



**UNIVERSIDAD
DE ANTIOQUIA**

Trabajo de investigación presentado como
requisito parcial para optar al título de:
Licenciada en Lenguas Extranjeras

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Medellín, Colombia
2022



Fostering Adult Students' Autonomy Through Digital Games as Homework Based on Andragogical
Principles.

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November 2022

Abstract

The study of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) has become an opportunity for adults to achieve greater goals within their personal lives. Nevertheless, adults, due to their busy schedules, have less time to invest in homework, leading them to not remember very well the topics explained in the class before. This action research aims to use Digital Games as homework, based on andragogical principles, to foster adult students' autonomy to review EFL class topics. This study was implemented in the Programa de Inglés para Adultos (PIA) online course 9 from Universidad de Antioquia. Fourteen students participated during a bimester where they used two types of Digital Games designed by the researcher as homework. The data was collected and validated through the triangulation method coming from journal entries, a group interview and two questionnaires. The results show that Digital Games assigned as homework effectively enhanced adult students' engagement and autonomy while developing them, which facilitated the retention of information from previous classes.

Keywords: Digital Games, homework, adult students, autonomy, andragogical principles, EFL.

Título del proyecto en español: Fomento de la Autonomía de los estudiantes adultos a través de juegos digitales como tarea basada en principios andragógicos.

Degree requirement

This action research project is submitted as a requirement of the Bachelor of Education in Teaching Foreign Languages (English-French) at the Escuela de Idiomas, Universidad de Antioquia, in Medellin, Colombia.

Acknowledgments

I wish to thank my students, cooperating teacher and coordinator from PIA for their formidable collaboration with my practicum process.

I would like to thank my practicum advisor and coordinator for their marvelous work, support and flexibility through my hurdling times.

Lastly, I want to thank my family and partner. With their constant support I could overcome the challenges given by my health condition during the practicum.

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Preface

Through my years studying the degree in foreign languages, I could learn about the education field, many different concepts related to it and the EFL classrooms. But as I started my practicum with adult students at PIA from Universidad de Antioquia, I understood how little I knew about andragogy and how different it is to work in an adult context. The dynamics within the classroom are different from the youngsters because adults are receiving classes by their own willingness. I have noticed this is something that contributes positively to their progress regarding the foreign language.

Nevertheless, adults also have a challenge to overcome concerning the enhancement of foreign language skills. I could observe that they claim to have less time to invest in their homework assignments. From my part, I consider homework as an important tool to reinforce information because it offers opportunities to review and practice. Thus, in order to provide my adult students the benefits of homework, it was my intention to offer them a more appealing alternative homework assignment. Given my experience as a gamer, graphic designer and tutoring, it occurred to me that digital games could foster their autonomy to review the class topics.

Description of the Context

The University of Antioquia is a public higher education institution in the department of Antioquia; its main campus is located in the city of Medellín. The School of Languages of this university has as its mission and vision the production of knowledge, respect for diversity and the strengthening of social values. It serves local needs in the field of languages and cultures with a critical and ethical sense, developing skills in languages and translation, with new programs and services in training, research and extension in accordance with the specific needs of the communities of the department of Antioquia (Escuela de idiomas, n.d.).

The School of Languages offers an external English program intended for adults named PIA (Programa de Inglés para Adultos) which is where this study takes place. This program is aimed at both young people, who have finished high school, and adults in general. It offers 14 courses, a Listening and Speaking course and a MET/APTIS preparation course. These courses are offered through both on-site and online environments (Extensión escuela de idiomas, n.d.).

The course observed for this Action Research study was an online level 7 with an hourly intensity of four hours per week for a total of 35 hours in two months. It was taught remotely through the Zoom application. The course had 14 students registered with an A2 proficiency level of English, their ages ranged from 20 to 50 years old, most of them are professionals or heads of family.

My Cooperating Teacher (CT), who was in charge of this course, has 13 years of trajectory in the education field. During the classes, she only spoke in the target language and encouraged the students to do the same. Also, she is a dynamic and approachable person, treats her students with respect, addresses them by their names and often makes jokes during class to build an agreeable environment for them. The program curriculum establishes the Task based learning approach for instruction, which

my CT followed and complemented with repetition techniques (asking students to articulate words after hearing them) and micro teaching moments teaching a short section of a larger lesson)

Statement of the Problem

Through observing the PIA online course 7, I could detect that during the classes it often happened that the students did not remember very well the topics explained in the class before. Therefore, in order to continue with the pacing of the class, the teacher had to explain the same topic more than once. Also, when observing the classes, it caught my attention that most of the students did not do the homework assignments.

