

Roleplaying at Home and Abroad: Multiliteracy for Playful Adults

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Abstract

Schneider (2023) suggests that tabletop roleplaying games (TRPGs) offer a platform for learners to practice diverse social and communicative strategies without real-world consequences. This paper aims to explore the integration of TRPGs, connected to multiliteracy pedagogy, into lifelong language learning and its potential benefits. Utilizing a phenomenological framework involving dialogues, interviews, and reflections, the study engages participants—lifelong English learners and native speakers from various backgrounds, all with over 20 years of TRPG experience.

The project encompasses two aspects: first, it delves into the experiences of L2 English learners and non-native English educators who employ TRPGs to enhance their speaking skills. Second, it investigates the role of game leaders in guiding L2 players through problem-solving scenarios and culturally relevant knowledge, thus promoting skills beyond language acquisition. An additional micro experiment involving educators as novice players yields thematic parallels to seasoned gamers' experiences.

By applying phenomenology, this research addresses two key questions: 1. How does TRPG participation enhance motivation, autonomy, and fluency for lifelong language learners? 2. How does TRPG involvement contribute to the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills among language learners (LL) and second language (L2) learners? The outcomes will inform discussions and offer recommendations for learners seeking to improve these facets of language learning.

Keywords: *agency, autonomy, critical thinking, fluency, multiliteracies, motiva-*

tion, problem-solving, safe spaces, tabletop roleplaying games.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

According to Schneider (2023), tabletop roleplaying games (TRPGs) simulate meaningful encounters of human behavior and interaction that allow learners to try out different social and communicative strategies without facing any real-world penalties. As an 18-year-old international student attending a college in New York State, I embarked on a transformative four-year journey in a foreign country. This experience involved using my L4 in a culture that had previously been familiar to me only through media such as TV, film, and music.

During my time in the United States, I had a memorable encounter when I ventured alone to a nearby university campus one evening. I was approached by an older individual who stood at the top of a staircase and asked, “Would you like to participate in a game?” Initially, this proposition raised alarm bells in my mind, and I imagined a potentially dangerous situation unfolding. However, upon closer observation, I noticed the person’s distinctive top hat and Dracula cape. This encounter marked my introduction to live-action role-playing (LARPing), specifically “Vampire: The Masquerade.”

Subsequently, I returned to the campus for my first LARPing session and was delighted to meet numerous individuals, each portraying a unique character. Among them, I encountered a game leader overseeing a (TRPG) centered on werewolves. While I continued to engage in both LARPing and TRPGs, I found the latter to be a better fit for me. TRPGs provided the comfort of a shared mental space, minimizing real-world consequences. Sitting face-to-face with fellow participants at the same table put me at ease, in contrast to the initial stress of engaging with only one or two players in a distant corner without a formal introduction.

The university campus buzzed with activity, hosting various game leaders and players engaged in different role-playing games, including “Star Wars,” “Shadow Run,” and “Dungeons and Dragons.” Embracing our identities as enthusiasts, we acknowledged our status as “nerds,” content to exist outside the

mainstream college social scene.

Amidst my academic pursuits and part-time employment, I juggled multiple gaming commitments, forming lasting connections and friendships that have endured into 2023. As an international student and non-native speaker (NNS) of English, engaging in these games provided invaluable opportunities to communicate fluently and employ culturally appropriate American English. These skills proved essential, allowing me to speak up in various contexts, collaborate effectively, and assert myself when necessary.

Participating in these games equipped me with the confidence to communicate not only with professors but also in situations where my racial background was a factor, such as interactions with officials who may have subjected me to profiling. Furthermore, they honed my ability to navigate potentially precarious situations that can arise, even in small towns, particularly as a woman.

While fantasy and science-fiction games exist within the realm of fiction, it is the real-world interactions and opportunities to make choices, face consequences, contribute meaningfully, and engage in conversations that facilitated my transformation. I evolved from a timid and apprehensive international student into a self-assured, self-advocating, and fluent NNS of English.

