion 2 was addressed in the analysis of this study, I attempted to identify possible information gaps, opinion gaps, and reasoning gaps within the activities performed in the chosen games.

Before Ellis's criteria were implemented, they were evaluated using Tomlinson and Masuhara’s questions for evaluating criteria. These questions are as follows:

“a) Is each question an evaluation question?

b) Does each question only ask one question?

c) Is each question answerable?

d) Is each question free of dogma?

e) Is each question reliable in the sense that other evaluators would interpret it in the same way?” (Tomlinson, 2012, p. 147).

Evaluating Ellis's criteria with Tomlinson and Masuhara's questions, it was concluded that the criteria largely hold up. The issues that one may find when evaluating Ellis's criteria are, first, that the criteria are largely free of dogma; however, one could argue that it implies a certain importance of how meaning is looked at within language learning. Secondly, there may be some problems with people being able to interpret the terms 'meaning' and 'gap' differently; however, since it is specified what is meant with meaning in the criteria and a further explanation of gap as a term is provided, this problem should be avoided.

Engaging with the narrative in Baldur's Gate 3

To start, I will discuss the gameplay aspects of *Baldur's Gate 3*. The first gameplay aspect that I want to look at is the character creation, character development, and story interaction. The roleplaying aspect of *Baldur's Gate 3* is the main aspect of the game. The player gets to create their character at the beginning of the game and customize various parts of their character. Through customization, they can make decisions about their character's aesthetic through choices of gender, facial structure, body type, and much more. Besides the aesthetic options, players also get to choose their characters' race such as dwarf or elf, background such as criminal or entertainer, and class such as fighter or rogue. The chosen race will impact various aspects of the player's character, such as base stats, available weapons, walking speed, and senses. The chosen background will impact the character's proficiency, giving a bonus of two skills, such as the criminal gaining deception and stealth. The chosen class will impact how the player character fights, such as the rogue fighting through being agile and able to sneak up on enemies. Through these customization options, the game will react to your character, and the way the player can play through the game will vary according to the personal choices the player makes. According to the customization, the player characters' dialogue options, how they can interact with the environments, personalities, and the success rate of their interactions will be altered. Throughout the game, to continue the story progression, the player must regularly make choices about their characters' dialogue or actions when interacting with non-player characters (NPCs) or party members, which will greatly impact the story. The choices will affect the player character's relationship with other characters, which can have outcomes such as creating a strong friendship or a romantic relationship with one of the NPC's or party members, or on the other hand, fighting with NPCs or losing available members to their party. How the player chooses to interact with the world leads to different outcomes, with a total of 17,000 possible endings to the game, mimicking how in real life, a person's actions and how they choose to interact with people

leads to consequences.

The process of creating a character and making impactful choices in the world of *Baldur's Gate 3* mirrors the "personalized learning experience" that Gee (2007) discusses (p. 78-87). Players can choose their race, class, and skills, tailoring the game to their interests and encouraging sustained engagement. This personalization can keep the learner motivated and interested, which is essential for effective language acquisition. The engagement that video games like *Baldur's Gate 3* can create is something that Sundqvist and Sylvén (2012) argue can be better utilized by teachers (p. 203-204). The process of interacting with characters and making decisions that impact the narrative provides a deeply immersive language experience. Players must understand and manipulate language to influence outcomes, similar to real-world language use. This is consistent with Gee's (2007) points on how video games create a "situated meaning" where language learning happens through active participation and decision-making within the narrative context (p. 78-80). Players are not passive observers but active participants who make choices that influence the game's storyline. Each decision a player makes can alter how the narrative unfolds, leading to new language encounters and learning opportunities. The agency-level mirrors real-world decision-making and language use, where the consequences of one's choices are directly experienced and understood. This kind of gameplay lines up with the concept of learner autonomy considering the player is active and in control of their learning while playing the game (Siegel, 2022, p. 159-161). The active participation in video games, according to Gee (2007), sets video games apart from other similar narrative-based media, makes it especially immersing for the consumer, and provides a rich context for language exposure and usage (p. 80-81).

