

**PASTIME TO PROFESSION TO PROFICIENCY: EFFECTS
OF INTERNATIONAL E-SPORTS ON LANGUAGE AND
COMMUNICATION SKILLS**

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Abstract <p>Digitaalinen kilpapelaaminen eli e-urheilu on nopeasti kasvanut viime vuosina yhdeksi suosituimmista urheilulajimuodoista ja kerää jo vuosittain useita satoja miljoonia katsojia. Vastaavasti videopelien vaikutusta kielten oppimiseen on tutkittu yhä enenevässä määrin, mutta se on kuitenkin keskittynyt sanaston oppimiseen sekä luetun ymmärtämiseen vaikuttaviin tekijöihin. Tutkimuksessamme keskityimme niihin vaikutuksiin, joille pelaajat altistuvat kommunikoidessaan joukkueen kesken englanniksi. Tutkimus pyrki myös vastaamaan siihen, mitä kieli- ja kommunikaatiotaitoja vaaditaan ammattikilpapelaamisessa kansainvälisessä ympäristössä.</p> <p>Tutkimus toteutettiin laadullisena tutkimuksena, johon haastateltiin kahta suomalaista ammattikilpelaajaa heidän kokemuksistaan Counter-Strike: Global Offensive -pelin parissa pelaten kansainvälisissä joukkueissa, joissa yhteisenä vieraana kielenä toimi englanti. Haastattelu koostui avoimista kysymyksistä, joilla haluttiin selvittää pelaajien peleistä oppimia kielellisiä taitoja, kommunikointitavoista joukkueetoverien kanssa sekä heille kertyneistä mahdollisista kielellisistä hyödyistä pelimaailman ulkopuolella. Aikataulullisten haasteiden vuoksi toinen haastatteluista tehtiin etänä puheyhteyden välityksellä ja toinen kirjallisena sähköpostihaastatteluna.</p> <p>Haastatteluiden tuloksena huomasimme, että vastaajat kokivat kielitaidon kannalta selkeästi hyötynensä pelatessaan englanninkielisiä pelejä sekä kommunikoidessaan vieraalla kielellä joukkueessa. Tärkeimmiksi kielitaidon osa-alueiksi pelaajat mainitsivat puheen tuottamisen sekä kuullun ymmärtämisen. Tutkimustulokset osoittivat myös sen, että motivaatio on avainroolissa oppimismotivaatiossa vieraiden kielten oppimisen suhteen.</p> <p>Aiheeseen liittyvissä jatkotutkimuksissa tutkimuskohteena voisivat olla tulosten perusteella ilmapiiriin, asenteisiin sekä yhteisymmärrykseen joukkueen sisäisessä kommunikaatiossa keskittyvät teemat.</p>	
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1 INTRODUCTION

Esports, or professional competitive gaming, has existed for some decades. Only in the recent years it has boomed and become an ever-increasing part of mainstream culture. Events such as the annual Dota 2 The International with their multi-million prize pools (The International 9 boasted an unforeseen 34,3 million dollar prize pool) regularly bring more and more non-expert viewers to watch the best of the best compete in the digital battlegrounds.

However, an esports athlete's career is generally quite short lasting around five years to a decade, and in many games on average 25 is considered the age to retire, due to various factors, such as stress and injuries (Suncho, n.d.). Many professionals start their careers in their early teens, devoting their lives to a game in hopes of making a living out of it. This can often mean neglecting general education and disregarding higher education. It is therefore interesting -and important- to explore which transferable skills can be obtained during these short-spanned careers that can later be utilized in other fields, and on the other hand finding out which skills would best prepare an aspiring gamer to a career in esports.