To this day, I continue to regularly participate in “Dungeons and Dragons.” I have observed that each age group within the gaming community possesses its unique terminology, culturally influenced experiences, and utilization of social cues. As an educator, I recognize the pedagogical benefits that TRPGs offer my students. Therefore, sharing my entourage’s TRPG experiences with adult learners and life-long learners language learners like myself can nurture and promote self-efficacy, agency, and fluency. With this in mind, I have gone back and gathered a few game leaders and players from my past and present to take a trip down memory lane. Our stories support the use of TRPGs as practice tools for not only language but also 21st-century skills. The vivid success stories of both NNS and NS of English on their learning journeys serve to inspire others who look for social and non-text book-based ways to pick up or maintain their skills.

As learners come in all shapes, sizes, and ages, so do TRPGs. Though my preferred genres are dark and high fantasy, horror, and science fiction there are plenty of options for more down-to-earth games, such as *Where is Alice?* Here, in a modern setting, players communicate and create a story by sending text messages to each other while trying to solve a missing person case. Dice, figurines, and maps are not used here, the focus being on roleplay and the theater-of-the mind. The same pedagogical benefits are to be received here. For example, language practice through text writing includes the active use of verbs, adjectives, and adverbs to describe scenes, give reasons, and state opinions.

1.2 Roles, rolls, and mechanics

Tabletop role-playing games involve roleplaying, problem-solving through teamwork, and mathematical elements. While the concept of roleplay is akin to language practice activities using “student A” and “student B,” TRPGs diverge significantly. In TRPGs, participants immerse themselves in distinct roles, each with specific backgrounds, within fantastical settings governed by unique rules—social, geographical, physical, and scientific. Unlike scripted language activities, TRPGs feature unscripted dialogues co-created live with fellow participants (“students C, D, etc.”). Players independently make choices, expressing thoughts, opinions, and ideas influenced by their characters’ backgrounds.

Freedom of expression is restricted only by character limitations established during creation; for example, a charismatic character engages in dialogue differently than a reticent, powerful wizard. These games aim to overcome challenges, defeat adversaries, accomplish missions, and pursue individual objectives through collaborative efforts.

Mathematics plays a role in ensuring fair gameplay mechanics. Fortunately, TRPGs simplify mathematical calculations by utilizing dice to determine outcomes. Players roll various types of dice, and the results align with game rules and the game leader’s judgement.

TRPGs typically feature a game leader and players, although player-only and single-player formats are gaining popularity. The game leader assumes vari-

ous titles, such as Dungeon Master, Game Master, or Story Teller, depending on the game system. Their role is demanding, involving the portrayal of non-player characters (NPCs), introduction of challenges, and crafting of immersive worlds. Preparation is essential for game leaders, as they are responsible for creating a dynamic and engaging environment.

A skilled Dungeon Master (DM), see Figure 1 below, prioritizes and respects player agency, a crucial aspect that parallels language learning. Player choices shape the narrative, with the DM facilitating consequences. In the TRPG ecosystem, the story evolves collaboratively between players and the DM, enriching the experience for all participants.

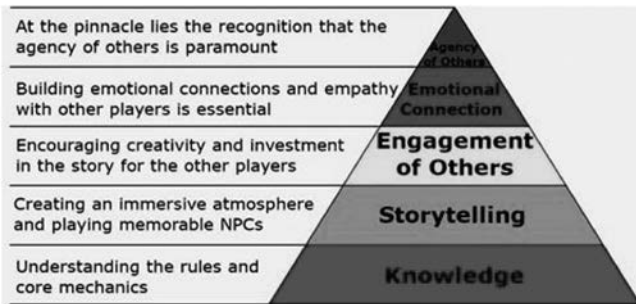


Figure 1. Skills Needed to Play as a Dungeon Master

The DM plays a pivotal role in fostering connections among characters, players, NPCs, and the game world. Such bonds are essential for informed decision-making and the development of teamwork. Encouraging players' creativity and personal investment in the narrative maintains their engagement and commitment. This engagement extends to the consequences of their choices. Additionally, DMs can enhance player immersion through interactive narrative strategies, drawing inspiration from their favorite games, films, novels, and comics. Understanding the rules and core mechanics of the chosen game system is fundamental. While DMs may be perceived as all-knowing, collaboration with players who are well-versed in the rules often occurs.