In some interactions with my CT, she confirmed that the students delivered their homework with many days of delay or did not do it at all. This situation made the CT adjust her lesson plans and develop those assignments with the students during the first segment of the classes, it also made her explain the topics once more. This means that part of some classes was dedicated to developing the homework collaboratively instead of investing that time on other learning or consolidating activities.

By the end of the course I had an informal interview with the students where they confirmed my assumptions about their difficulties to do homework. They expressed that due to their busy schedule, sometimes it is difficult for them to do the activities assigned by the CT. Some students even said they had never done their homework and just stayed with the contents learned during the class time. Others said that if the homework was something not so extensive or time-consuming, it could be more manageable for them.

In the learning process, homework is an opportunity to review and retain information (Milbourne & Haury, 1999) in between class sessions. Also, it is a flexible tool that can be adjusted to the needs of the audience (Jendrych & Wiśniewska, 2022) like in this case of adult students in remote

courses. PIA course 7 students' reluctance to do homework caused them to not remember very well the topics explained in the class before and to spend part of the class developing the homework instead of consolidating the topics or advancing in others. If the PIA students' autonomy to review the class topics through homework is fostered it could bring beneficial aspects to the students and to the pacing of the synchronous sessions in the online environment.

Theoretical Background

This research project heeds on the PIA course 7 students' autonomy to review the class topics through homework. With the aim of fostering students' autonomy to review prior topics, digital games based on andragogical principles will be implemented and assigned as homework. In this section, the key concepts from this study will be stated and discussed focusing on their pertinence with English Language Teaching (ELT).

The Importance of Homework

Homework is regarded as a set of school tasks assigned by teachers to be completed by students out of school (Cooper, 2001). According to this author, homework has positive effects over the achievement scores of students and brings beneficial aspects such as a positive attitude towards studying, self-direction, self-discipline, enhancement of study skills, more independent problem-solving skills, and it gives the opportunity for the student to review and practice with materials given in previous classes (Copper, 1998; Cooper, Robinson & Patall, 2006). These aspects, especially the last one, are part of the effects that this study with adult students is looking to obtain. In other words, they comprise the purpose of assigning homework to the PIA group.

It can be said that the effects of homework are linked to the purpose the teacher has in mind to assign it. Minke (2017) states that homework can conduct two main purposes: summative (to give a

grade on students' performance) or formative (to check students' progress and provide feedback). More importantly, the teacher, while designing and assigning homework, should take into consideration if its purpose is instructional or non-instructional.

According to Epstein & Van Voorhis (2001, p.181-193), the instructional purpose of homework facilitates opportunities for the students to review topics already taught in classes; it facilitates the retention of the information. On the other hand, the non-instructional purpose focuses on the interactions and relationships surrounding the student or the development of personal characteristics not related to the academic field. The instructional characteristics of homework denote great significance for ELT. According to Pittenauer (2022), the results of her research about the views of homework in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classrooms reported that doing the homework assignments provide spaces for college students to review and practice which are important aspects to improve English proficiency. This means that, following an instructional type of homework could benefit PIA students to ameliorate their language skills by the opportunities of practice and review offered by the homework assignments. Also, this author stated that EFL teachers must communicate the purpose of homework assignments to their students and design a variety of homework in concordance to the trends of the moment to be up-to-date. These factors promote positive response upon the completion of homework by students. This last statement highlights the matter of course of this research, which is promoting EFL adult students' homework completion.

Autonomy and Motivation Through Homework

The lack of homework completion by students may lay on several motives. In the case of this study, from informal conversations with the CT and the students in the observation phase, the main motive has been attributed to the busy schedules of the adult students. This is a challenge when it comes to assigning homework to adults because they may not have a lot of time outside of class to devote to their English studies. As claimed by Arnsten (n.d, para. 6), "While adult learners may have less

time than younger students for homework, it is important that they devote time to their studies in order to make progress.”

In other words, the progress of adult learners in an EFL classroom could be significantly connected to the completion of homework. As stated by Pittenauer (2022), being in tune with the latest homework trends to design different types of homework promotes a positive response in terms of completion. This is what this study will seek with the implementation of alternative assignments that are different from the traditional homework they are usually assigned. As claimed by Rousseau (2018), the traditional assignment is more focused on the summative assessment aspect which favorize grades instead of progress, the tasks are disconnected from the real world situations, focusing on facts, isolated skills and non-interactive content. On the other hand, alternative homework focuses on the formative assessment which favors monitoring the progress of the student and providing feedback. Also, alternative assignments have instructions, questions, and a purpose that must be known to students in advance. These assignments are tied to real-world contexts and constraints, requiring students to solve realistic problems.