Sundqvist and Sylvén (2016) also argue that activities in which an L2 learner actively relies on their language skills successfully impact their proficiency with the target language (p. 187). As players navigate the game, interact with characters, and make strategic decisions, they encounter diverse forms of language—dialogues, texts, and environmental cues. Each form of language exposure is contextualized within the game's events, making it relevant and meaningful. This relevance is crucial for language retention and application, as Gee (2007) notes, because it links language learning to immediate, real-life-like situations (p. 83-87). In *Baldur's Gate 3*, players continuously interact with the game's language through dialogues, quest logs, and character interactions. Similarly to how Gee (2007) describes the benefits of the gameplay in *Deus Ex*, this continuous engagement requires players not only to understand

but also to use language in various forms, enhancing both comprehension and retention. The game's setting in a richly detailed fantasy world provides complex language input through archaic terms, specialized vocabulary, and elaborate descriptions, all of which enrich an L2 learner's language experience as they must understand and use language effectively to advance in the game.

Now that we understand the first gameplay aspect of Baldur's Gate 3, the roleplaying aspect, we can test it using Ellis criteria to see if it fulfills the requirements to be considered a TBLT activity.

Criterion 1: The primary focus should be on 'meaning' (by which it is suggested that learners should be mainly concerned with processing the semantic and pragmatic meaning of utterances)

In *Baldur's Gate 3*, the character creation and story interaction necessitate that players focus primarily on semantic and pragmatic meanings of utterances. Players must understand the implications of their choices, whether creating a character or interacting in dialogue. These decisions are embedded in a context that requires comprehension of both direct and indirect speech acts to navigate the game's world and story effectively. This focus on meaning is essential as each choice can significantly change the characters' relationships and the game's progression. And therefore, this gameplay aspect meets criterion 1.

Criterion 2: There should be some kind of 'gap' (i.e. a need to convey information, to express an opinion or to infer meaning).

There are opinion gaps prevalent in *Baldur's Gate 3* during the character interactions and decision-making processes. Players frequently encounter scenarios where they must form opinions based on their character's morals, backstory, and situation. Discussing potential strategies or deciding the best course of action based on personal or collective morals reflects this gap, as players use the same information to arrive at different conclusions based on their individual interpretations and character alignment. However, one could argue that there is somewhat of an uncertainty in the validation of the gap, considering that the interactions and decisions the player can make are restricted within the game design. For example, if the player's character needs to express an opinion to an NPC, there will be dialogue options that

the player can choose between but they will be restricted to these options, which one could then question if it really can be considered as an act of expressing one's own opinion. However, even if options restrict the player, the player still has to make a conscious choice, considering which option might lead to the progression in the story that they wish to see. Even though the player chooses an opinion for their character while being restricted, the act within the game mimics the action of expressing an opinion in real life. The gameplay of character creation and story interaction also often incorporates reasoning gaps, especially when players must deduce conclusions or anticipate outcomes based on given information. The player has to make predictions about the consequences of their interactions with NPCs and deductions about the storyline based on subtle cues all demand reasoning. For instance, choosing how to approach a conflict, determining the loyalty of allies, or solving puzzles to advance the story involve using given information to make reasoned judgments that affect the game's narrative. When it comes to information gaps, *Baldur's Gate 3* may not heavily focus on this type of gap in the character creation and story interaction aspects since most information needed to make decisions is generally provided directly to the player. However, there are moments in the game where players must gather information from the environment or through interactions to make informed decisions. For example, uncovering parts of the backstory or motives of other characters can fill an information gap, influencing the player's choices. Although there would be some hesitation in answering whether this gameplay aspect meets criterion 2 if the criterion was only interested in information gaps, the criterion only requires at least one type of gap, which means that this gameplay aspect meets criterion 2.

Criterion 3: Learners should largely have to rely on their own resources (linguistic and nonlinguistic) in order to complete the activity.

Players in *Baldur's Gate 3* must rely on their linguistic and non-linguistic resources to advance in the game. This includes understanding language, making strategic choices based on dialogue, and utilizing game mechanics (like skill checks) that depend on their character's attributes and prior decisions. The game does not always provide explicit language instruction but expects players to use their existing language skills and cognitive abilities to understand and respond to scenarios, embodying the "learn by doing" philosophy. Therefore, this gameplay aspect meets criterion 3.