Digital games' effect on language learning has been researched for as long as digital games have existed, but as games have become more and more mainstream entertainment in the past years, research on digital game-based language learning has become increasingly abundant. Most of the research considers story-based, adventure or roleplaying games, due to their inherent language content (i.e. Autio, Takamaa: 2020), attitudes and player-learner perceptions about game-based language learning (i.e. Autio, 2018; Juvonen, 2019), or language learning game design (Kaipainen, 2020). Some research touches upon competitive games and Counter-Strike: Global Offensive (henceforth CS:GO), amidst other game genres, but doesn't actually focus on the aspect of esports (Juvonen, 2019; Erkkilä, 2017). This leaves a gap in knowledge, as games and esports are parallel but separate phenomena.

The purpose of the current paper is to bridge this gap in knowledge by analyzing Finnish esports athletes' experiences and perceptions about how international teamplay has affected their language and communication skills. Furthermore, it seeks to answer questions such as what sort of language and communication skills are needed on a career in international esports. The theory section of this paper consists of a dichotomy of topics; on one hand it concerns e-sports and CS:GO the game as general phenomena, and on the other it introduces the core educational theories concerning informal learning and digital game-based learning.

2 THEORY

This chapter is divided into two sections. In this chapter we first illuminate the notions of e-sports and CS:GO by describing the main features they contain and clarifying the competitive side of CS:GO. Secondly, we discuss the effects digital games have had on second language learning. Furthermore, we examine aspects of language educational theory which must be considered when analyzing language learning through gaming and aim to shed light on informal learning contexts it contains.

2.1 On e-sports and CS:GO

E-sports

Electronic sports (also e-sports or esports) can be described as playing video games as a form of competing against other players (Mangeloja, 2020). Mangeloja (2020) points out that mere gaming for fun does not equal e-sports, but rather requires a platform backed by organizations and professional teams aiming to compete. Furthermore, e-sports as a phenomenon often takes place in formats of competitive tournaments, offering participating teams or solo players a chance to gain monetary compensation depending on results (Mangeloja, 2019).

E-sports is a popular form of entertainment for viewers around the world, and in 2020 reached over 435 million viewers and is projected to reach around 577 million viewers by 2024 (Newzoo, 2021). It is worth noting that according to Mangeloja (2019), e-sports has overtaken ice hockey's place as the most favored form of sports to watch amid young adult men in Finland.

Counter-Strike: Global Offensive

Counter-Strike: Global Offensive or CS:GO is a teamplay oriented first-person shooter game, where the objective is to win the match by winning rounds against the opposing team. In first-person shooter games the player sees the world as if through the eyes of the character, and usually only being able to see the character's hands and weapon, as seen in figure 1 below. In CS:GO, players aim primarily with a crosshair that is always on the center of the screen. There are, however, a handful of weapons that players can aim down sights with. The teams include five players with different roles, such as in-game leader, entry fragger, lurker, and AWPer, all which have their own focus points during rounds, and usually a coach. CS:GO was developed by Valve and Hidden Path Entertainment and released in 2012. It is the fourth game under the Counter-Strike title, after Counter-Strike 1.6, Counter-Strike: Condition Zero, and Counter-Strike: Source. Although the game offers multiple game modes, the competitive scene focuses on one game mode, where two opposing sides with five players each, Terrorists and Counter-Terrorists, either try to plant a bomb on one of the bomb sites or in turn try to prevent the bomb from being planted or try to defuse a planted bomb. The players can make in-game purchases to buy better equipment to give them an edge, such as armor, defuse kits or better weaponry by acquiring in-game money by winning rounds or killing enemy players. The teams' aim is to reach 16 round wins out of 30 to win a map, or to win enough extra rounds following a 15-15 stalemate. Depending on the competitive occasion, matches can be best-of-1, best-of-3 or best-of-5 maps.



FIGURE 1 Screenshot from the game Counter-Strike: Global Offensive on the map Dust II

In professional CS:GO, international line-ups communicating in English as a lingua franca (ELF) have seen success, yet players in the most successful teams tend to share the same first language. This could highlight the importance of being able to communicate in a precise manner and sharing information quickly, faster than when communicating in foreign language. As roster changes are fairly common and specific line-ups may have only a few months to make acquaintances before players are replaced with other players, there might not always be enough time to discover the true potential of a specific roster, communication-wise. In the following section we discuss language-related factors that may affect professional CS:GO players.