These characteristics of alternative homework assignments are more in concordance with an adult context, since they promote students' autonomy and a self- direction nature which could motivate adult students in homework completion. Autonomy stated as “the property or capacity of agents of being self-governing or self-determining” (Stoljar, 2015, p.314) and self-directedness stated as “the ability to make choices independent of others and manage our actions and lives without external forces influencing or dictating what we should do” (Squier, 2016, p.1).

Additionally, as mentioned by Kasworm & Yao (1992) to support adult learner autonomy and self-directedness, it is necessary to move from traditional course expectations to alternative designs where students engage in creation, exploration, and decision-making. This means that to promote students' autonomy to do homework in the PIA course it would be necessary to apply an instructional

alternative type of homework which is in tune with the latest homework trends, with a purpose known by students in advance and with content that is related to their real life contexts.

Autonomy is a key factor when it comes to ELT, especially in online environments, like the one we have in the PIA course where this study is conducted. As Parupalli mentioned (2018, p. 3), "Autonomy enables learners to make decisions about their strategies and goals in language learning ... It also encourages learners to use the language in real-life situations outside the classroom". Learning a foreign language requires practice and dedication. In this process, the student can make connections and open up to different foreign language components that are not only stated in the EFL classroom but also outside of it. These foreign language components can be found in tools that constantly surround the students' personal lives such as music, movies, games and media. It is likely that if presented with digital games as homework, their autonomy and self-direction would drive them to state goals and strategies when accessing these multimedia tools in order to learn while interacting with them.

Also, the elements comprising meaningful and effective learning for adult students that enhance their autonomy and self-direction are linked to andragogical principles. As believed by Dwivedi (2018), the homework assignments as a procedure for training adults should be conducted by andragogical principles.

Homework Based on Andragogical Principles

Andragogy is defined as the art and science of helping adults learn, based on certain crucial assumptions about the differences between children and adults as learners (Knowles, 1968, p. 351). The forerunner of adult education Malcom Knowles, who founded and developed the Andragogical Theory, created a model defining the six fundamental principles or assumptions that any instructional process must follow to achieve effective learning in adult students: 1) A self-concept of autonomy and self-direction: The adults' learner maturity leads them to having power and control over their own learning processes. 2) A higher level of life background and experience: Adults have accumulated years of

knowledge and self-concept of how things operate. 3) The need to understand the reasons for learning something: The adult must have clear what and why they are learning something. 4) A learning motivation based upon personal need: For adults is satisfying learning when the processes involve real life tasks or problem solving situations. 5) A pragmatic orientation: Adults want to learn something applicable to their current lives and that improves it. 6) An internally driven motivation to learn: Adults' motives to participate in any activity involving learning comes from their own personal needs rather than from the externally imposed (Clardy, 2005).

In addition to these fundamental principles, according to Adam (1987), there are other three principles that are crucial for the processes that must take place in an andragogy model of learning: 1) Participation: Adults must get involved in the decision making in collaboration with others or take active part in the task execution to keep motivated and have a favorable attitude towards reaching goals. 2) Horizontality: The adult is self-directed and has self-control due to the experience and maturity, so the adult becomes responsible for his/her own learning and sees the teacher as an equal. 3) Flexibility: Adjust materials or strategies to the adult student needs.

Given that the PIA course is an adult learners context, the most practical path to take seems to be incorporating the andragogical principles to their homework assignments. In that manner, the adult students' characteristics would be taken into consideration in the design and purpose of assignment, which may enable their autonomy and motivation in the completion of homework.

Digital Games as Homework Assignments

Using digital games as an alternative homework assignment is part of the actions targeted by this study. As stated by Jendrych & Wiśniewska (2010), in this era of learning in online environments or also known as E-learning, especially when it comes to ELT, Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) provide suitable tools for tasks that challenge the adult, are aligned with the andragogical principles and can be less time consuming for the learner. This means that the use of an

ICT tool (i.e. digital games) as homework could provide the adult learner the flexibility suggested in the andragogical principles regarding their lack of time outside the classroom and it could motivate their autonomy for homework assignment completion.

Furthermore, ICTs tools contribute positively to ELT in terms of the capacity it has to extend the didactic material that helps to introduce or reinforce information related to the target language in students. As mentioned by Idrees (2010), technologies help to develop new language skills through pictures, videos, audios and other materials. These materials enable the student to practice or reinforce previous knowledge about the second language. Therefore, the use of an ICT tool, such as digital games, not only could provide the PIA learners the flexibility required for homework completion but also enough material to support their retention of information about prior English classes.

