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HISTORY-THEMED GAMES FROM THE PLAYERS' PERSPECTIVE:

AN ANALYSIS THROUGH A SOCIAL
MEDIA PLATFORM

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Abstract

This study explores the opinions, perceptions, and experiences of young people interested in history regarding learning history through digital games. Posts by enthusiasts of history-themed games on Reddit, a popular social media platform among gamers, were analysed through qualitative content analysis. Based on these posts, additional questions were formulated and posted on the platform to further investigate the topic. The responses, along with the initial posts, were collected and analysed. The study is limited to texts written in Turkish or English by users on the mentioned social media platform. The findings reveal that some students attribute their success in history courses to digital games, while certain teachers incorporate these games as educational tools in their lessons. Additionally, some users stated that digital games can provide fundamental knowledge of historical events and offer complementary benefits for history education. On the other hand, some users expressed concerns about the potential of digital games to distort historical accuracy, highlighting the risk of misrepresentation in game narratives.

Keywords: Digital games, history-themed games, history education, Reddit, social media.

Introduction

Unlike other sciences, history has limited facilities because it cannot be directly experimented with or observed. However, the teaching and learning of history are pretty flexible and can be approached in various ways. In the past, history learning was done through books, novels, radio programmes, newspapers, and documentaries both inside and outside the classroom (Demircioğlu, 2008; Keskin, 2008; Yazıcı, 2008, p. 38; Yahşi & Keleş, 2013). With technological advancements and their widespread use, new methods have emerged. Öztaş (2015) surveyed history students on the use of historical films and series in teaching. He concluded that students found them both beneficial and enjoyable. Furthermore, Marcus (2005) studied the use of films in history lessons by incorporating various films into classroom instruction. Visual content such as films, series, and documentaries has the potential to be useful for history teaching because visualising history makes it more memorable and easier to understand. Therefore, historians have shown increasing interest in visual content in recent years, leading to research on the use of digital games in history teaching. Aydoğan and Karabağ (2020) developed a browser game to investigate whether educational computer games would benefit history teaching and implemented it with high school students (p. 124). The study revealed that students' spatial perception improved. Similar studies have been conducted by academics working with educational computer games. McCall (2016) examined the applications and effects of using digital games in history education.

Oceja, Albian-Cubillo, and Torres-Trimállez (2022) conducted a literature review on studies related to history learning

through digital games. Rossi and Bondioli (2021) explored the potential applications of digital games in history education. In addition to educational computer games, commercial computer games are also regarded as valuable tools in history education. Prof. Dr. Emrah Safa Gürkan, on his YouTube channel @omnibuslive where he discusses the history and current events, mentioned that commercial computer games like *Crusader Kings III* (Paradox Development Studio, 2020) and *Europa Universalis IV* (Paradox Development Studio, 2013) reflect the period they depict in detail and could be evaluated as materials in lessons (Gürkan, 2024). Similarly, the @HistoryRespawned YouTube channel, run by professional historians, has critically analysed historical video games from a historian's perspective for over a decade (History Respawned, n.d.). Despite the positive perspectives on using commercial and digital games in education, some educators express concerns. Some argue that learning history through commercial computer games is limited, as these games can consume significant amounts of students' time, include propaganda, and present historical events from a Western perspective (Corbeil & Laveault, 2011; Karabağ, 2010; Zin & Wong, 2013, p. 10).

While the debates on teaching history through digital games continue, computer games, which are very popular among young people, can potentially convey historical events with their realistic graphics and detailed stories. Additionally, the products of the computer game industry are much more flexible than those of the cinema and television series industries, have more detailed content, and can be consumed over longer periods. All these factors make learning history through computer games a separate topic of discussion. Based on

this, the question arises about the opinions of young people, computer game users, and historians interested in computer games about learning history from computer games. To answer this question, this research investigated people's opinions on whether it is possible to learn history from computer games through posts on the social media platform Reddit. The main reason for choosing Reddit is that it is a very popular platform among young people and computer game players. According to 2024 statistics, 44% of Reddit users are between the ages of 18 and 29, while 30.6% are between the ages of 18 and 24 (Duarte, 2025; Similarweb, n.d.). This makes it possible to reach a young audience open to learning history. Additionally, Reddit ranks fifth among platforms where companies from the education sector advertise. Besides the education sector, companies from other industries that attract young people's attention such as social media platforms, digital marketing, and web design are also among the top advertisers (Juntire, 2024, p. 2). Furthermore, Reddit makes its content available to everyone, and past data analysis research has proven its reliability in terms of data (Proferes et al., 2021; Jamnik, 2017).