2.2 Language educational theory

In the 1990s, second language (L2) learning was viewed mostly as a mechanistic and individual cognitive process. In other words, L2 learning was viewed as separate from the surrounding social context. During the 2000s, however, more and more attention has been paid to the social and contextual perspectives in the field of *second language acquisition* (SLA) (Kurata 2011: 5). As learning taking place in non-educational digital games is explicitly informal, informal learning is an essential theme for this paper.

Informal learning contexts

Benson (2003: 1-2) presents learning contexts as a trichotomy: *formal*, *non-formal*, and *informal*. The formal simply refers to any learning happening within the confines of the curricula of educational institutions and programs, generally on the path from preschool to graduate studies. The non-formal, then, includes learning in contexts such as extra-curricular activities, driving school, and workshops; anything that is led by a teacher or instructor, but outside the curricula of institutionalized education. The informal is that which is neither formal nor non-formal. Furthermore, it is defined by the lack of authority; rather than being led by a teacher, learning in informal situations is governed by the individual themselves.

Adding another layer of trichotomies, Benson (2003: 3-5) suggests that the informal consists of three forms of learning: *self-directed*, *incidental*, and *socialization*. Self-directed learning refers to individuals or groups of individuals intentionally and consciously setting out to learn something. Incidental learning refers to a situation where learning is not the main objective of an activity, but rather takes place 'by accident', while the learner is immediately aware of the learning experience. Socialization, then, depicts a situation where the learning is not intentional, neither is the individual

aware of the learning at the time of the learning experience. It is not uncommon, however, for individuals to become aware of these experiences retrospectively.

From the perspective of the present study, socialization is the most important form of informal learning, as the purpose is to find out how playing with international teammates has shaped the interviewees' language and communication skills.

Online informal learning of English (OILE) includes multiple ways of acquiring language by making non-native users susceptible to English in different interfaces, such as listening to music with English lyrics, watching television shows and movies in English, or playing video games where English language is used (Sockett & Kusyk, 2015: 153). As Sockett and Kusyk (2015: 153) state, the aforementioned activities are repeatedly conducted without a specific objective to learn. The present study, thus, aims to reveal how this informal learning of English materializes in CS:GO.

Kurata (2011: 6) catalogues the possible benefits of informal interactions with native speakers as enhancing learners' sensitivity to the target culture, increasing their self-confidence, and heightening their willingness to use the L2. However, it would be reasonable to assume these benefits to apply also in informal interactions between L2 learners, who do not share a common native language.

Digital game-based learning

While *digital game-based language learning* (DGBLL) refers to all sorts of language learning taking place within the framework of games, Reinhardt and Sykes (2014) propose DGBLL to consist of three different sorts of learning: *game-enhanced*, *game-based*, and *game-informed*. Game-enhanced learning refers to using traditional, commercial games not originally intended for L2 learning and teaching; game-based to using games designed specifically for L2 learning; and game-informed to adopting game theory and mechanics in more traditional teaching. For the purposes of the present study, mostly game-enhanced learning is relevant, as CS:GO is a commercial, non-educational game. Moreover, game-based and game-informed learning tend to refer to formal learning contexts.

Reinhardt (2018: 1-2) mentions that in order for DGBLL to work, player-learners need to adopt a "learning to play" mindset. With this he refers to a situation where the player is totally focused on the game, and is only incidentally learning game rules, mechanics, narratives and language in order to be able to keep playing. Adopting this mindset allows teachers, game developers and learners themselves to tap into player-learners' gaming enthusiasm and turn that motivation into language learning.