That being the case, Digital Games is an ICT tool that could comprise all the concepts mentioned before and that according to Connolly and Stansfield (2006, p. 459-476) has gained popularity in the new era of E-learning nowadays. Game-based learning is designing a game to deliver learning content transforming a boring task into an interesting one (Lahri, 2015). Additionally, when this type of learning is developed in the online environment (E-learning), it focuses only on computer or digital games which have rules, goals and objectives, outcomes and feedback (Connolly & Stansfield, 2006). Consequently, the digital games' characteristics contribute to the incorporation of the andragogical principles into assignments such as: logical thinking: game players as creative problem solvers; learning by doing rather than knowing; a high degree of control over students' progress; interaction and participation; the development of the ability to process information very quickly; a fun and relaxed environment for learning, exploration, trial and error, roleplay; and simulation of real life experiences (Kirriemuir & McFarlane, 2004).

Considering the multiple characteristics that digital games comprise as an ICT tool for learning in online environments, they could be considered as an appropriate alternative homework assignment for adult learners and at the same time, those digital games could provide ELT positive support.

Research question

How can the implementation of homework through digital games and based on andragogical principles foster PIA course 9* students' autonomy to review the class topics?

* The research study proposal was made after observing and working closely with PIA course 7 students. By the time of the implementation, this group was enrolled in course 9.

Objectives

General Objective

To explore how the implementation of homework through digital games and based on andragogical principles foster students' autonomy to review class topics.

Specific objectives

- To establish appropriate digital games that comprises the andragogical principles and the formative purposes of homework.
- To analyze students' perceptions about the implementation of digital games as homework.
- To examine the effects of digital games as homework on students' autonomy to review class topics.

Action Plan

With the intention to foster PIA course 9 students' autonomy to review the class topics, I will implement the assignment of homework through two digital games that will be designed based on andragogical principles. Due to the busy schedule of adult learners, the idea is to offer them an option that is different from traditional homework in the sense that it is faster, entertaining and, at the same time, it does not let aside the instructional component of homework. For that purpose, there will be some actions that will take place from September to January in 3 cycles.

The next table recapitulates the plan action for this study.

Table 1

Action plan summary

Activities	Time frame	Participant
Cycle 1: Adapt and design two types of digital games as homework.	6 weeks	Student-teacher
Cycle 2: Implement digital game homework type 1 and 2. Collect data through journal observation, two questionnaires to the students and a group interview.	10 weeks	PIA students CT Students
Cycle 3: Data triangulation analysis and findings.	5 weeks	Student-teacher

Development of Actions

The **first cycle** took place from September 5th till October 15th. The idea in this period was to determine suitable standards for digital games as homework for adults and design the games. For this reason, I conducted an informal interview with the PIA coordinator. I was informed that the main topic for PIA course 9 was predictions for 2050. Therefore, I developed the design, story and tasks of the two digital games based on this concept and took into account the andragogical principles.

On this occasion, I used online free applications to develop my own games as a teacher. The first type of digital game as homework that I designed is named **World in 2050** (See Appendix C); with this game the student can accompany Xia, a PIA time traveler on a mission in the 18th century to warn the fairy queen about what is coming in the year 2050. To engage students with the story I created an introductory video to the game available on youtube (Zapata, 2022). In the digital game the student can move the main character around a town, talk with the villagers and other characters, swing the sword and defeat enemies, follow instructions and solve questions. While the player performs tasks asked by the secondary characters in order to find the oracles the story unfolds and eventually is asked to defeat the main boss which leads to the ending.

The second type of digital game as homework that I designed is named **The old man** (See Appendix C); with this game the student can help Peter to get to the end of the story. This type of game is named by the application as interactive fiction. The player is presented with the beginning of a story and gets to choose path A or B in every section of the story, according to what was chosen the plot gets different and the player gets to a specific ending. I designed 6 different endings and diverse plots around the story. Also, I created a reward as an incentive. Once the student reaches at least one ending a password will be given to them to open a PDF file with the link to watch a special video ending. In

addition, it has an option to restart the game if the student wants to follow another path and reach another ending.

Considering that this course is developed in a remote manner, both digital games are available to play online through a computer or smartphone. The idea with these two games as homework is for students to review prior English class topics such as: future tenses, parts of speech and expressions that could help them build predictions and probability. These digital games as homework could help them to have clear ideas for the final task which consist of developing a vlog with their own predictions for the year 2050. It should be noted that the first game is more intricate to handle and takes longer to complete than the second. In the trials it was shown that the first game takes approximately one hour to reach the ending and the second game takes approximately 20 minutes. It was devised this way to test the availability of time, since as mentioned above, adult students claimed to have little time to dedicate to homework.

The **second cycle** took place from October 18th till December 13th, which comprises the period of study time of PIA course 9. The idea in this period was to implement the two digital games as homework and collect data through an observation journal, a group interview and two questionnaires to the students.