Dungeons and Dragons (D&D), a prominent example, is typically played

biweekly or monthly, offering a sense of familiarity and security to participants. Players of all ages engage in D&D sessions in various settings, including homes, online platforms, gaming shops, and campus study areas. The duration of gaming sessions varies, spanning from a brief 3-hour session to continuous play over several years. Players typically receive invitations to join a campaign from the DM or fellow players. These invitations may be extended in person, through gaming shops, or via online platforms.

The motivations for accepting invitations to participate in tabletop role-playing games can be categorized into three primary factors. Firstly, TRPGs offer a low-threshold social activity that aligns with the interests of prospective players, many of whom already enjoy board games, video games, and reading within the genres of high fantasy, dark fantasy, horror, and science fiction. Secondly, the decision to participate can be linked to the psychological need for relatedness, as articulated by Coe (2017) through Reeve's (2005) concept of *being recruited*. This need underscores the human desire for connection and interpersonal relationships.

According to Chen and Lai (2020),

More than 40 million people play D&D around the world and sales have grown by double-digit percentages for the last five consecutive years. No longer a fringe hobby, D&D features prominently in mainstream and celebrity culture (call it the "Stranger Things" bump).

A concise overview of D&D, see Figure 2, reveals its inception in 1974, its notable prominence during the 1980s, and its resurgence in the 1990s alongside the emergence of other tabletop role-playing games, including entries in The World of Darkness franchise. In the 2020s, D&D and TRPGs made a significant transition to YouTube and social media platforms.

Chen and Lai's (2020) research indicates a noteworthy development in the increased participation of female players, with the proportion having risen from 20 percent in 2012 to the current 40 percent. Furthermore, the majority of TRPG enthusiasts are aged 25 or older. The growing popularity of D&D-

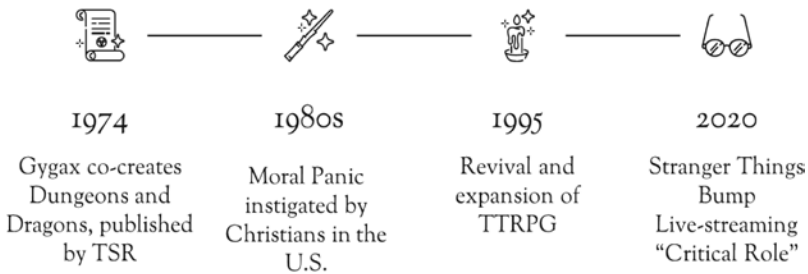


Figure 2. Short History of Dungeons and Dragons

themed television series like “Stranger Things” and films such as “Honor Among Thieves” continues to contribute to the expanding player community. Live streaming has played a pivotal role in broadening D&D’s audience.

A new category of D&D influencers has emerged, exemplified by “Girls, Guts, Glory,” an all-female D&D group actively engaged in streaming and cosplay at conventions. Similarly, “Critical Role,” a collective of professional voice actors, see Figure 3, has amassed a vast following, with over half a million fans tuning in to their D&D streams. Their content, specifically videos from the 2018 campaign, garnered a remarkable 160 million views on YouTube. Furthermore, Critical Role’s adventures have been adapted into an Amazon Prime Original animated series titled “The Legend of Vox Machina,” with two seasons released up to 2023.



Figure 3. Critical Role Voice Actors

1.3 Literature review

Cook et al. (2017), drawing from Phillips (1995), Quijano-Cruz (2007), and Zalka (2012), highlight the historical utilization of role-playing and simulation predominantly within English as a Foreign Language and second language classes. However, contemporary classroom role plays and post-tertiary self-study settings often lack authentic student input and the freedom to set utterance goals, thus missing opportunities for autonomy and the application of multiliteracies. Multiliteracy is a concept based on:

the assumption that individuals ‘read’ the world and make sense of information by means other than traditional reading and writing. These multiliteracies include linguistic, visual, audio, spatial, and gestural ways of meaning-making. Central to the concept of multiple literacies is the belief that individuals in modern society need to learn how to construct knowledge from multiple sources and modes of representation. (UNESCO-IBE 1995-2023).