DGBLL research so far has been mostly focused on adventure games, due to generally including an abundance of vocabulary and grammatical structures, and massively multiplayer online games (MMOs) for their potential for socio-collaborative L2 learning (Reinhardt 2018: 6-7). A third genre of games which has been greatly researched is actual educational games, which run the risk of players adopting a “play to learn” mindset rather than a “learn to play” one, causing the game to feel like a mandatory task and thus making the player-learner’s motivation plummet (Reinhardt 2018: 2). Games that are highly competitive and have poor in-game language content, such as CS:GO, have received far less attention or none at all. It is the purpose of this study to find out whether such an environment, where in-game language content is sparse, but rather replaced by collaborative communication, could still work as a DGBLL environment.

3 METHODS

3.1 The aim of the study and the research questions

As mentioned before, the average length of an esports athlete's career is quite short, and takes up a lot of years that are traditionally spent studying a vocation. Therefore, it is important to find out if playing in a professional organization teaches athletes valuable transferable skills that would be useful after the players' gaming careers. Such might include language and communication skills.

This study aims to find out how Finnish esports athletes' English language skills were affected after playing CS:GO in international lineups. It seeks to shed light on the subject by finding answers to the following research questions:

1. How have the interviewees improved their oral expression and comprehension skills playing in international lineups?
2. What sorts of language and/or communication skills are required to play in an international lineup?

3.2 The data

This section explains how data was gathered and why these methods were chosen for this study.

Interviews were chosen as the primary data gathering method for this study because it is interested in the athletes' experience and views on the subject. A questionnaire could also have been used, but that would have run the risks of an unreliable response rate and the answers being too shallow for proper analysis.

The participants were chosen with the following criteria: they had to be at least moderately successful in their field, Finnish, and have experience playing in international lineups. Invitations to participate in the study were sent to multiple professionals of different games, but most were either too busy with their tournament and training schedules to participate, or otherwise unavailable. The participants recruited were personal acquaintances of one of the researchers, which proved to be an invaluable resource, as without them this study could not have been made. Both of the participants were CS:GO players with experience playing in international lineups. Furthermore, the coincidence of both participants being professionals within the same game allowed for further specification of the research questions. At the time of the interview, the participants were 25 and 27, respectively, and both had started their competitive careers in their early twenties. Residents of Uusimaa region, both participants have studied in a vocational school after finishing their primary education.

The data for the present study was gathered with semi-structured interviews which included both close-ended and open-ended questions. However, open-ended questions were favored for their ability to allow the participants more freedom in their answers. It was expected that this would lead to a more informal discussion between the interviewer and the interviewees, thus allowing for a *narrative* to form. According to Hyvärinen, Nikander and Ruusuvaori (2010), a narrative is important to interviews, not only because it is what makes the data interesting, but because it emphasizes chronology, causation and subjective experience. The interview itself was based partly on the questionnaires used by Erkkilä (2017) and Autio (2018).

Each interviewee was interviewed once, although they were given the option to contact researchers in case something later came into their mind. In turn, they were asked whether it would be possible to email them again for possible follow-up questions. The interviews were carried out on a communication application called Zoom. It allows voice and video calls over the internet free of charge, both privately and in chat rooms. Setting up a multi-person voice call in the application would have been useful in the case of a group interview, but as individual interviews were chosen, only private calls were used. During the interviews, the speech was digitally recorded and saved in JYU's secure cloud storage and the original copies were deleted for security purposes. The aim of this remote way of interviewing was to provide the interviewees with the possibility of answering directly from the comfort of their home, with

equipment they were used to operating in day-to-day life. This was hoped to make the participants more focused on the subjects of the questions and more comfortable telling their points of view. Due to scheduling problems, participant B was not able to participate in a real-time voice interview and answered the questions of the interview base by email instead.