According to Bell (2005), observation can help to spot significant events, perceive what is being said and done, and the observers can make interpretations in their own way. Therefore, I developed a structured process through an **observation journal** from the first day of classes till the end of the PIA course 9, with the aim to spot: 1) The retention of information from previous classes prior, during and after the implementation of each game, and 2) Student's homework autonomy and development prior, during and after the implementation of each game.

The implementation of the first type of digital game: World in 2050 took place on November 10th and the second type of game: The old man on December 6th. Every time a digital game as

homework was assigned to the students I took some minutes of the class to explain the purpose, the directions and instructions of the digital game. Later on, the homework was posted on the google classroom through a google document with the instructions of the game that I already had explained to them. Inside each game instruction, I left a link with the **questionnaire** in order for students to respond to it right after they had played the game and had the ideas fresh (See Appendix A). According to Bell (2005), it is necessary to know exactly what you want to know and for that reason you must aim your questions of the questionnaire based on the objectives of the investigation. In this case, the two questionnaires intended to get their perception about the use of the digital game as homework.

Later on December 13th, which was the final day of classes, I conducted a semi-structured **group interview** for the students (See Appendix B). As stated by Bell (2005), something special about interviews is that the interviewer can go deeper into responses than questionnaires. According to Altrichter (1993) they allow the interviewer to access meanings in order to gain greater understanding of a situation. Following this idea, it was intended to go deeper about their perceptions about the digital game as homework with questions that were expected to clarify ideas. It was performed at the end of the course because I wanted to know their perceptions of the experience as a whole, having done the final task and having played the two digital games.

The **third cycle**, which was the final stage, took place from December 14th till March. The idea in this period was to triangulate the data and analyze it so the findings could support the conclusions. It took more time than expected because I had health issues. Nevertheless, it was successfully prosecuted.

Data Analysis

This work is an action research study, cataloged by Burns (2009) as an opportunity for teachers to carry out an investigative exercise of their own practices in the classroom to bring improvement and

change. In order to acquire a better conversance of the information based on the objectives of this research, I have decided to analyze this data through the triangulation method; since, according to Bell (2005), it is used to look at the same issue from different perspectives. Therefore, the triangulation of this research consists of: the analysis of the data gathered through my observation journal, the two students' questionnaires and the group interview.

The observation journal was developed from the beginning of classes till the end of the course and retrieved thirteen entries. The two questionnaires intended to explore the student's perceptions about each game; in the first questionnaire, 10 out of 14 students participated and in the second questionnaire, five out of fourteen students participated. Due to some logistic mismatches with my CT, the implementation of the last questionnaire got close to the final task, then it had fewer participants than the first one. Additionally, the group interview intended to clarify ideas about student's perceptions and whole experience about the digital games as homework, therefore, it was conducted at the end of the course with 10 out of 14 students.

The data was transcribed into a word summary sheet for better distribution and understanding of the content. Then, it was categorized following the inductive method, as described by Altrichter (1993) the categories were chosen during and after scrutinizing the data and color-coded to better distinguish one from another. Afterwards, codes were assigned using both numbers and letters in a matrix table to have the due guide of the file for each category.

Findings and Interpretations

After due analysis of the aforementioned data, three main categories emerged: 1) Students' retention of information from previous classes, 2) Students' homework autonomy and development, 3) Students' perception of the digital games as homework.

Students' Retention of Information from Previous Classes

After implementing the two digital games as homework, I observed that the students began to present improvements in oral expressions both in the past and in the future tense during their class interventions. Moreover, they were more successful in class exercises that required using tools learned in previous classes and they participated more actively:

In the final class they were given an exercise in which they had to spontaneously express a topic that involved predictions. In their performance, they were improvising and resorting to the information learned through the whole course all together in one moment. On this occasion, they used more than - will and going to- to complement their predictions. they used- might and be likely- as well. They still made some mistakes in the pronunciation but it was evident how greatly their vocabulary had increased in comparison with the beginning of the course. I noticed that they used some expressions from the two games and they were more prone to risk, leave their comfort zone, and use more linguistic elements to make their predictions. (Observation journal, Dec. 13th, 2022)

This finding demonstrates that students' ability to retain information from past classes improved through the implementation of digital games, which is in accordance with Idrees (2010), when the author states that technology materials facilitate language skills.