Multimodality, closely associated with the New London Group’s pedagogy of multiliteracies, employs various modes and their specific functions to convey messages to distinct audiences, accommodating the expanding modes facilitated by modern communication technologies (Kress, 2010). See Figure 4

As Torress-Rodriguez (2022) affirms, TRPGs are a form of storytelling activity akin to classroom role-play but distinguishable by their intrinsic multimodality. TRPGs allow unscripted learner-player input and output, significantly impacting motivation, engagement, and language usage. These games rely heavily on linguistic, tactile, and gestural modes, encompassing verbal communication, physical interactions like rolling dice, and the use of figurines, pictures, and maps to enhance spatial comprehension. Additionally, audio elements such as music, special effects, and voice modulation contribute to immersive storytelling, as noted by Woods (2016), fostering agency, emotional engagement, and socialization skills among players, thereby supporting language production and practice.

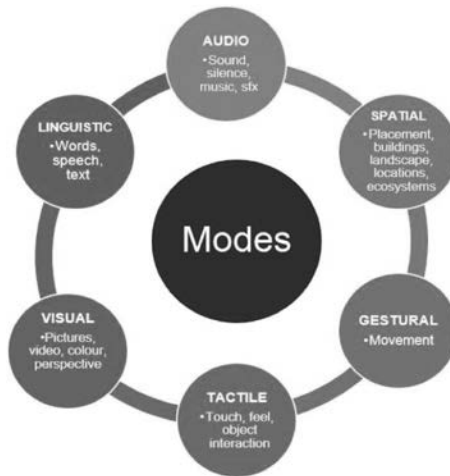


Figure 4. The New London Group 2009-modes

Despite the potential educational benefits, some educators, as noted by Cook et al. (2017), are deterred by the perceived “nerd culture.” Those who venture into TRPGs may struggle to integrate them into existing curricula (Hsu and Wang, 2010). While a few educators incorporate TRPGs into writing activities (Cook et al., 2017), their use as a platform for authentic speaking practice and collaborative meaning creation remains limited. TRPGs closely align with the principles of multiliteracy and multimodal pedagogy, enabling learners to apply experiential, conceptual, or critical knowledge in an immersive, co-created, fictional world. “Learners actively learn by applying experiential, conceptual or critical knowledge in the real world, learners act based on knowing something of the world, and learning something new from the experience of acting (Cope & Kalantzis, 2015).”

The incorporation of TRPGs in tertiary education for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners is a subject of limited discussion. Concerns about the perceived unproductivity of gaming endure, yet the demand for pedagogical approaches fostering critical thinking and learner autonomy is growing (da Rocha, 2018). TRPGs offer a safe space for learners to express ideas, connect with peers through shared creative experiences, and boost their confidence in

spoken language proficiency. Additionally, TRPGs serve as motivators for students, providing a platform for self-expression, decision-making, and the practical application of knowledge and skills in real-world contexts. Independent learning by adult L2 learners, influenced by their diverse cultural backgrounds, offers genuine opportunities for communication and language production among L2 peers and native speakers. Nevertheless, the scarcity of TRPGs in curricula persists due to the absence of long-term effectiveness measures. Demonstrating the tool's efficacy in language retention and active use could position TRPGs as an immersive educational tool that blends multiliteracy, 21st-century skills, and foreign language education. To investigate these long-term effects, the researcher focuses on the experiences of long-term TRPG players and game leaders to assess their impact on learning and personal growth.

2 Methodology

2.1 Research questions

This study aims to investigate the positive outcomes of integrating TRPGs into independent adult language learning. Six adult players and game leaders from four different countries were interviewed as part of this qualitative research. The researcher was actively engaged as a participant-researcher during interviews, seeking answers to two key questions:

1. How does TRPG participation enhance motivation, autonomy, and fluency among lifelong language learners?
2. How does TRPG involvement contribute to the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills among language learners (LL) and second language (L2) learners?