3.3 The method of analysis

The data gathered was transcribed into textual form and then analyzed using thematic analysis. The data was closely examined to find specific and reoccurring themes and motifs showing the effects of playing a game in English and in international line-ups on the players' English language skills. In addition, it was examined to find out which effects had been positive and which negative (i.e. they might have learned specific game-related vocabulary while learning improper grammar).

The thematic analysis of the transliterated data yielded five categories of themes at first. They were labelled as Benefits; Game-, Gaming-, Profession-Related; Accent, Ways of Speech; Requirements; Negative Experiences; and Other Languages. Subsequently, they were color labelled in the data material. However, these categories appeared quite shallow and directly derived from the interview questions themselves. Upon closer examination of the material, themes such as Speech Production, Lack of Experience, Attitude Towards School and Formal Versus Informal Language Learning started emerging. These were consequently marked in the material as comments on the side of the Word documents. The next chapter will explore the interviewees' views on these matters. The interviewees will be referred to as participants A and B to guarantee anonymity.

4 ANALYSIS

In order to see what the effect of professional e-sports has had on the interviewees, it was important to establish a “baseline”; the level of the interviewees’ language capabilities and attitudes before starting their careers. Both respondents rated their English language skills as “average” or “normal for a kid that age” by the ends of their respective comprehensive schools (around ages 15-16). Participant A even recalled watching unsubtitled TV series and reading books in English, which might suggest above average capabilities. Speech, however, he found difficult in those days. Participant B does not mention difficulties in producing speech, on the contrary he mentions how gaming had helped him: “It was more natural to talk a foreign language in school and especially in front of others when I had experience about it through games.” Player A characterizes himself as not having been an especially active student during his comprehensive school due to lack of interest. Despite this, he often mentions school education as a reference point in his answers.

Moreover, it would seem like the most influential factors behind the players’ improvement in linguistic skills has been the perpetual use of the language and perceived effortlessness of it. Using a foreign language in a pastime setting where the grasp of language is important but not in a central role turns the learning into a more motivating and lower-stakes situation where learning happens organically (Fashant et al 2020).

4.1 Perceived effects

Characteristics of ELF communication

As Piirainen-Marsh and Tainio (2009) state, repetition and imitation are key in language acquisition. This combined with the playful nature of video games, players are presented with platforms to showcase their language skills, however varied they may be (Piirainen-Marsh and Tainio, 2009). In several *Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games* (MMORPG), such as a game mentioned by participant A, RuneScape, the player must train a specific skill in-game by repeating a task for tens or even hundreds of times in order to level-up. For example, seeing a text telling the player “you caught a trout” every few seconds for an hour, the player begins to internalize the meaning of said sentence. While the mentioned example of repetition in video games seems to be a minor one, according to Piirainen-Marsh and Tainio (2009) no form of repetition is insignificant enough to prevent language acquisition. The claim for repetition’s importance in vocabulary learning is also made by Nation (2001, 74-76), who argues that words can be included in one’s own vocabulary only through thorough repetition of the words.

Additionally, part of the interest towards playing games resides in collaboration with other players, as participant A noted. Being able to communicate and interact with others while playing, in-game or by talking to others using a specific voice chat application for gaming over the Internet, enables players to share learning experiences, which might in turn help their motivation to learn the target language.

When asked about which language-related skills the professional e-sports players have needed to communicate with their teammates, auditory comprehension was emphasized by the participants as one of the most important areas. This emphasis on the importance of understanding what one hears was pointed out in multiple sections throughout the interview. Participant B noted that because their teammates were all English as Foreign Language (EFL) speakers, they had to speak slower at times and “less with an authentic English accent” to be understood correctly.

Another language-related skill that was brought up in the interview as an essential part of communicating was oral production, i.e. speaking. Participant A stated that the ability to express oneself in different ways does not only help you to communicate in the target language, but also bolsters the speaker’s oral skills in any language.