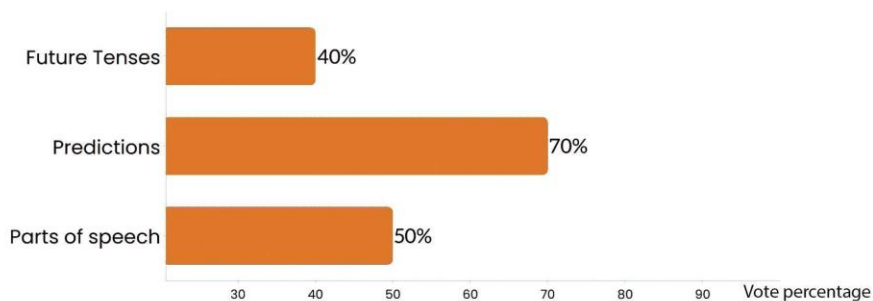
Regarding the course topics, the students showed awareness of how they were reviewed during the games. In the first questionnaire, 80% of students (8/10) agreed that the first digital game allowed them to review prior English class topics and the ones they were currently seeing. They said they could review these topics from the dialogues, examples and the situations presented in the game in a playful and fun manner, and 30% (3/10) of students mentioned they learned new vocabulary from the game. Similarly, in the second questionnaire, 100% (5/5) of students agreed that the second digital game allowed them to review prior English class topics such as: future tense, auxiliaries, predictions and parts of speech. This suggests that digital games not only show favorable results in retaining information from

past classes during exercises within the class, but also that the students themselves feel that through the games they can do this review, reaffirming some of the andragogical principles (Clardy, 2005): students are autonomous, know the purpose and feel motivated to do the task.

In the group interview, the students were asked to vote for the topics that were reviewed during the digital games (see Figure 1). The one with more votes was predictions, which was the main topic in this course. While the students were only asked to vote, they also named the elements inside the categories that they remembered, showing that they have imprinted in their minds these elements coming from the game and the previous classes. According to Epstein & Van Voorhis (2001), the instructional purpose of homework facilitates the retention of the information. Therefore, this suggests that the digital games were structured correctly and with effective results as homework since the students were able to retain information from them and make connections to information from previous classes.

Figure 1

Topics reviewed through digital games as homework group interview votes



Students' homework autonomy and development

As mentioned in the Description of the Problem, at the beginning of the course, the lack of autonomy of the adult students to do their homework became noticeable, especially with the formative type of homework. In the first formative assigned task, before this intervention, from 12 students who attended the second day of classes only 33% (4/12) did it. On the other hand, when implementing the

first digital game, 93% of the students (13/14) did this type of homework and when carrying out the second one, 86% of the students (12/14) did it. It should be noted that this type of homework was formative as well, that is to say that although the students knew that this homework was not going to have a grade, they obtained a higher number of completion. This shows that the students' autonomy to develop homework increased using digital games regardless of grades compensation. As suggested by Clardy (2005), for adults is satisfying learning when the processes involve real life tasks or problem solving situations, which in this case indicates that digital games content drive more their motivation to develop homework than the grades they could obtain from them.

Regarding the time of fulfillment, the results of the questionnaires showed that in the implementation of the first digital game 40% of the students (4/10) dedicated more than one hour to complete their homework, 20% of the students (2/10) dedicated even more than four hours, and one student took only five mins to complete it. This last student is in the range of the youngest of the group and she is a videogamer, which is probably why she did the task faster than all the other students. Also, only one student could not reach the end of the game. In the second game, the maximum time that students took to complete their homework was 30 minutes and the least was three minutes. This time all students reached the ending of the game. This game was designed in a way that regardless of the path the students chose to follow, they will reach an ending. To reach another ending, the students must restart the game and choose a different path. 40% of students (2/5) did reach more than one ending, which means that they had enough time and interest to restart the game and play it again.

Concerning their predilection, when students were asked which of the two games they liked the most, in the group interview 80% of the students (8/10) showed a preference for the first game, which takes more time to play. Added to this, some students stated that they would try to reach other endings of the second game or play the first game again after the course ended. This data shows opposition to the claim by Arnsten (n.d, para. 6) that adults have less time to complete their homework, which had

also been mentioned by the students before this implementation, because they not only spent enough time to complete the digital game that took the most time but also that this was the task they liked the most.

Students' perception of the digital game as homework

Positive aspects. The students showed a positive attitude with the idea of replacing the traditional homework with digital games since the beginning and they expressed it at the end of the course. In the group interview, students were asked to describe digital games as homework in three words, and they said the following: "Easy to understand, childhoodlike, interactive, interesting, creative, entertaining, illustrative, amazing, funny, short, pleasant and cute". Some students wanted to explain further their choice of words: Student 1: *"I found it illustrative because honestly, with the first game, I learned a lot of vocabulary... And, also my children came while I was playing and they loved this game."* Student 5: *"Little Red Riding Hood. I don't know why the first game reminds me of that story. The first character, the little girl, brings memories of childhood."* (Group interview, Dic. 13th, 2022).