Criterion 4: There is a clearly defined outcome other than the use of language (i.e. the

language serves as the means for achieving the outcome, not as an end in its own right).

The outcomes in *Baldur's Gate 3* are not solely about language use but achieving specific objectives within the game—such as completing a quest, forming alliances, or affecting the narrative's direction. Language serves as a means to these ends, where successful communication can lead to favorable outcomes in the story, reflecting the real-life use of language to achieve goals beyond just communication. And therefore, the gameplay aspect meets criterion 4.

Turn-based action in Baldur's Gate 3

Moving on to the second gameplay aspect of *Baldur's Gate 3* that will be analyzed, the turn-based battle system. The turn-based combat system in *Baldur's Gate 3* intricately mirrors classic tabletop RPG mechanics translated into a digital format. Every character involved in combat, including the player character, the player characters' party members, and the enemies, takes turns where they can perform different actions to win the fight. The order in which the characters take turns is decided at the beginning of the battle by rolling a dice for initiative. When a playable character has their turn, the player has to decide which ability they want to use by utilizing their available resources, the basic resources being "action", "bonus action", and "movement". The idea is that the player has to spend resources to be able to use their abilities; for example, if the player wants the character to use their weapon and attack, an action is required. If the player wants the character to drink a potion, using a bonus action is required.

The abilities available for each character are determined by various factors such as race, class, and equipment. The character's race will also influence their movement speed, but movement is also affected by many things like items or difficult terrain. With each turn, the player can use one action and one bonus action as well as use movement to make the character move around the terrain. Some abilities, such as the character's more powerful attacks, can require both an action and a bonus action, so the player has to constantly consider which abilities they want the characters to use while considering how their resources can be best utilized. Although abilities are mainly used for combat, there are also some abilities that can be used outside of combat for reasons such as making opponents more friendly or making a character hide before the combat, making it possible for the character to perform a stealth attack when combat starts. It's up to the player to determine the best set of actions before and

under combat with the goal being simply to eliminate all threats.

The turn-based combat system in *Baldur's Gate 3* requires players to think critically and strategize their moves, which involves processing and understanding the game's language to make informed decisions. This aligns with findings from Gee (2007), where video games are seen as environments that leverage natural human learning processes (p. 65-68). The strategic planning and execution in combat necessitate a deep understanding of game mechanics and language, as players must read and interpret ability descriptions, enemy stats, and combat effects. This active engagement with the game's language resources can enhance cognitive skills important for L2 learning, such as problem-solving and critical thinking. The fact that the gameplay in *Baldur's Gate 3* enables L2 learners to practice problem-solving and critical thinking while using their linguistic skills does not align with the opinion presented by the teachers interviewed in Chik's (2012) study. The teacher's view was that video games could only serve as sources of linguistic input through in-game texts and were unrelated to broader language learning goals. Still, problem-solving and critical thinking could be seen as such (p. 108-112).

The gameplay aspect of turn-based combat asks for cognitive and strategic engagement from the player. Considering this, Reinders and Wattana's (2012) study deserves attention as they argue that gaming that requires considerable cognitive effort, while being effective for developing fluency through a focus on meaning, does not always lead to improvements in linguistic complexity or accuracy (p. 183). Therefore, this would indicate that the combat aspect of *Baldur's Gate 3* would not be particularly useful if an L2 learner has a need to improve their grammatical accuracy. However, one should also keep in mind that Sundqvist and Sylvén (2012) praise games that challenge learners' cognitive skills through complex gameplay and suggest that such games have the possibility to provide rich language learning experiences, providing more benefits than other forms of gameplay (p. 201-202). Considering this, one should not neglect turn-based combat within video games as a possible L2 learning environment but consider what a learner may gain from engaging in such gameplay. The multimodal presentation of the combat system (visual, textual, auditory cues) enhances comprehension and retention, supporting Chik's (2012) findings on video games' multimodal language inputs (p. 109-111). As the combat scenarios within *Baldur's Gate 3* can often be repetitive, players get multiple opportunities to practice and refine their language without