Both interviewees recognized that playing video games and language skills acquired while playing professionally in an international team line-up benefited them in several ways. For example, breaking down language barriers when traveling and socializing with people in English was mentioned by both respondents. Moreover, the ability to communicate in foreign languages was seen as a general asset in various everyday life scenarios. Furthermore, participant B stated their pronunciation of English words had in fact improved during their time in an international line-up.

However, using and learning English with other non-native speakers can lead to obtaining improper grammar, which in turn can lead to incorrect word order when producing sentences, as participant B stressed. Nevertheless, neither participant saw this as a definite negative and in turn stated that even native English speakers speak using improper grammar, thus still being understood. As Motschenbacher (2013: 193) states, speakers of EFL tend to use linguistic characteristics that are not bound to a specific language such as English, but are rather a consolidation of grammatical rules of those languages that the user is familiar with. In a situation where there are no native users of English present, such as in an international line-up of CS:GO players, some level of proficiency in English is still expected, yet it is not expected or even wanted to be on par with native speakers. Moreover, ELF promotes equality among the non-native speakers when there is no pressure to adopt the normative standards of the L1 users (Motschenbacher, 2013: 194).

When a team consists of ELF speakers, the players share a common background that, as Cogo and Dewey (2012: 115) state, unifies them as a group of ELF speakers whose lack of precise linguistic norms tethers them together. Moreover, being aware of communicating in a language that is not de facto the same language as that of native speakers of English, ELF speakers are likely to negotiate the meaning of English as they engage in communication with one another (Cogo and Dewey, 2012: 116). Furthermore, in instances of non-understanding, rather than misunderstanding, ELF users actively pursue ways of negotiating meaning to be mutually understood, whether it is pre-emptive strategies before the possible non-understanding happens or to correct a mishap that has already happened (Cogo and Dewey, 2012: 135). In addition, Cogo and Dewey (2012: 136) claim that the idea of ELF users' negotiating of the meaning of language being harmful or having negative effects on the speakers' efficiency are unjustifiable.

The difficulty in producing spoken language was shown in participant B's response when asked about the effects of fast-paced situations within the game on his ways of communicating with teammates. The respondent claims that in situations where many things are happening simultaneously, the importance of prioritizing what needs

to be said is essential in order to deliver a clear message to teammates, i.e. simplifying one's speech. The player, describing himself as someone who communicates a lot, also noted that he feels confident enough to communicate on his teammates' behalf "if they are in a difficult, busy situation and have no time to give out accurate information" on what is happening in the game.

In addition, both interviewees noted that other players' backgrounds influenced how their messages were perceived. For instance, participant A described the way Swedish players spoke as "softer and more gentle-type" and that players whose native language is part of the Slavic language group as "cruder-sounding". As the players are unable to see each others' facial expression due to playing in different locations over the internet or simply having to concentrate on the fast-paced game, it might be even harder to notice possible politeness alongside the vocal message. Moreover, the participant added that these language-specific ways of communicating can lead to misunderstandings and alteration of the contents of the message. As Baker (2015: 237) states, all instances of exchanging messages via communication include components that are affected by the speakers' culture and identity, for example participants, settings, and discourse. However, using English as a lingua franca, the participants are able to forge new, intercultural identities that do not belong to any distinct culture (Baker, 2015: 239). This could imply the fact that ELF users are driven to find common ground and ways of understanding their peers.

Effects of informal learning

What becomes crystallized in participant A's answers is how learning basic language skills in a formal situation and then applying those in one's free time greatly amplifies learning:

"If at school you study words and the language overall then... of course you train practice there too, a little, as much as you have time for in a couple of hours a week... then of course if you get to apply that which you have learned like, in your own everyday life, be it via playing or anywhere else, then it develops your language skills greatly."