The research problem statement is: What are the opinions, perceptions and experiences of young people, computer game users, and historians interested in computer games regarding learning history through digital games? The sub-problems of the research are as follows:

Sub-problem 1: According to the opinions and perceptions of Reddit users, what contributions can digital games have on learning history?

Sub-problem 2: According to the opinions and perceptions of Reddit users, what are the disadvantages and drawbacks of learning/teaching history through digital games?

Literature Review

The Differences Between Educational, Edutainment and Commercial Digital Games

There are three digital game genres used in classrooms:

- Educational digital games focused on educational objectives,
- Edutainment digital games are created to educate children through entertainment, Commercial digital games are created for entertainment and commercial purposes (Aydođan & Karabađ, 2020, p. 108; Cole, Parada & Mackenzie, 2024, p. 990-991; Dondlinger, 2007, p. 22; Egenfeldt-Nielsen, 2006).

Early versions of digital games were commercial products which were created by computer engineers for different purposes such as entertainment, commerce, or to increase the popularity of computers. For example, the digital game *Bertie the Brain*, developed by Josef Kates, was a video game released on August 25, 1950, designed to play tic-tac-toe, and this game was famous for being played by Danny Kaye, who was a famous American comedian and actor. This game increased the popularity of computers among the public (Bateman, 2014; Donovan, 2010). After introducing Bertie the Brain (1950), another digital game *Tennis for Two* (Higinbotham, 1958), developed by William Higinbotham,

released in 1958. These games were followed by various types of games such as *SpaceWar!* (1962), *Star Trek* (1972), *Empire* (1978), *Pac-Man* (1980) and *Super Mario Bros* (1985) (Donovan, 2010). Educators have actively contributed to their development, and these games are primarily focused on educational objectives. As a result, they may appear more complex when compared to commercial digital games (Cole, Parada & Mackenize, 2024, p. 990-991; Aydoğan, 2020, p. 25).

The first educational digital game was *The Sumerian Game*, developed by William McKay and released in 1964. It was a text-based strategy game played through a teleprinter (Knolle & Nicely, 1972). Over time, educational video games became more prevalent among teachers. In the 1990s, educational computer games related to mathematics began to emerge (Egenfeldt-Nielsen, 2006).

Edutainment digital games, on the other hand, are computer games developed not only for entertainment but also for educational purposes. These games are designed to serve both commercial and educational purposes (Dondlinger, 2007, p. 22). While some sources refer to all such games as educational computer games, Denis and Jouvelot (2005) and Dondlinger (2007) distinguished between educational digital games and edutainment games in their studies. Since the game suggestions made by Reddit users in this study include educational, commercial, and edutainment games, the characteristics of these different types are presented in this part of the literature review. Another aspect of Reddit users' suggestions is associated with history-themed games.

Just as there are distinctions between commercial, educational, and edutainment games, there are also differences between history-themed video games that include historical fiction and those that include actual historical content. For example, *Civilization IV* (Firaxis Games, 2005) features historical fiction and was developed purely for entertainment and commercial purposes, whereas *Civilization Edu* (Firaxis Games, 2018) was designed with educational objectives and includes historically accurate content (Aydoğan, 2020, p. 93). In addition, some history-themed digital games combine both historical fiction and historical content—in other words, edutainment historical video games. These games aim to serve both educational and commercial purposes. For instance, *The Oregon Trail* (MECC, 1971) included both fictional characters and historical content that has been used in classrooms to help children learn about American history and The Route of The Oregon Trail itself (McCready, 2021, p. 182).