real-world consequences. This aligns with Gee's (2007) principle that video games embed practice within engaging contexts, helping players learn and retain language skills more effectively (p. 65-68). Engaging in combat involves specific terminology and language structures related to actions, character abilities, and strategies. This consistent exposure helps vocabulary retention and understanding, offering a practical language application in high-stakes contexts. Gee (2007) describes the principle of practice as working exceptionally well when a language learner plays video games because the gameplay makes practicing fun and engaging while the learners themselves do not even realize that they are practicing language skills (p. 65-68).

With the principle of practice in mind, the turn-based combat system in *Baldur's Gate 3* should benefit L2 learners, as it becomes a form of language drill while not feeling as such for the player. Another concept from Gee (2007) that is consistent with the gameplay aspect of turn-based combat is "the regime of competence" (p. 65-68). In turn-based combat, players must think strategically about every move. Mastering basic skills such as choosing the right attacks or using defensive tactics appropriately provides a sense of achievement. Over time, these scenarios evolve, requiring players to rethink and adapt their strategies as enemies exhibit different behaviors or new combat conditions are introduced. This cyclic process of mastering, adapting, and remastering skills underpins the regime of competence, keeping players in a state of engaged learning. As players advance in *Baldur's Gate 3*, the complexity of the combat scenarios increases. Early battles serve as introductory lessons where players can experiment with basic combat mechanics. As they progress, they encounter enemies that challenge them to utilize more strategic thinking and a comprehensive understanding of their character's abilities and the game's mechanics. Each combat encounter is designed to be challenging yet achievable, with varying difficulty levels tailored to keep players within the regime of competence. This means that while players are consistently challenged, the challenges are not so difficult that they become discouraging, nor are they so easy that they become boring. According to Gee (2007), this balance is crucial for maintaining engagement and motivation (p. 65-68).

Now that we understand the second gameplay aspect of *Baldur's Gate 3*, the turn-based combat system, we can test it using Ellis criteria to see if it fulfills the requirements to be considered a TBLT activity.

Criterion 1: The primary focus should be on 'meaning' (by which it is suggested that learners should be mainly concerned with processing the semantic and pragmatic meaning of utterances)

The turn-based combat system requires players to understand and process the semantic and pragmatic meaning of the game's language. Players must comprehend character abilities, enemy descriptions, and tactical options, often described in detail within the game's text. This deep engagement with the game's text to understand and make strategic decisions places a focus on meaning. However, for this aspect of the game, although there is a focus on meaning, it would not be considered the primary focus. Players primarily plan moves, consider character positions, and decide which abilities to use to counter opponents effectively. Therefore, the primary focus is on utilizing tactical knowledge to win battles. Although this gameplay aspect focuses on meaning through understanding game mechanics and narrative elements, this is not the primary focus, meaning that the gameplay aspect does not meet criterion 1.

Criterion 2: There should be some kind of 'gap' (i.e. a need to convey information, to express an opinion or to infer meaning).

Within this aspect of *Baldur's Gate 3*, information gaps can be found as players often need to gather information about enemy weaknesses, environmental advantages, or the effects of specific abilities, which may not be explicitly provided and need to be learned through gameplay or discovered through exploration and experimentation. There are also reasoning gaps as strategic planning in combat requires players to deduce the best course of action based on the information at hand, such as choosing the right spells or attacks that exploit enemy vulnerabilities. As for an opinion gap, for this aspect of the gameplay, there is not really one. The player independently chooses strategies and actions based on the game's challenges without consulting, negotiating with others, or expressing opinions. As both information and reasoning gaps can be found within this gameplay aspect, it meets criterion 2.

Criterion 3: Learners should largely have to rely on their own resources (linguistic and nonlinguistic) in order to complete the activity.

In *Baldur's Gate 3*, players must rely on their linguistic resources (understanding game language and instructions) and non-linguistic resources (cognitive and strategic planning abilities) to succeed in combat. The game does not offer direct language teaching but embeds language use within the mechanics and narrative, requiring players to apply their existing knowledge and learn from context. Therefore, this gameplay aspect meets criterion 3.