This phenomenon can be seen as a dialogue between formal and informal learning; a base skill level is achieved in a formal learning environment, i.e. school, and taken to a next level in an informal learning environment, i.e. a hobby. The theme of informal learning emerges from interviewee B's answers as well. Whereas participant A describes the phenomenon as first learning at school and applying the skills to leisure time activities, participant B describes it in a reverse direction:

“Speaking English in games made studying easier, for example with presentations and speaking with others. It was more natural to speak a foreign language at school and especially in front of others when I had experience about it through games.”

Here, we see the informal learning affecting and supporting learning in a formal environment.

Interestingly, both players have had offers from organizations and professional CS:GO teams where the language used is not English or Finnish. In both cases, the language in question was Swedish, a language that neither of the interviewees claimed to be able to speak well. While participant B stated that the idea of playing in a Swedish-speaking team was exciting and he was eager to play there, the move never materialized. However, participant B added that he would have been willing to learn the language to be able to play. Participant A in turn accepted the offer to play in a Swedish-speaking team, where all his teammates were native speakers. He explained that “the communicating was English-oriented in the beginning and switched more and more towards Swedish as time progressed and in the end we communicated about 70 percent in Swedish, if not more, and the rest in English.” In addition, the respondent admitted that he did not feel as confident using Swedish as he did English, but the need to learn the language to be able to have the opportunity to progress in his career acted as a rather strong motive. Moreover, the player strongly felt that he was able to learn more Swedish during his time in the team than in school. In conclusion, it seems professional e-sports players’ motivation to learn new languages or languages perceived as hard to learn surges when the objective is to gain a place in top organizations. Furthermore, this kind of motivation-driven language learning may be effective over longer periods of time compared to traditional school surroundings.

Perhaps the single greatest difference in opinion between the respondents was evident when asked about whether the players have had or wish they had had any guidance or instruction regarding those specific language or communication skills that they have needed as professional e-sports players. While participant B simply stated that he has neither had nor wanted any help in the aforementioned skills, participant A noted that there is still very little training on how to become a professional e-sports player and how to handle everything that it includes:

“This form of sport is still so young... in football and in ice hockey you are coached from a very young age all the way until you stop playing... and if you are good you are prepared to face the fame and the pressure that comes with it, right? You are told about those things and taught how to behave with it and how to live with it. In our sport it is like you come straight out of your mom’s

basement to play in front of 30 000 people... that is the kind of thing where you could use some help.”

Participant A was adamant that he had not had the need for said coaching, although he recognized that many others could have benefited from it. The answer suggests that there indeed is a market and demand for comprehensive coaching regarding both the mental and lingual side of the professional e-sports scene. As gaming and video games have received recognition for being a compelling way of acquiring language skills (Piiirainen-Marsh and Tainio, 2009) it is indeed possible that there could be video game based language courses included in future curricula.

In addition, participant A stated that learning languages can only be beneficial; If a player is good enough, getting an opportunity to play at the very top of CS:GO might depend on the player’s language skills. As the interviewee noted:

“It is kind of a bummer if you have the chance to get your dream job, but your language skills are insufficient, the worst case scenario is that you lose the opportunity. Or at least makes the beginning more difficult than it should be.”

5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Having combined the initial material with relevant theory, certain themes were found that could have been further explored (such as atmosphere, attitudes and willingness to help and understand in team communication situations), but simply had to be glossed over for the sake of saving time. Despite the time restrictions caused by the pandemic, we feel like this paper managed to answer some questions about the elusive nature of professional esports as well as raise many more important questions to be researched in the future.

Although gaming has only in the recent years become more of an acceptable hobby and perceived as less of a fruitless ‘waste of time’, old prejudices are deep-rooted and still to some extent govern how gaming is seen in school and in society at large. While it is debatable whether DGBLL has a place in the formal classroom, perhaps the most fruitful way of harnessing youngsters’ gaming enthusiasm for the purpose of language learning is to make it an acceptable topic for discussion in the classroom. Moreover, Reinhardt (2018: 144) presents that in order to unleash the full potential game-enhanced learning, a teacher should provide their students with pedagogical supplements, such as tasks to contextualize vocabulary learned in the game. In terms of CS:GO, this could mean writing an article about a professional match, or recording one’s own commentary on one.

