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INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF
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**EMBRACING CHANGE:
EMANCIPATING THE LANDSCAPE
OF RESEARCH IN LINGUISTIC,
LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE**

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Noble Resort Hotel, Melaka
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READ AND PLAY: IMPROVING ADOLESCENTS' READING SKILLS THROUGH VIDEO GAMES

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ABSTRACT:

Video games, in general, are electronic games that can be interacted with using input devices such as computers and gaming consoles. There are some people who perceive video games as having no educational value, as it is often presented negatively by the media. Thus, the fact that video games can be educational is always overlooked due to the public's negative perception, especially the older generation. This study aims to prove that video games can be “edutainment”, which is both educational and entertaining. Moreover, this study is also conducted through a collection of short stories made into a video game. The finding reveals that gamification of writing, in this case, short stories show positive feedback from adolescents and can encourage them to read more effectively.

Keywords: video games; edutainment; reading skills; gamification; adolescents

1. INTRODUCTION

Since ancient times, games, such as board games and card games, have long been part of society. Nowadays, with the progressive changes in technology, games have become more prevalent in the form of video games. According to Esposito (2005), a video game is defined as a form of playing using audio-visual apparatus. The term video game is often linked to entertainment by most people instead of education. This was evident when the dangers of playing video games for adolescents became a wide concern for parents. Excessive playing of video games may lead to addiction and an inability to differentiate between virtual and actual reality (Friedrichs et al., 2015). However, several studies have also shown that video games can be an educational tool for adolescents if appropriately used. From the countless negative aspects that video games can cause to adolescents, it can be seen how much of an impact video games have. A research by Griffiths (2002) stated that video games have the potential to be educational when used in the proper context. Moreover, adolescents that spend more time playing video games that train peripheral demands are more inclined to have better reading skills compared to those that do not (*Playing Video Games May Enhance Reading Skills, Says USask Study*, n.d.). The study consists of participants with varying gaming experience levels to complete a task requiring attention-demanding reading. The study concluded that exposure to peripheral demanding video games could improve one's ability to read quickly and efficiently.

This project is a combination of Creative Writing and New Media Language. For this project, the author combined video games into an e-book. The e-book consists of five short stories; readers must read a portion of each short story before continuing the stories through video games. Additionally, the five short stories are all children's short stories which have altered storylines as the author believes that most people are familiar with classic children's short

stories. The author decided to combine e-books and video games because this unconventional combination can easily attract people. Moreover, if the project is solely a video game, those who view it negatively would not feel interested. On the other hand, with the added label of “e-book”, people would find it intriguing and are much more inclined to accept video games as educational.

1.1. Project Objective

There are three objectives for this project. Firstly, to improve reading skills among adolescents through video games. To elaborate, adolescents nowadays spend more time playing video games than reading. Therefore, the author decided to use video games as a way for adolescents to improve their reading skills. Next, this project aims to determine what influences adolescents to read effectively through video games. Since the author wishes to use video games as a medium to improve reading skills, it is crucial to understand the factors that influence it. Lastly, to provide video games that are appropriate in an educational context. As mentioned earlier, most video games serve the purpose of entertainment. Not a lot of educational video games are available on the market. Although the project is small, the author hopes it can be appreciated for its educational value.

1.2. Entrepreneurial Opportunities

The selling of the five short mini video games and the e-book is a possible entrepreneurial opportunity. The product is targeted towards adolescents ranging from the age of 12 to 20. As for the pricing, due to it not being available in physical form and its simple gaming mechanics, the product would be priced at RM5. Although this might seem low priced, this is already considered a lot, especially for a small-scale video game. Furthermore, the product is advertised and sold on "itch.io". This is a website where most less experienced developers publish their video games. Moreover, the community on the website is also vast, which creates an opportunity for the product to reach local and global consumers.