Criterion 4: There is a clearly defined outcome other than the use of language (i.e. the language serves as the means for achieving the outcome, not as an end in its own right).

The objective of combat in *Baldur's Gate 3* is clear: to strategically maneuver and utilize abilities to defeat opponents. Language serves as a tool to achieve these objectives but not as a primary goal in itself. Success in combat is measured by victory over enemies and progression in the game, not by language proficiency. Therefore, this gameplay aspect meets criterion 4.

Fortnite and multiplayer mode

To analyze the multiplayer aspect of video games, *Fortnite* will be used instead of *Baldur's Gate 3*, as the multiplayer gameplay is a bigger part of the game design within *Fortnite*. Although *Baldur's Gate 3* offers a multiplayer mode, this would not be considered a key feature. *Fortnite's* multiplayer gameplay is engaging and multifaceted, appealing to both competitive and casual gamers. The mode from the game that will be looked at is the “*Battle Royale*” mode, the most popular mode, where 100 players drop onto an island and fight to be the last one standing. It combines shooting, building, strategic planning, and social interaction, providing a rich and varied gaming experience that has contributed to its popularity within the gaming community. The game's emphasis on teamwork, combined with the competitive nature of its *Battle Royale* mode, ensures that each match is unique and exciting, maintaining player engagement over time. Players can choose between four modes: one single mode and three multiplayer modes (duos, trios, or squads). If the player wants to play with others, they can either make a team with their friends or be teamed up with randomly selected players. When playing online with a randomly selected team, having played this mode, English is the most common language used to communicate with other players from around the world. Therefore, this study will focus on players who choose to be teamed up with randomly selected players and communicate with these teammates in English. If the player chooses to only play with friends that live in the same country, they

would probably communicate in their native language and that would not be relevant for this study. Communication is key in duos, trios or squad modes. Players often use voice chat to coordinate movements, share resources, and strategize together over how they should eliminate enemies. One of *Fortnite's* distinctive features is its building system, which allows players to construct walls, ramps, floors, and roofs using collected resources like wood, brick, and metal. This can be used for defense, gaining a tactical advantage, or navigating the terrain. Players use a variety of weapons ranging from shotguns and assault rifles to crossbows and grenades. Strategic use of the environment and building elements is crucial to outmaneuver and outlast opponents. The playable area periodically shrinks due to an encroaching storm, forcing players closer together and increasing the likelihood of encounters. Players need to stay within the eye of the storm to avoid taking damage.

The benefits of playing games with others is something that Gee (2007) brings attention to. *Fortnite's* multiplayer modes require constant communication among team members, facilitating social interaction and collaborative problem-solving. This interaction occurs in real-time and often in a second language (English), which mirrors Jean Lave's (1988; 1996) theory of socially situated cognition, suggesting that learning happens most effectively through participation in social practices. While players communicate with their teammates and strategize to take out enemies, they can learn both cognitive and linguistic skills from each other. Engaging in "communities of practice" allows for dynamic language use and acquisition (Gee, 2007, p. 203-208). The need for quick responses and the psychologically secure environment of the game can enhance L2 learners' willingness to communicate, according to Reinders and Wattana (2012, p. 183-185). *Fortnite* creates low-pressure situations where mistakes in language use are less likely to be met with severe repercussions, reducing anxiety and promoting more spontaneous language use. While the game supports language development through its interactive and communicative demands, it is important to note that Reinders and Wattana's (2012) study showed that individual learning outcomes can vary (p. 183-185). The extent to which a player engages in English conversation and strategizes with teammates can influence how much they improve their language skills. It is possible to communicate with team members through text-chat when playing *Fortnite*, and players can also communicate using emotes (animations that indicate some type of feeling) or by placing pins on the map to make their team members aware of something. However, as emotes and pins are a somewhat ambiguous way of communicating and leave little room to strategize, they are not optimal for communication. The most effective way to communicate,

and the way most players will choose, is to use voice-chat, as the gameplay asks for quick responses that make text-chat impractical. According to Reinders and Wattana (2012), voice-chat can be more demanding for language learners because of its immediacy, while text-chat allows for more time to process and construct answers. Therefore, the multiplayer aspect of *Fortnite* may be challenging if the L2 learner has a limited vocabulary (p. 182-185).