As participant A pointed out, for an esports athlete, it is quite impossible to foresee what sort of opportunities one will face in their career. Moreover, his sentiment about it being unfortunate if a dream job opportunity slips from one’s fingers due to lack of language skills suggests that, perhaps, for aspiring esports athletes, focusing on any one specific language might not be the optimal way into language learning. Perhaps, indeed, formal language teaching could focus more on general language learning competences; while teaching a language, also teaching *how to learn* a language. Such

competences would then make it easier for each individual to independently increase their mastery of different languages.

While Kurata (2011: 6-7) values informal learning contexts as particularly valuable educational assets, they also point out that truly authentic and meaningful relationships between L2 learners and native speakers (or foreign learners of the same L2) are not always readily available, which may create an immense dilemma for language teachers; how to provide each student with an equal opportunity for such interactions? According to Wegerif (1998: 46-48), successful online education (and quite possibly other activities as well) is contingent on the construction of a space of engagement, where the participants share interest in the present educational, social, and communicative activities. One could argue that, in the case of gaming, co-operative activities should be included in that list. At some level, be it professional or leisure gaming, online gaming appears to fulfil all of these prerequisites with ease. Moreover, online gaming is a rather accessible activity, and foreign gaming companions are always available. We therefore propose that online gaming communities are valuable, and underutilized, educational assets.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 INTERVIEW BASE

Haastattelurunko

1. Mikä oli englannin kielen arvosanasi peruskoulun päättötodistuksessa?
2. Miten itse arvioit oman englannin kielen taitosi?
3. Mitä ja minkä tyyppisiä videopelejä olet pelannut?
4. Minkä ikäisenä aloitit englanninkielisten videopelien pelaamisen?
5. Minkä verran olet pelannut videopelejä elämäsi eri vaiheissa (tuntia/viikossa, tuntia/kerta)?
6. Koetko englanninkielisten videopelien pelaamisen vaikuttaneen omaan kielitaitoosi? Miten?
7. Mitä kielellisiä taitoja olet oppinut videopeleistä?
8. Koitko englanninkielisten videopelien auttaneen omaa koulumenestystä englannin kielen opinnoissa?
9. Mitä englannin kielen taitoja olet tarvinnut pelatessasi?
10. Minkä ikäisenä aloitit pelaamaan Counter-Strikea?
11. Minkä ikäisenä aloitit pelaamaan Counter-Strikea ammatiksesi?
12. Minkä ikäisenä siirryit pelaamaan joukkueeseen, jossa et voinut käyttää äidinkieltäsi?
13. Kauanko olet pelannut joukkueessa/joukkueissa, jossa olet käyttänyt englantia kommunikointiin joukkutovereidesi kanssa?
14. Mitä kielellisiä taitoja olet tarvinnut kommunikoidessasi joukkuetovereidesi kanssa?
15. Miten edellä mainittu kommunikointi on vaikuttanut englannin kielen taitoosi?
16. Koetko videopeleistä ja ammatistasi opitun kielitaidon hyödyttävän sinua pelimaailman ulkopuolella?
17. Millainen viestijä olet joukkueessasi?

18. Vaikuttavatko muuttuvat tilanteet tapaasi viestiä joukkueessa?
19. Miten suomalaispelaajien tapa viestiä eroaa kokemuksesi mukaan muunmaalaisten pelaajien tavoista?
20. Oletko saanut tarjouksia joukkueista, joissa yhteinen kieli olisi ollut muu kuin englanti/suomi? Minkälaisia ajatuksia se sinussa herätti?
21. Oletko saanut tai toivotko saaneesi opastusta tai koulutusta erityisesti niihin kielitaidon tai viestinnän tarpeisiin, joita ammattilaispelaajana tarvitset?