2. METHODOLOGY

The author's first method was project planning, including literature research on educational video games, technicalities in developing video games, and determining suitable children's stories for alteration. Moving on, the author begins to write the short stories and draft the games' overall designs. The author made sure to finish writing the short story before moving on to game development since this is much more efficient. Next, for game development, a suitable software was used that allowed the author to develop a game by scratch but without the hassle of programming. When determining the genre of the video game, since the project focuses more on the reading aspect, the author decided on Role Playing Games (RPG) and Visual Novels (VN). According to Butler (2018), both genres have more reading elements than other genres. The author also included sound effects and graphics to enhance the gaming experience. After developing the game, beta testing was conducted within a small circle of friends. The beta-testing includes proofreading sentences and identifying bugs or loopholes preventing players from proceeding smoothly in the game. Then, the author exported the game as an executable (.exe file), which made it downloadable to the public. Finally, the e-book was designed on Canva, and the games were published on itch.io.com. (Refer to Figure 1).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

First and foremost, to determine the perception of video games in general, a survey focused on the targeted audience, adolescents. The survey consisted of 21 respondents between the ages of 11 and 24 years old (Refer to Figure 2), where 15 respondents are 18–21 years old, 4 respondents are 11–17 years old, and the remaining 2 respondents are 22–24 years old. These age range are the three stages of adolescence: early adolescence, middle adolescence, and late adolescence (Kids First Pediatric Partners, 2014).

Furthermore, the survey also asked whether video games can improve reading skills, to which 11 respondents strongly agreed, 8 respondents agreed, and the other 2 respondents were unsure (Refer to Figure 3). To further understand what makes reading in video games different, respondents were asked about the aspects of a video game that influences their desire to read. The results show that visuals, audio, storyline, and gameplay are very influential in encouraging respondents to read in video games (Refer to Figure 4).

To gain more detailed data on how video games improve reading skills, 5 participants, aged 17, were asked to read a slightly complex short story. After reading, they were given a survey on their reading process. When asked about certain information regarding the short story, 3 of the participants were unable to recall it. Another question asked on the motivation to read the short story shows that 2 participants were not interested (Refer to Figure 5). Upon further questioning, it was understood that they could not stay focused when reading for an extended period and felt bored.

Next, all 5 participants were asked to play an excerpt of the researcher’s product on video games about short stories, and a similar survey was given. The results show that all 5 participants could recall specific information when asked. Furthermore, they were very motivated to read the short story as a video game (Refer to Figure 6). The reasons given vary, but it can be summarised that the aspects of the video game make reading the short story more enjoyable compared to reading only the text.

Additionally, regarding the feasibility of the project, 16 respondents showed keen interest in the project, whereas the other 5 respondents were neutral (Refer to Figure 7). Respondents were also asked about the duration of a playthrough for all five video games; most preferred 10 – 15 minutes of playthrough (Refer to Figure 8). These results were vital in the final product as the author hoped to cater to the targeted audience’s demands.

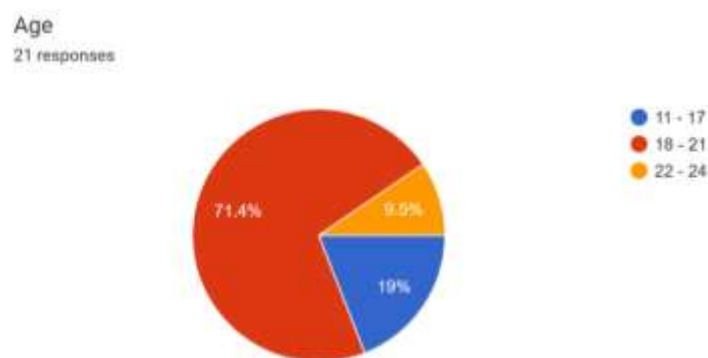


Figure 2: Responses to Survey Question 1



Do you think that reading skills can be improved through video games? (Example: Reading dialogues, instructions and storylines in video ga... Agree 3 - Maybe 4 - Disagree 5 - Strongly Disagree
 21 responses