Also, students showed motivation to perform the task. In the second questionnaire 80% of the students (4/5) expressed not having difficulties with the game. On the other hand, with the first game, 70% of the students (7/10) expressed having difficulties during the game such as: Following instructions, finding clues, downloading and the meaning of some words. However, out of all these students only one did not reach the end of the game. This shows that the games were challenging enough for them to feel drawn to face obstacles but not impossible to perform which motivated them to go on.

Additionally, the first questionnaire showed that 90% of students (9/10) expressed they had an agreeable experience using the first digital game as homework. They gave positive feedback such as: it was fun, ingenious, creative, interesting, with good visual elements, story and challenges. In the second questionnaire 100% of the students (5/5) expressed had enjoyed the second game. They expressed that it was fun and that they were quite interested in finding the end of the story. They mentioned as well

that they enjoyed this type of task because it is different and stays out of the common methodologies.

Student 9: *"In my opinion, I enjoy games and learning with them more than common tasks"*. Student 10: *"I like it, because it is another methodology to learn"*. Student 12: *"I think it is a very very good way to teach. To make it work. I'm an engineer, actually, I really appreciate innovation"*. (Questionnaire 2 Dic. 6th, 2022). This is evidence that digital games are, in their perspective, something different and therefore it is more attractive for them than the other tasks they had before.

When the students were asked about their experience with the digital games as homework a repetitive word they used was -fun-. Two students agreed that the story inside the game was a catch, that it was emotive and transported the person to the game and it was engaging which motivated them to keep going and find the ending or in the case of the second game, the multiple endings. Some of their opinions were: Student 9: *"I'm a gamer and I found the game very easy and short. But, it was very entertaining, with a good plot, and very nice graphics"*. Student 11: *"I can tell it is a quality game, with better graphics than others that the other teachers use and also had a story and a purpose."* (Observation journal, Nov. 24th, 2022 & Group interview, Dic. 13th, 2022). This shows students' appreciation of the content and characteristics inside the games. As mentioned above by Lahri (2015) Game-based learning transforms a boring task into an interesting one. The fact of being captivated by their stories and graphics indicates they were motivated to keep playing them till the end.

When the students were asked if they would like to use games as homework again the response was affirmative. This is an example of a student explaining the reasons why: Student 8: *"I like the game as homework because it's an interactive exercise, and I can practice listening and agility. I like feeling that I'm not doing homework"*. (Group interview, Dic. 13th, 2022). Additionally, five students mentioned they would play the games again and try for other endings after the course ended. This indicates that using the digital games as homework was appealing enough for them to want to use them again or play them

again even if they no longer have to, but for their own entertainment. This could help them review topics even when they are no longer part of the course.

Negative aspects. The results of the questionnaire showed that 20% of students (2/10) didn't enjoy the first game. One student mentioned that she had technical issues and the other one did not like video games. I followed these two students' cases closely and I asked further questions about it in the group interview. Case student 5) She had technical issues and couldn't play the digital game because she had trouble understanding how to move the character with the joystick or the arrow keys. Nevertheless, this student during the interview affirmed that she had played and liked the second digital game. She said that one was more simple to handle and easy to understand. Case student 6) She indicated that she doesn't like video games, said during the group interview that she believes that games are better for youngsters as her children and she couldn't reach the end of either of the digital games as homework. Nevertheless, she described the game as homework as interesting, emotive and didactic, and expressed her willingness to try again to reach the endings of the second digital game as homework.

Although there were problems with the first implementation, these problems were corrected by offering students another digital game with simpler maneuvers in the second implementation. In the case of the student who does not like video games, it is somewhat contradictory since she says that she does not like them but she gave positive feedback about the digital games as homework. It is my belief that she may be in a position where she doesn't like digital video games but is aware of the benefits of it.

Conclusions

The evidence presented in the previous section shows that using video games, that are designed under andragogical principles, as homework gives adult students the motivation to

autonomously explore again the elements learned during the classes through their simulation of true life situations in a fun manner. Also, the findings suggest that students are capable of emulating what they learned through the game spontaneously when the opportunity arrives in class, and some students are willing to review the course topics with the digital game again, even when they will not get any grades from it.

The fact that most of the students have shown preference for the first game, which was made purposefully more intricate, time consuming and challenging shows that they are willing to make time to develop their homework if it is something that connects with good childhood memories or allows them to immerse in a world where they lead a character and get to the end of an engaging story. In other words, it seems that adult students have time for homework if they can have fun and enjoy while developing it.

In sum, the students had a positive response regarding the replacement of traditional homework with digital games as homework, despite some downside aspects of the first implementation, the improvements of the second one solved most of those issues. In general terms, the students perceived the digital game as homework as something interesting and engaging. All students used positive words for the description of the digital game as homework, it was shown by their comments that they appreciated the opportunity to perform the homework assignment in a new way and that it was engaging enough for them to be willing to play it even after the course ended.