Digital Games and the Relation of Learning History

Millennial youth, no longer satisfied with traditional textbooks and conventional school practices, seek out diverse channels, interactive tools, and innovative learning methods offered by the digital age to access knowledge (Erol-Şahin, 2024). In addition to interactive learning tools, documentaries, films, and MOOCs, digital games are also recognised as one of the alternative pathways contributing to history education. In recent years, the following studies have been conducted on the use of digital games in history education: Gonchar (2020) evaluated the visuals in the computer game *Assassin's Creed* (Ubisoft, 2012) to see if they could be used

in history education, developing ideas and activities for their use. As well as Gonchar's master's thesis in a doctoral dissertation conducted by Aydođan (2020) is studied the impact of digital games on students' historical site perception and chronological thinking skills. In this dissertation, Aydođan conducted experiments using browser-based games from different genres and analysed his findings by comparing the results. In another study, Erdem (2019) conducted an experiment using the digital game *Civilization VI* (Fraxis Games, 2016) to investigate whether students could develop historical thinking skills through gameplay. McCready (2021) in his doctoral dissertation, conducted double experiment at his classrooms. Firstly, he assigned his students to design historical video games and assessed his students' tendencies in designing video games. Secondly, he analysed impacts of video games on counterfactual thinking skills through *Fallout 4* (Bethesda, 2015) in his classroom. Karsenti and Parent (2020) conducted a similar study using *Assassin's Creed* (Ubisoft, 2012), developing applications for its use in education. McCall (2012) conducted a study on using digital games in secondary education history classes, examining the applicability of history-themed digital games such as *Civilization* (Fraxis Games). Kolek et al (2020) had students play the digital game *Czechoslovakia 38–89* (Charles University, 2014) to have them experience the destruction and chaos of war, aiming to understand if video games can change students' attitudes towards historical events. Their study confirms that video games can influence players' explicit attitudes, enhance historical awareness, and play a significant role in shaping societal understanding of historical and social realities through perspective-taking and detailed item-level analysis. Radetich and Jakubowitchz (2015) wrote about their experiences and

challenges in teaching history with digital games, based on feedback from a seminar they organised. Studies on the use of digital games in education can extend from the specific field of history education to general education.

A significant portion of globally renowned games has been history-themed, which may suggest that these games attract not only individuals with an inherent interest in history but also students who engage with historical content primarily through textbooks and to earn grades. Beyond their primary function of entertainment, digital games have begun to assume new roles, including educational and pedagogical missions. History-themed games, in particular, provide players with opportunities to experience historical events more immersively while simultaneously shaping their perceptions of historical spaces and narratives. For instance, an international study on the *Assassin's Creed* series found that the increased social realism of historical locations in the game was associated with greater enjoyment, while a stronger sense of place was linked to greater appreciation (Bowman et al., 2024). These findings suggest that history-themed games extend beyond mere knowledge transmission, offering the potential for enhancing players' abilities to understand and interpret historical spaces.

Numerous studies emphasise the positive contributions of history-themed games to education, particularly in fostering cognitive and analytical skills. Kuran, Tozoglu, and Tavernari (2018) integrated history-themed games into a world history course and found that students demonstrated an improved understanding of social, political, economic, and technological contexts across different historical periods. Similarly,

Docuayan et al. (2024) developed *Historya*, a 3D game designed to teach Philippine history, and concluded that it enriched students' learning experiences and increased their engagement with historical events. Hiriart (2019) further argues that digital games represent a novel form of historical representation, enhancing students' historical comprehension through immersive learning experiences. Collectively, these studies highlight the pedagogical potential of history-themed games, illustrating how they facilitate historical thinking and analytical reasoning skills. However, despite their educational potential, history-themed games present certain risks and limitations in history education. The accuracy and level of detail in historical models embedded within these games can directly impact the learning process. Kuran et al. (2018) caution that if historical models are inadequate or inaccurate, students may develop misconceptions about historical events. Similarly, Cole (2022) acknowledges that while games such as *Assassin's Creed Odyssey* (Ubisoft, 2018) can increase interest in historical content, they also risk blurring the lines between historical fact and fiction, potentially leading to misunderstandings. Fogu (2009) further critiques strategy-based simulation games, arguing that developers' biases inevitably shape the historical narratives presented, which may result in players developing distorted or incomplete perspectives on history.

The potential drawbacks of history-themed games extend beyond historical accuracy, as these games also risk oversimplifying historical narratives. The study *The Technological Mediation of Collective Memory Through Video Games* underscores that procedural game design may lead to fragmented or superficial understandings of historical events (Matei,

2023). Similarly, Donald et al. (2023) explore how historical video games function as tools of "soft power" or "public diplomacy" on a global scale, particularly in the contexts of the United Kingdom and China. They argue that while such games can shape cultural identity in international discourse, they also risk presenting history in a biased or selective manner, reinforcing cultural stereotypes among players. Likewise, the editorial *Games with History, Heritage, and Provocation* discusses how history-themed games can promote intellectual engagement with the past while simultaneously raising concerns about their potential to trivialize or sensationalize significant historical events (Mochocki, 2022).