2.2 Participants

Six participants were purposefully selected from the researcher's gaming network, and data saturation determined the sample size. All participants possess over twenty-five years of experience in playing and/or leading TRPGs. Interviews were conducted one-on-one, except for a couple who were interviewed

together. The participants' age ranged from thirties to forties, with most beginning their gaming journey in their teens or twenties. Of the participants, one identified as female, while five identified as males. Among them, Participant 1 and Participant 4 were native English speakers, while Participants 2, 3, and 6 were fluent non-native English speakers. Geographically, participants represented diverse origins, including Curaçao, The Netherlands, and the United States, with gameplay locations spanning Japan, The Netherlands, and the United States. See Figure 5. The primary gateway TRPGs for this group were *Dungeons and Dragons*, *Vampire: The Masquerade*, and *Werewolf: The Apocalypse*.



Figure 5. Participant countries and playing locations

2.3 Adult learner interviews/discussions

Qualitative data collection involved semi-structured Zoom interviews lasting 45 to 90 minutes, adopting a phenomenological approach. The study sought to explore the application of multiliteracies in independent learning experiences over the years, focusing on question-and-answer sessions and recollections of past experiences. The researcher actively participated in discussions that arose from interview questions, often leading to specific examples illustrating the transformative effects on 21st-century skills and language proficiency. Emergent themes fell into seven categories: bonding through enjoyment, communication, enhanced confidence, critical thinking, language learning/utilization, problem-solving, and the provision of safe learning environments.

2.4 Experiment with TRPG and English teachers as amateur players

While TRPGs offer significant educational potential, there is a reluctance among adult learners and educators to adopt them in both classroom and extra-curricular settings. This hesitancy may stem from historical stigmas associated with games like Dungeons and Dragons, which were viewed as controversial or nerdy in previous decades. However, the acceptance of nerd culture in contemporary pop culture may render TRPGs more appealing to students, teachers, and adult learners. To bridge this knowledge gap, the researcher organized a workshop that offered a simplified 45-minute TRPG experience, designed to help educators and learners grasp gaming mechanics and demonstrate the benefits of TRPGs in language learning and skill development. The workshop participants included native and non-native English speakers, spanning a range of ages.

3 Personal stories and experiences

3.1 A life-long journey

Seven key aspects of TRPGs were identified during interviews and discussions with participants, illustrating their suitability for language learning, effective communication, and the development of 21st-century skills:

Bonding over fun: quick and lasting

Participant 1, an NS Forever DM stated that TRPG requires vulnerability from both players and DMs. According to them, “What happens as a player at a table, is you’ve come together to have this special experience. You get past the awkwardness because you know who you each are as a player and as a character. It’s easy to bond after that because you shared that moment.” Essentially, though the events are not real, the emotions that arise from participating are very much so. Daniau (2016) explains that a player’s involvement depends mostly on her own experience, interests, attitudes, goals, abilities, and current mood. Building bonds is essential to group learning. The classroom is no different. Students who bond and share personal details and experiences during the learning process are more willing to perform language tasks in front of their classmates with a lesser degree of loss of face. This may take a whole semester.

However, the inclusion of TRPGs can speed up this process due to the intermediate mask or character that is used as a proxy in social communication and is designed to take all the social hits or (imagined) negative commentary. The space between the self and the persona created slowly disappears as players get to know players.

Safe spaces: Trial and error

Participant 2, an NS player, states that the gaming table and group one plays with create a safe space for exploring emotions and boundaries. Participant 2 further posited that it is a “safe way to handle moral quandaries, in a safe space. So, you can gain insight. And I think you can gain insight into your kind of mind that way.” Children do this naturally through play. Adults no longer have a safe space to try out smaller or bigger decision-making in their circumstances. As Daniau (2016) states “Players partly reveal themselves through their play, the authenticity of their engagement is essential to allow them to explore their journey through an inter-subjective perspective.” In other words, having a character make similar decisions in simulated circumstances can be freeing as the consequences of these decisions do not immediately affect daily life. Watching action and consequence play out tests your ability to handle these sets of events in real life.

