FACTSHEET

Video games and addiction

Am I going to transform learners into video game addicts?

One of the common myths about video games is that players end up becoming addicted to them and end up neglecting other aspects of their life. While some extreme cases of players ending up spending all their time on games have been reported, it should not influence the decision that teachers and educators make when they introduce video games in the classroom.

Is video game addiction real?

The debate about whether addiction to video games is real or not is still recent and it is very polarising.

First, as is the case with other negative video game myths, **gamers are used to their hobby being scapegoated** for virtually any malfunction in society. The fact that non-players tend to accuse games of causing such trouble does not help in establishing a dialogue.

Second, even though a **gaming disorder has been defined by the World Health Organisation (WHO)** in 2018, psychologists and psychiatrists do not all agree on the scientific basis for such a definition and this decision is still perceived as controversial. For instance, in 2013 internet gaming disorder had not been included as a disorder in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM–5) of the American Psychiatric Association, but as a topic that needed further research (Haelle, 2019).

Finally, **gaming disorder would only concern a small percentage of players,** although this percentage does not seem to be established yet. For most people, playing video games, whether online or offline, does not cause them to suffer mentally,

socially, and behaviourally (Brigham Young University, 2020).

Do I risk making my students play too much?

Some games are created to be played indefinitely, others are created to be played as one would read a book: there is a clear start and a clear finish to the game, and you could come back to some parts of it from time to time as you would enjoy reading your favourite pages in a book.

Some games or moments in a game can require a lot of focus, make the player feel strong emotions, or be frustrating because they are difficult.

Source: Technology vector created by freepik - www.freepik.com

These inherent aspects to games can make the player tired, and most games invite them to take breaks from time to time (either through explicit messages, by offering to prepare before an important battle, by distributing checkpoints or saving points throughout the game, etc.).

Similarly, if you invite your students to play games or review game material as part of an activity or exercise, whether in class or at home, it is unlikely that they will develop a gaming disorder. After all, you will not ask them to stay online for 16 hours to

develop a city or space station in a massive online multiplayer game (MMO). The task you will propose will have a clear objective, and it is likely to contain a time constraint, especially if it is done in class. In addition, playing for oneself and playing for the class is not the same: even if students develop an interest in the game you propose, they are unlikely to spend their whole time playing it.

Players and non-players should be more conscious of player retention mechanisms

Some games can appear 'addictive' to non-players because they can lead or encourage the player to play regularly, or for several hours. As long as the player has fun and stays in control of such mechanisms, they do not lead to addictive behaviours.

The business model of some games is built on player retention mechanics that prompt the player to come back regularly. For instance, a player who connects every day, even without playing, for several days in a row could get rewards in a game (points, new powers, skills, etc.). Others require to join groups to complete tasks together at the same time. Some of these mechanisms aim to make the game fun (eg. playing with others), but others are created by marketing teams for the game to generate more revenue.

Such mechanisms, when the player is not conscious about their impact, might not make the player clinically addicted, but might blur the line between playing for fun or playing because one has to, or because the game forces them to.

Organisations linked to events such as the Safer Internet Day (https://www.saferinternetday.org/) can provide interesting information to understand and discuss these topics. For instance, Childnet.com (UK) in English: https://www.childnet.com/teachers-and-professionals/hot-topics/gaming

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