Finally, when finishing the investigation and looking at the results of it, I realized two things that are important that as a teacher I would like to emphasize. First, a student mentioned that with the digital game as homework they learn while they are entertained and feel like not doing homework at all. This idea reveals a key factor. It made me realize that homework is in the minds of students as a type of punishment and as a burden. But, using new ways of homework such as digital games, opens up a possibility to change the bad connotation that people associate with homework and transform their

perspective to something more positive, as a pleasant activity. Secondly, andragogy along with homework is a subject that to my knowledge has not been widely explored. Looking for elements that would help me with this investigation was not an easy task and that was one of the limitations of this study. Therefore, I'm glad to have participated in this exploration and I hope that my action research can open new doors for this topic to become more popular and further improvements can be made.

Reflections

Before my experience with the practicum, I thought of dedicating my work only to youngsters. But now I have realized that working with adults has opened me up to new possibilities. On the other hand, it has been a total challenge to complete this stage of my studies due to my health issues. But thanks to the help of kind and understanding people I have exceeded my goals.

In addition, this experience with action research has shown me how important it is to innovate in the educational area. It is an aspect that has helped me better understand myself as a teacher and the field of education. I look forward to continuing my path as a language teacher, hoping to preserve what I have learned at this stage and continuing improving.

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Appendix A

Students' Questionnaires

Google forms questionnaire Digital Game 1: World in 2050.



This game has been created to review topics of English lessons and for research purposes. Please answer the following questions to evaluate your performance and perceptions about the game.

1. Your name _____
2. Your age range: 24 or less 25-30 31-40 41-50 51 or more
3. Did you reach the end of the game? Yes No
4. How long did it take you to play the game? _____ ↓
5. Did you have difficulties at any stage of the game? In case yes, please indicate which difficulty.
_____ ↓
6. Did you enjoy the game? Why? _____ ↓
7. Do you feel that you could review prior English class topics with the game? Why?
_____ ↓
8. Leave a comment about your experience using the Digital Game as homework.
_____ ↓

Google forms questionnaire Digital Game 2: The old man.



This game has been created to review topics of English lessons and for research purposes. Please answer the following questions to evaluate your performance and perceptions about the game.

1. Your name _____
2. Your age range: 24 or less 25-30 31-40 41-50 51 or more
3. How many endings did you reach in the game? 1 2 3 4 5 6
4. How long did it take you to play the game? _____
5. Did you have difficulties at any stage of the game? In case yes, please indicate which difficulty.
_____ ↓
6. Did you enjoy the game? Why? _____ ↓
7. Did you review prior English class topics with the game? Which topics?
_____ ↓
8. What is your perception about using the Digital Game: The old man as homework?
_____ ↓
9. Do you have any suggestions to improve this type of homework or the game?
_____ ↓

Appendix B

Group Interview

Protocol: In the first segment of this class I would like to invite you to participate in a group interview which makes part of my investigation about the use of games as homework. I will ask you 6 questions as a group. It will take around 30 minutes. Your participation in this interview is voluntary and you are free to withdraw, without giving any reason and without being penalized or disadvantaged in any way. This interview will be recorded and the data collected from this interview will maintain your anonymity throughout the project, including in publication. If you agree please raise your hand.

Questions:

1. Please write on the chat 3 words that describe your perception about using the Digital Games as homework?
2. How was your experience using the Digital Games as homework?
3. Please vote with emojis about which topics you review during the games?

 Future tenses Predictions Parts of speech: Conjunctions, verbs, nouns, adjectives and adverbs.
4. Which of the two games as homework did you like the most and why?
5. Would you like to use games as homework again? Why?
6. Do you have any suggestions to improve this type of homework? The game?

Appendix C

Games

Digital Game type 1: World in 2050. Hello fellow students. With this game you can accompany Xia, a PIA time traveler on a mission in the 18th century to warn the fairy queen about what is coming in the year 2050. The idea with this game is for you to review prior English class topics such as: parts of speech, predictions and probability. The character moves using the arrow keys on the keyboard. Or the keys W, A, S and D. Or use the joystick on android.

Link: <https://rpgplayground.com/game/world-in-2050/>



Digital Game type 2: The old man. Hello fellow students. With this game you can help Peter to get to the end of the story. The idea with this game is for you to review prior English class topics such as: parts of speech, future tenses, predictions and probability. It will be of great help for your final task. The character will always give you two choices. You can use the mouse arrow (your finger on mobile devices) over the A and B red buttons on screen or use the keys A and B on the computer keyboard to choose one path.

Link: <https://storage.googleapis.com/users.gamefroot.com/4747899/game/616186/1670265893586.html>