Communication: conflict resolution and social cues

Participants 3 and 6, both NNS players and DMs, found that “most of the game is based on dialogue.” Dialogue between players in the now, but also between characters navigating a different world, is creative, authentic, and time-sensitive. Generally, the language used in-game is the language used for what would be called off-task conversation in a classroom environment. The reason for this is straightforward; it’s too much effort and time to translate slowing down the game. Peer support is a faster solution to not being able to find a word in L2. Participant 6 further elaborates on how this helps in attaining life and language skills, “Both in-and out-of-game misunderstandings are an opportunity to sharpen your communication skills as a person in a hopefully safe space.”

Problem-solving: sharing your ideas

Participant 6 continued to state that TRPG-play creates constant opportunities “to make choices that you would never make in real life, and be held accountable for those choices.” Problem-solving is about making choices and applying knowledge, and resources. All three of these elements originate in players and their characters and are shared out loud through communication in the language of choice. Another good example of problem-solving is the heavy use of puzzles by the DM in-game.

Participant 1 thought “active puzzles are particularly good at getting players as a whole communicating amongst each other to figure it out. It forces problem-solving in a new way because it’s easy to problem-solve in your language.” Puzzles in L1 are fun but in L2 they pose a specific challenge. Communication here depends on clearly presenting your ideas and reasoning. However, the most important aspect of solving puzzles is the acknowledgment of everyone’s input; the wizard generally knows more about magic items than the fighter!

Participant 5 as a lifelong learner of English recalled his early days of studying English and using the language both abroad and at home. He spoke about the need for different English in various situations. This includes vocabulary and register. “It’s the same thing with these TRPGs. if you go on a holiday in England, you use different English, than in a fantasy world where people are trying to kill you.” According to this participant, using a variety of registers, and practicing your ability to speak out your ideas are important to communication in English. “TRPGs stimulated me to work on my English, to think better and properly find solutions to problems in game. You can have ideas, but you need to speak them out.”

Critical thinking: consequences and morality

Participant 4 discussed consequences and morality in problem-solving. Just because you can do something, should you? “If you can find some way of solving a battle scenario creatively, it may completely negate the scenario.” In other words, your party or team’s actions may fly in the face of the general goals and

mission parameters and may destroy what you are trying to protect. Should you do it anyway to save your own life? The participant explains as follows “If you had to fight your way through an army, but you survey the land, notice the army is downriver from a dam, and you just break the dam. And you might wipe out the entire army. You know, you also have to think about all the consequences of that, because there might be a village down the way as well.”

Confidence: In- and out-of-game

Participants 1 and 2’s experiences as DM included cases of players growing through gameplay into more independent and confident individuals in the real world. Participant 2 recounts, regarding practicing real-life skills in-game, “You have to just make decisions and deal with the consequences without knowing in advance if it’s gonna turn out wrong or if it’s gonna give you the expected result.” In the case of Geralt, an ex-coworker with whom they had been playing for a few years, they saw him grow from an insecure individual to a confident person able to make decisions decisively and stick to them. Geralt had become more open to making contact with people as well. At his job, he went from just working on the floor to being a team leader. According to Geralt’s DM, this was “because he was no longer afraid of just stepping up and making decisions when it’s called for.”

Participant 1 shared the case of the quiet Japanese English learner coming to life during an in-class English-medium TRPG session. She was his student, a very quiet girl who loves role-playing games and plays D&D online with friends. “During the game in class, she was much more talkative with me and, and with her classmates. She was able to explain how these sorts of games work. She’s like, ‘*Oh, I can help you with this. You can do anything.*’” The student even stayed after class a few minutes before her bus and was chatting with her teacher in English, which she didn’t usually do. Confidence, motivation, and the availability of safe spaces worked in tandem in this case to get a student whose interests were activated to the degree that she felt confident to share her knowledge with her classmates openly.