Now that we understand Fortnite's multiplayer aspect, we can test it using Ellis criteria to see if it fulfills the requirements to be considered a TBLT activity.

Criterion 1: The primary focus should be on 'meaning' (by which it is suggested that learners should be mainly concerned with processing the semantic and pragmatic meaning of utterances)

When playing *Fortnite* with others, there is a significant linguistic component where players must understand and produce language to coordinate with teammates, strategize, and navigate the game's challenges. The communication required often revolves around conveying complex tactical information and making quick decisions based on verbal exchanges. Thus, the gameplay inherently involves processing utterances' semantic and pragmatic meanings. And therefore, this gameplay aspect meets criterion 1.

Criterion 2: There should be some kind of 'gap' (i.e. a need to convey information, to express an opinion or to infer meaning).

All three types of opinion gaps mentioned by Ellis can be found when looking at the multiplayer aspect of *Fortnite*. Players often lack complete information about the enemy's location or strategy and must communicate findings with their team, creating an information gap. Teams must discuss and decide on strategies, which involve expressing and reconciling differing opinions based on the same information, creating an opinion gap. Players frequently engage in deductive reasoning, such as determining potential enemy movements or deciding the best approach for survival based on limited information, creating a reasoning gap. Therefore, this gameplay aspect meets criterion 2.

Criterion 3: Learners should largely have to rely on their own resources (linguistic and nonlinguistic) in order to complete the activity.

Fortnite players must rely heavily on their linguistic and non-linguistic resources to succeed. Linguistically, they must communicate effectively with teammates, often in a second language. Non-linguistically, they must employ strategic thinking, spatial awareness, and quick reaction times. This reliance on personal resources to achieve game objectives aligns well with the TBLT framework. Therefore, this gameplay aspect meets criterion 3.

Criterion 4: There is a clearly defined outcome other than the use of language (i.e. the language serves as the means for achieving the outcome, not as an end in its own right).

The ultimate goal in *Fortnite* is not language learning but to eliminate all enemies and be the last team standing. Language is crucial to achieving these outcomes, facilitating strategy and cooperation among teammates. This clear distinction between the means (language use) and the end (game victory) satisfies the TBLT criterion, where the language serves to achieve a non-linguistic outcome. Therefore, this gameplay aspect meets criterion 4.

Discussion

With the analysis in mind, let us return to the research questions of this study and attempt to answer them. The first research question is: *Are video games possible to view as task-based language teaching (TBLT)?* According to the results shown by using the criteria produced by Ellis (2012) to analyze different gameplay aspects, the simple answer would be that it is possible to view video games as TBLT. However, the interesting realization that comes from looking at different gameplay instead of just looking at games in their entirety is that although some types of gameplay can be viewed as TBLT, some types of gameplay can not be viewed as such. In the case of this study, it was shown that the roleplaying gameplay in *Baldur's Gate 3* and the multiplayer gameplay in *Fortnite* meet Ellis' criteria and could therefore be viewed as legitimate tasks that would work as TBLT. Additionally, it was also shown that the turn-based combat system in *Baldur's Gate 3* did not meet all 4 of Ellis criteria and, therefore, could not be viewed as a legitimate task within the TBLT framework. However, it should be noted that the turn-based combat system only failed to meet criterion 1 and that there were still multiple ways in which this type of gameplay could have benefits for an L2 learner. What this ultimately means is that, if one wishes to use video games to improve L2 skills, there is a need to carefully consider what benefits can come from the gameplay of a chosen game. With that in mind, one could conclude if and how well the

gameplay would fall into a method of language learning and how well the possible benefits one could acquire from the game line up with the learning goals one wishes to reach. Further research into different forms of gameplay and their potential benefits for L2 learners would be beneficial for the purpose of being able to make conclusions about what games are best suited for different individuals.