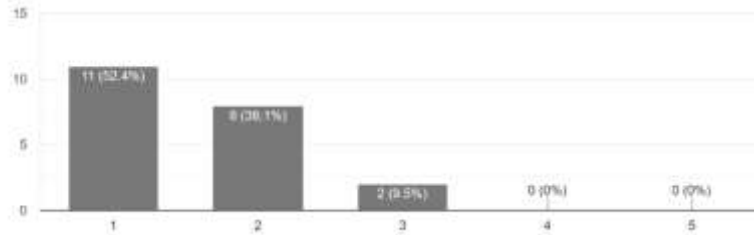


Figure 3: Responses to Survey Question 3

What influences you to read texts in video games?
 21 responses

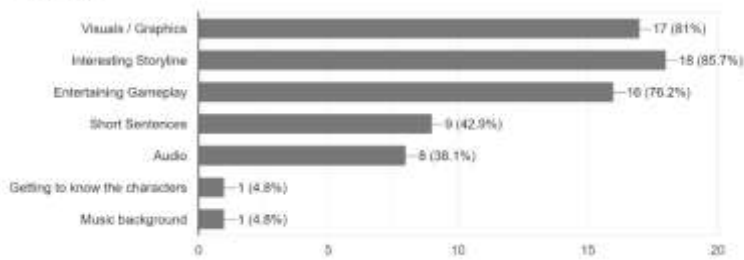


Figure 4: Responses to Survey Question 4

Rate your motivation when reading the short story. 1- Low 2- Neutral 3- High
 5 responses

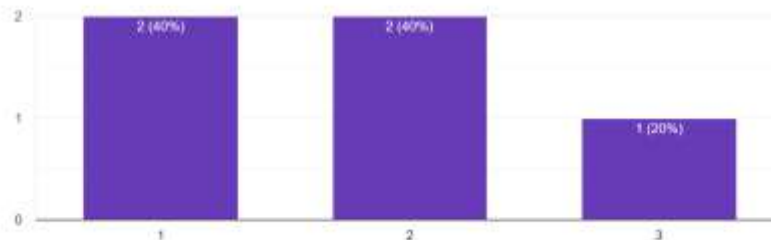


Figure 5: Responses to Pilot Study Question 2

Rate your motivation when reading the short story through the video game. 1- Low 2- Neutral 3- High
 5 responses

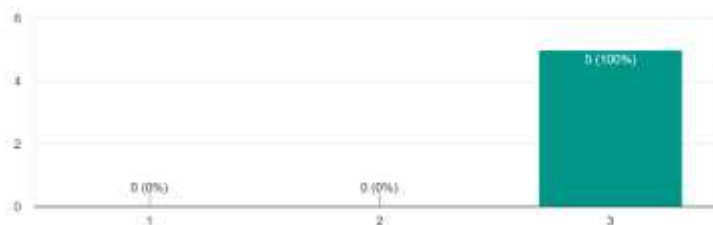


Figure 6: Responses to Pilot Study Question 3

Would you play a video game inspired by children's short stories? (Example: Hansel and Gretel, Little Red Riding Hood, and The Ugly Duckling.)
 21 responses

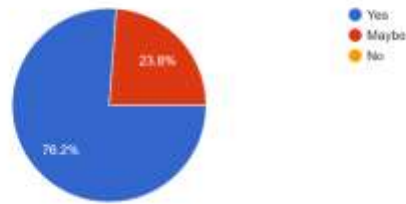


Figure 7: Responses to Survey Question 5

How long do you think a video game inspired by short stories should be?
 21 responses

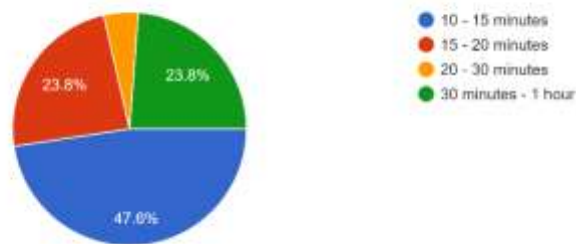


Figure 8: Responses to Survey Question 6

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this project which combines an e-book with video games has the potential to assist adolescents in improving their reading skills. Moreover, the project has also achieved its objective of determining what makes adolescents prefer reading in video games. Despite the project being a success, several improvements could have been made. Firstly, the author admits that access to video games is not flexible. The video games can only be played on Personal Computer (PC). This undoubtedly narrows down the scope of the market since not everyone has a PC. It is recommended that the video games could be made playable on other platforms such as Android and IOS. Furthermore, as the author is not experienced in programming, the process of completing the video games consumed more time than expected. This made certain parts of the video games rough or unnatural. This could have been improved by asking for advice from individuals in the programming industry. Overall, the author believes this project is the outcome of the subjects ALS252: Creative Writing and ELS105: New Media Language.

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APPENDIX

Activities/Week	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Proposal of idea to supervisor														
Consultation with supervisor (Online and Offline)														
Conduct research and survey (pre-survey and post-survey)														
Drafting of 5 short story outlines														
Converting short stories into game format														
Beta testing of video games														
Draft of extended abstract														
Final editing of final product														
Poster preparation and printing														



Product Sample: Video Game



Product Sample: Video Game