Language learning/Use: Peer support and practice

Participant 2 offered another case in which peer support featured in language learning. This DM's players are all NNS of English and live in the Netherlands. A shy friend and player had a lot of difficulty speaking English when they first met. It was so bad that he used to be embarrassed and refused to speak English in public. Shy learners usually find that playing a character can dispel anxiety in speaking as the self is hidden. "His English has been improving," his DM said, and "he's been getting a lot more confidence because of the game's safe environment." The other players in his group and his DM assisted him when he didn't know a word. No one made fun of him. Asking for clarification becomes second nature as it can be done by both the player in a sidebar and as the character in-game. Participant 6 raised the point of pin-point language practice opportunities for NNS within gameplay. As an NNS speaker of English herself taking on the role of DM, she recalled having to come up with a lot of adjectives to make the setting vivid. She found that to be a challenge. Similarly, she explained that as a player describing your action is very important. "Do you *bust* down the door? Or do you *carefully open* the door?" Each of those sentences has a different consequence within the game. Input, repetition, and production of words used for real-time actions make for authentic learning.

These seven aspects intertwine to create a robust and authentic learning environment within TRPGs. They promote the development of communication skills, problem-solving abilities, critical thinking, confidence, and mutual support among language learners by working through imaginary world tasks.

3.2 Educators comment on their experiences as first-time TRPG players

Participants offered feedback on their trial session. Most participants found the gameplay fun and highly interactive. While initial surprise regarding the standard session duration was noted (3-4 hours), participants later thought it reasonable.

The educators, who were first-time players, indicated that the experience revealed built-in language practice opportunities. In their experience, the moti-

vational aspect of autonomy in decision-making, the importance of collaboration and communication for problem-solving, and the significance of critical thinking were all prominently featured in TRPGs. This aligns with Bawa's assertion (2022) that TRPGs offer opportunities for adult learning by utilizing prior knowledge and critical thinking. Each session typically concludes with a summary and debrief, allowing players to transition out of character and discuss their emotions and thoughts on in-game decisions. This practice enhances language learning, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills. Debriefing is followed by a recap before subsequent sessions, enabling players to revisit previous decisions, express changes in opinion, and plan for upcoming gameplay. In line with Cook et al. (2017), peers' comments serve as reminders and reinforce learning even when players struggle to recall the story.

From the perspective of the DM, the researcher observed that novice players closely followed a team-building pattern despite the brief duration of play. Bowman (2010) highlights that RPGs promote archetype enactment and social cooperation to achieve goals, emphasizing the need for group cohesion among players and characters. The participants swiftly transitioned from strangers to a cohesive team, collaborating on puzzles and facing dangers together. Their collective decision-making process and acceptance of consequences further demonstrated the value of teamwork and cooperation.

4 Results and recommendations

The research findings indicate that TRPGs offer opportunities to enhance motivation, autonomy, fluency, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills among language learners. Four key game procedures within TRPGs, namely *choice*, *puzzles*, *dialogue*, and *descriptions*, facilitate the latter. Figure 6 illustrates the benefits of TRPGs for lifelong and language learners, with particular emphasis on three intersecting areas.

The intersection of *puzzles* and *autonomy/motivation* highlights how game procedures foster group learning by necessitating knowledge and insight sharing among players to make informed choices and solve puzzles. This intrinsic motivation to speak, often lacking in adult English classrooms, aligns with

Marsh’s (2018) emphasis on nurturing individual intrinsic motivation for improved language learning.

Consistent use of descriptive language, which involves describing settings, actions, and character behaviors, contributes to fluency development. Furthermore, the intersection of *critical thinking* and *puzzles* underscores the importance of player dialogue in comparing perspectives, reaching a consensus and fostering critical thinking skills.