Moving along to the second research question: *can there be synergies between gaming and classroom learning?* Throughout the analysis, various ways in which different types of gameplay show potential for synergies between gaming and classroom learning have appeared. Video games provide a context that can be highly engaging for learners, making the language-learning process more enjoyable and meaningful. Teachers who understand and incorporate elements of gaming into the classroom can make lessons more relevant to students' interests and extracurricular experiences, which Reinders and Benson (2017) discuss (p. 571). This alignment can increase motivation and engagement, which are crucial for effective learning. The interactive and enjoyable nature of video games can lead to increased time spent interacting in the target language, which is beneficial for language acquisition and therefore gaming deserves attention from teachers as an extramural activity that can be encouraged for L2 learners. Gaming as an extramural activity promotes autonomy in learning, according to both Reinders and Benson (2017), as well as Sundqvist and Sylvén (2016). As shown in the analysis of this study, players independently navigate challenges and make decisions when playing games. Teachers could harness this aspect by creating classroom activities that allow students to take more control of their learning processes, thus fostering a sense of agency and independence. Activities could include project-based learning, where students choose topics related to their gaming experiences, because if students can choose their own topic that aligns with their interest, this relevance increases motivation and engagement which are fundamental elements to cultivate agency. Activities could also include collaborative group work, where students share and negotiate gaming strategies and language use, because when students can learn from each other's insights and methods, this can lead to more diverse approaches to learning and problem-solving which can help the students in developing their independent thinking skills. As Sundqvist and Sylvén (2012) noted, gaming can introduce students to a wide range of vocabulary, including slang and technical terms (p. 200-204). In the classroom, these words can be explored and contextualized, helping students understand not only the meanings but also the appropriateness of different language registers. This can also lead to discussions about

code-switching, translanguaging, and the social implications of language choices.

Games often immerse players in rich narrative worlds that require understanding and navigating different cultural contexts and language uses, such as when exploring the fantasy genre-inspired world within *Baldur's Gate 3*. By linking these experiences to classroom activities, teachers can provide students with a broader understanding of language as it is used in various social and cultural settings, which was touched upon by Chik (2012, p. 108-112). This can enhance students' ability to use language flexibly and appropriately across different contexts. The rich, contextual settings where language is used naturally and meaningfully within video games can help students understand the use of language in various contexts, improving their ability to transfer these skills to real-world situations, which is an integral goal of their L2 studies. As mentioned previously, the teachers that participated in Chik's (2012) study did not view video games as helpful material for L2 learning as they felt that video games benefits were very limited; however, it is important to note that the study in which these teachers were interviewed was published over 10 years ago and video games have undoubtedly changed and evolved in this time. The teachers may have expressed a different opinion, more in line with the findings of this study if interviewed again today (p. 108-109). Multiplayer games, such as *Fortnite*, facilitate social interactions in the target language, which can improve communicative competence. Such interactions can mimic collaborative activities in the classroom, providing a dynamic environment for practicing language. Teachers can draw on this by incorporating group tasks that require similar skills to those challenged when playing video games, thus helping students improve their communicative competence in the target language. This can be particularly effective in language classes, where students must negotiate meaning and collaborate to complete tasks, just as they do when participating in online gaming. The strategic and problem-solving elements of gaming can enhance cognitive abilities such as critical thinking and decision-making. These skills are valuable both in and out of language learning contexts, and the development of such skills is highly encouraged within the Swedish school system. Ultimately, games can serve as a supplementary tool in language teaching as an extramural activity, providing a practical learning environment that reinforces language skills taught in more traditional classroom settings.