Finally, the effectiveness of history-themed games in educational settings is highly dependent on how they are utilized. For instance, the study *What Do Students Learn When Collaboratively Using a Computer Game in a U.S. History Classroom?* examined students' collaborative problem-solving experiences related to historical disease epidemics through computer-based gaming. While findings indicated that games promoted engagement and collaboration, they also revealed a tendency among some students to prioritize game mechanics over historical content, potentially undermining educational objectives. This suggests that the pedagogical efficacy of history-themed games hinges on how they are integrated into curricula and facilitated by educators (Kennedy-Clark & Thompson, 2011, p. 534-535).

As the researchers agreed, history-themed games emerge as powerful tools that foster historical thinking and enrich the learning process by making history more engaging. However, careful consideration must be given to the historical

accuracy, pedagogical context, and implementation of these games. To maximize their educational value, history-themed games should be thoughtfully designed, critically evaluated within the framework of history education, and supported by educators who can guide students in critically engaging with the historical narratives they present.

The studies we examined have explored history-themed games using various methodologies and sample groups, offering diverse perspectives. However, no research has been identified that analyses the connection between history-themed games and learning through a social platform. Building on this gap, our study aims to explore discussions on Reddit, a platform where millions of players, history enthusiasts, and gaming communities converge—a space we have also been a part of for many years. By examining user-generated discourse, we seek to provide a fresh perspective on how digital communities perceive, debate, and interpret historical narratives in games.

Reddit as a Research Platform

With its large user base and diverse communities, Reddit provides a valuable space for analysing the opinions and experiences of history enthusiasts and gamers. The platform's forum-based structure and volunteer moderation system ensure that user-generated content is presented with a certain level of quality and organisation, making it easier for researchers to access meaningful and reliable data. Furthermore, it has been noted that Reddit applies a detailed filter to posts and comments due to changes in U.S. social media laws and policies, resulting in higher-quality content (Nakajima Wickham & Öhman, 2022, p. 14-15).

Previous research has demonstrated that analysing user-generated content on Reddit can offer in-depth insights into social trends and individual perspectives. For instance, Demirel (2024) examined news-sharing and consumption practices within the r/Turkey community on Reddit, emphasising the platform's richness in user engagement and interaction. Similarly, Proferes et al. (2021) conducted a systematic literature review and identified 727 studies that used Reddit as a data source, analysing them based on year, research methods, and key findings. These studies highlight the increasing role of Reddit as a research tool across various academic disciplines.

Reddit's broad and diverse user base makes it a valuable sentiment and opinion analysis resource. As a platform where users engage in real-time discussions and generate authentic content, Reddit has proven to be an effective source for sentiment analysis and opinion research. Alrumaih et al. (2020) and Boettcher (2021) conducted sentiment analysis studies using Reddit data, demonstrating the platform's ability to reflect a wide range of perspectives. Furthermore, Rocha-Silva et al. (2024) conducted a review and evaluation study on using Reddit as a passive data collection tool, identifying approaches researchers can adopt to leverage its content effectively.

Additionally, several studies have highlighted Reddit's significance in understanding cultural and social dynamics. For example, Aktaş and Eker (2023) analysed cultural symbols produced during the r/Place event on Reddit, showcasing the platform's potential as a research source for user participation and collective digital expression. The vast amount of data available on Reddit provides scholars with high-quality and diverse content that can be used for academic research.

In conclusion, Reddit presents a unique research environment for exploring user experiences, perceptions, and discussions related to history-themed games. The platform's structure allows for the collection of rich, user-generated content, making it a valuable tool for studying how historical narratives are perceived and debated in digital spaces. By analysing discussions on Reddit, researchers can contribute fresh perspectives to the academic discourse on historical storytelling in gaming and player engagement with history-themed digital experiences.

Methodology

This study employs document analysis, a qualitative research method, to examine user perceptions of historical narratives in games. Document analysis involves systematically reviewing written or visual materials related to historical events, human actions, or phenomena, organising the extracted data, and deriving meaningful insights (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2021, p. 189). Creswell (2020) highlights document analysis as a vital component of qualitative research, as it enables an in-depth review of textual and visual data, facilitating the identification of patterns, themes, and meanings (p. 184–187). Following Creswell's (2020) framework, this study integrates qualitative document analysis by analysing discussions on Reddit to explore how users engage with historical narratives in games.

