Chapter 8
Use of Interactive Online Games in Teaching English as a Foreign Language

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ABSTRACT
The purpose of this study is to examine how the use of multiplayer English teaching online games influences students’ self-efficacy and their English performance scores. The participants of this study were sixty elementary students in Korea. They were selected based on the scores on the social-affective value test and then divided into two groups—high and low groups. During five weeks, the participants played with an English teaching online game two hours per week. The students’ self-efficacy scores were collected before and after they played the online game. Their English performance scores on the online game were collected to compare the two groups. The findings indicated that their online game experience increased self-efficacy. Interestingly, students with low social-affective values showed more improvement than those with high social-affective values in both self-efficacy and performance scores.

INTRODUCTION
Today many young people spend much of their time on computers and online games. With this trend, online gaming has attracted the interest of educators and researchers (Godwin-Jones, 2005). A growing number of educators and researchers believe that the use of online games can induce student motivation and engagement in their learning process. For instance, online games promote students’ socializing skills (Shimai, Masuda & Kishimoto, 1990; Steinkuehler, 2006) and language skills (Meskill, 2005) through collaboration among multi-players. In spite of its popularity among young learners, there is little empirical study done on the educational benefits of online games in language education.

One of the difficulties that English as a foreign language (EFL) learners face is limited opportunities to use and practice the target language. Interaction and communication is a key requirement for learning a language. In an EFL setting, lack of interaction often fails to promote student engage-
ment and their self-efficacy in communicating in the target language. As multiplayer games promote learners’ collaboration and their application of learned knowledge in real-world settings (DeKanter, 2004), the use of interactive games will benefit EFL students in learning English. There is a need for examining whether the use of interactive online games improves EFL students’ self-efficacy and their English skills and whether the experience of online games relates to students’ social-affective values.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the current study, I define social-affective values as self-esteem, self-efficacy, risk taking, anxiety and extroversion/introversion. The interactive online game used in this study is one of the English teaching online games where multiple players participate in a given cyberspace simultaneously.

INTERACTIVE GAMES AND
EFL LANGUAGE LEARNING

Meaningful and authentic interaction is an essential element in language learning (Ellis, 1985; Gass, 1997; Gass, MacKey & Pica, 1998; Hall & Verplaatse, 2000). Input, interaction and the creation of output in authentic contexts should be a major component of activities in a second or foreign language context. An assumption underlying the use of interactive games in language education is that they will create an environment for promoting this type of interaction among students and will provide an opportunity to apply their language knowledge into a real situation. As language knowledge includes two categories, organizational knowledge and pragmatic knowledge (Bachman, 1990), the major aim of the use of technology in language education is to generate many different environments for interaction and the negotiation of meaning. In the case of EFL settings where students lack an opportunity to practice their target language, the potential advantage of using online games is great.

Multiplayer online games can promote student motivation, increase communication, and encourage collaboration among participating students. Brown (2007) stated that computers can provide a convenient venue to practice the target language, support multimodal practices (auditory, visual and written), and promote the fun factor. Although interactive online games could offer many useful tools for language learning and teaching, most of studies related to online games have focused on vocabulary teaching (e.g., Huyen & Nga, 2003; Yip & Kwan, 2006). Especially in EFL settings, multiplayer English teaching online games which promote interaction and communication will provide meaningful and authentic learning tasks for EFL learners. As Sharrock and Watson (1987) stated, simulation and gaming could provide practice of real-world communication that EFL classes are lacking.

The use of interactive games has an impact on the meaning of interactivity for learning (DeKanter, 2004). He explained that the elements of interactive game playing— that is, adaptivity, competition and communication— overlap with the traits of successful students. After investigating the use of educational games, Wood (2001) concluded that students paid more attention to learning materials that use game-like formats than traditional learning materials such as textbooks.

SELF-EFFICACY AND
SOCIAL-AFFECTIVE FACTORS
IN LANGUAGE LEARNING

In language education, it is important to understand how language learners feel and how they respond to learning a target language. A large number of variables are involved in the affective domain during the language learning process. The affective domain refers to how students’ social and