	Autonomy/ motivation	Critical Thinking	Fluency
Choices	Take action, move the story forward	Consider personal and environmental consequences	Use SVO effectively
Puzzles	Share knowledge	Compare POV	Debate correct solution
Dialogue	Learn from players and DM	Help party make the right choice	Use correct register
Descriptions	Overcome challenges	Help others visualize	Describe setting, actions and characters

Figure 6. How TRPGs can help LLL learners

One way to implement TRPGs in the language learning classroom is to have regular 45-minute to 90-minute sessions to help students use the language they learn during the semester. Age groups that have been piloted range from middle school to university. Logistics vary per class or group. See Figure 7. A large university language classroom may consist of 30-40 students. In this case, it is necessary to have several groups of students go on their adventures simultaneously. One student, the designated DM, would run the game, while a group of 3-4 students are players. A different DM could run a game every session. In organizing various student-led groups, proper pre-game instruction is paramount. As Phillips (1994, p.12) explains, “in order to introduce the basic concepts of RPGs to the students,” he brings in “example games, dice, adventures, and literature based upon various games.” In addition, a *session zero* explaining the class adventure setting and allowing for character creation is

necessary. On the other hand a smaller class size of 3-6 students, for example in a seminar or elective course would allow for the teacher to take on the role of the DM for a single group of players. In his discussion of transformative role-playing, Daniau (2018, p. 428) points out the benefits of a smaller group size as “an optimal size for the quality of interactions and the emergence of a group’s imagination.” Other learning environment in which regular sessions could be held, include on-campus English practice groups or clubs. These could be fully student-led or teacher-led.

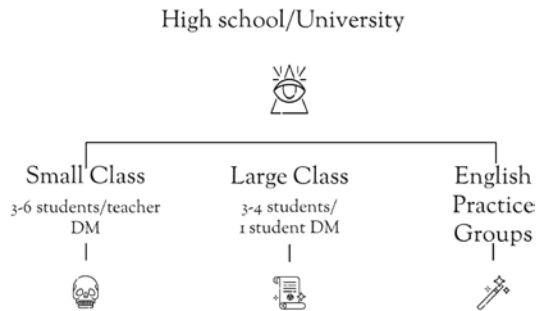


Figure 7. TRPG in the language classroom

Similar to Cook et al.’s (2017) results, teachers trying out gaming as a player at the aforementioned workshop became interested in implementing sessions in class. This may “require a level of experience playing and watching roleplaying games being implemented in classrooms.” YouTube offers many options for watching live games run and played by professional voice actors and regular TRPG groups. Insights into the tasks of the DM and unexpected developments with players here serve as learning examples for incumbent teacher-DMs. Options for gaining personal experience as a player include online TRPG groups that can be joined for free or for a fee. Recommended places to find online calls for players are *Meet up.com*, *Roll20*, *Pathfinder* groups, and Facebook groups such as *Women+ of Dungeons and Dragons*.

5 Discussion

TRPGs foster a positive group dynamic, promoting willingness among players to communicate with others in a safe and supportive environment. This authentic communicative setting offers valuable learning experiences for lifelong language learners, enabling them to practice and receive peer feedback, thereby enhancing their confidence. Consequently, the researcher's interactions with interview participants and observations from the experiment lead her to advocate for the integration of TRPGs into language learning as they seem to yield consistent, immediate, and effective results.

6 Conclusions

This paper outlines learning benefits and modes derived from experienced gamers' insights, validated by the experiences of novice players. Common themes revolve around adaptability in response to dynamic fictional environments and effective communication methods. Peer support, immediate situational feedback, and regular practice contribute positively to learner-player confidence. The resultant increase in fluency, autonomy, and motivation is exponential and finds support in post-session debriefs and pre-session summaries. The augmentation of in-class speaking time facilitates the application of critical thinking and problem-solving skills within a learner-centered environment. These benefits aid in reducing performance anxiety in foreign language speaking, increasing participation, utilization of diverse verb tenses and active listening. TRPGs can serve as a valuable tool for providing learners with supervised speaking practice among peers, thereby positively influencing their behavior beyond the confines of the roleplaying group.

7 Limitations and final remarks

This study aimed to investigate, through discussions with experienced learner-players, the potential of TRPGs to enhance motivation, autonomy, fluency, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills. Generalizing from personal experiences can be challenging, especially when findings are derived from small sample sizes. Therefore, it is essential to exercise caution in making broad

claims about the entire language-learning population based on such limited data. Nevertheless, the global popularity of TRPGs, the consistent rate of engagement demonstrated in the workshop experiment, and the existence of enduring campaigns allude to the potential benefits that TRPGs may offer to life-long language learners.

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