To be even more specific on how extramural gaming can be utilized in the classroom, going back to Sundqvist and Sylvén's (2016) examples of what can be done in the classroom, I

would like to discuss how this study's findings in *Baldur's Gate 3* and *Fortnite* could expand their ideas. Sundqvist and Sylvén (2016) suggest that teachers could recommend video games as an extramural activity that would be both beneficial and fun for students who may struggle with developing their L2 (p. 171). The findings in this study support this claim; however, it is important that the teacher considers what game they may recommend to their students. If the teacher believes that the student would benefit from TBLT as a method, they could choose between recommending a narrative-focused and interactive game or a game where the student would play online with people from all around the world. Although, considering Reinders and Wattana's (2012, p. 182-185) claim that voice-chat may be a challenge for less experienced L2 learners, it would seem that the best option would be a narrative-focused and interactive game. Considering that Sundqvist and Sylvén (2016, p. 172) bring attention to the fact that video games such as "The Sims" have been used in educational settings, it may also be beneficial to use a game in the classroom that falls under the narrative-focused and interactive genre of video games, similarly to how other media such as movies or books are used. However, if the students are actually to play through the game, *Baldur's Gate 3*, which was used to exemplify narrative-interactive gameplay in this study, it would not be an optimal choice because of its long playthrough time. The teacher could instead look for a game with a similar form of gameplay, maybe a game that only focuses on the story and narrative, such as visual novels, that can be played through in what is deemed as a reasonable time by the teacher. On the other hand, if the students are not to play through an entire game but play through a portion of a game or watch a gameplay video where characters interact extensively, *Baldur's Gate 3* could be used for this and be quite useful because of its large cast of characters with distinct ways of speaking. Similarly to how Sundqvist and Sylvén (2016, p. 171-172) suggest that teachers can use nonstandard language that students learn through playing video games, a teacher could let their students do tasks centered around the language used within *Baldur's Gate 3*. As students engage with the game, students can note down various words and expressions used by the characters. Special attention should be paid to words that seem unusual, archaic, or particularly expressive. The class could then discuss the context in which the words were used in the game. Analyze the language's formality, tone, and appropriateness in various situations depicted. After that, there are various activities that the students could engage in using the archaic language in *Baldur's Gate 3*, such as the following 3 examples:

1. Students compare how these words are used in the game versus how they are used in more conventional settings and in modern-day English. This can involve looking up definitions and contemporary usage examples in dictionaries or online language databases.
2. Students could write a short story or dialogue using the language styles observed in the game, adapting them to fit a different genre or setting.
3. Have a discussion about how languages evolve and how the fantasy genre often revives archaic forms of speech for artistic purposes.

This approach should not only make learning about language fun and engaging but also help students develop a better understanding of how language functions across different contexts and time periods.

Conclusion

Through a criteria-based materials analysis, this study demonstrates the significant potential of video games as a multifaceted tool for task-based language learning (TBLT). Through the analysis of the games *Baldur's Gate 3* and *Fortnite*, it has been observed that certain gameplay elements align with Ellis's TBLT criteria, offering authentic, contextual language use that engages learners in meaningful communication. This aligns well with the goal of "language use in functional and meaningful contexts" from the English syllabus (Skolverket, 2022, p. 1). In games, language is not just a learning objective but an essential part of navigating and succeeding within the game's environment, which offers a practical application of language skills in diverse and dynamic settings. The character interactions and narrative depth in games like *Baldur's Gate 3* enrich the learner's exposure to diverse linguistic registers and cultural contexts, fostering a deeper understanding of language use and its nuances. Conversely, multiplayer elements in games like *Fortnite* encourage real-time communication and collaboration, pushing learners to apply their language skills in dynamic and socially interactive settings. This directly supports the syllabus's emphasis on developing an all-rounded communicative ability (Skolverket, 2022, p. 1). As students engage with other players and navigate complex narrative and social interactions in these games, they practice and enhance their language skills across multiple dimensions — listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Educators can enhance engagement, encourage autonomy, and bridge the gap between classroom learning and real-world application by strategically incorporating video games into language learning curricula. This integration not only aligns with modern educational approaches that emphasize student-centered learning and digital literacy but also cater to the evolving interests and learning styles of today's digital landscape. This is in line

with the Swedish National Agency for Education's emphasis on encouraging learning language both in and outside of formal educational environments (Skolverket, 2022, p. 1). Ultimately, this study advocates for a thoughtful selection of video games in educational settings, suggesting that when aligned with pedagogical objectives, gaming can transcend entertainment to become a powerful educational ally, promoting both linguistic proficiency and a broader communicative competence.

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