Research Design

This study employs a case study design, which emerged in the early 20th century in sociology and anthropology. Frequently used in qualitative research, particularly in history,

psychology, and education, case studies allow for in-depth examination and evaluation (Uçan, 2021, p. 227).

Universe/Sample

The universe of this study is the social media platform Reddit, while the sample consists of young people interested in history and young history teachers active on the platform. As of 2023, Reddit has 1.66 billion users (Juntire, 2024). Since collecting comments from all relevant users is impossible, discussions on history and historical computer games were selected to gather their opinions.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data for this study was collected from posts and comments on Reddit, focusing on topics related to history or historical computer games. The content analysis technique was used to collect and interpret the data, while thematic analysis was applied to analyse and compare the data. Content analysis is a widely used method in both qualitative and quantitative research, as it focuses on examining documents to identify messages or data within a text (Tanrıverdi & Köksal, 2018, p. 250). This method involves categorising the extracted messages or data, testing their validity, and preparing them for interpretation (Akgün et al., 2018, p. 259; Tanrıverdi & Köksal, 2018, p. 250). Thematic analysis, on the other hand, allows data to be coded based on themes and patterns, categorised by source, time, and location, and then compared (Glesne, 2013, p. 259). In this study, data collected from Reddit were categorised and analysed based on the topics and the commenters' approaches to digital games.

The data was gathered from the following subreddits: r/historyteachers, r/assassinscreed, r/eu4, r/badhistory, r/tarih, r/veyakinevren, and r/history. Posts and comments discussing learning history through digital games were collected from these subreddits. The subreddit communities selected for this study were chosen based on three main criteria: thematic relevance to history education through games, linguistic accessibility (i.e., content in Turkish or English), and the presence of active discussions. Subreddits that were topically close but lacked sufficient user engagement or diverged significantly from our thematic scope were excluded during the data screening process. Table 1 provides detailed information

about the topics and posts in chronological order. During the research process, comments were reviewed individually, and only those that were respectful, free of insults or profanity, explanatory, well-written, and understandable were included in the analysis. Although the Reddit platform has a large user base, the data in this study was purposefully selected in accordance with our predefined themes. The sample size of 907 comments, with 80 selected for detailed coding, aligns with Creswell's (2020) principle that qualitative thematic research prioritises data richness over quantity, and that 'saturation often occurs within a relatively small number of well-chosen data points.

Table 1 Topics and Posts Examined in the Study.

Discussion Topics	Post Titles	Post Interaction Count	Post Date
r/history 1	Should video games teach history	673 comments	2015
r/badhistory	Historical errors in video games	57 comments	2018
r/historyteachers 1	Which digital games do you use in lessons?	16 comments	2018
r/assassinscreed 1	What did Assassin's Creed games teach you about history	18 comments	2019
r/history 2	Do video games teach military history	23 comments	2019
r/assassinscreed 2	Can I learn history by playing Assassin's Creed	13 comments	2020
r/assassinscreed 3	Digital games helped me get high grades	62 comments	2022
r/historyteachers 2	Is it possible to teach history with digital games	20 comments	2022
r/eu4	Can history be learned from video games?	8 comments	2023
r/tarih (EN-History)	Is it possible to teach history with digital games	15 comments	2024
r/veyakinevren (EN-And-closeuniverse)	What do you think about history-themed games	3 comments	2024

T: 907 comments

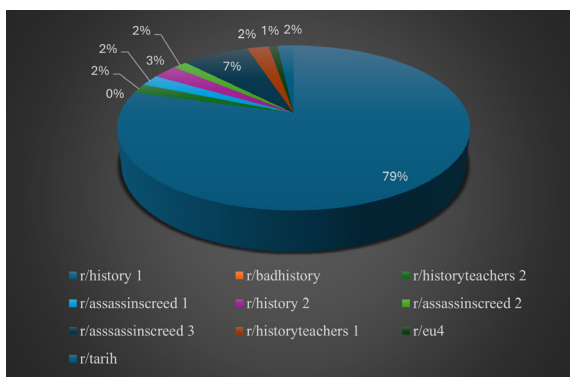


Figure 1 Graphical form of collected data.

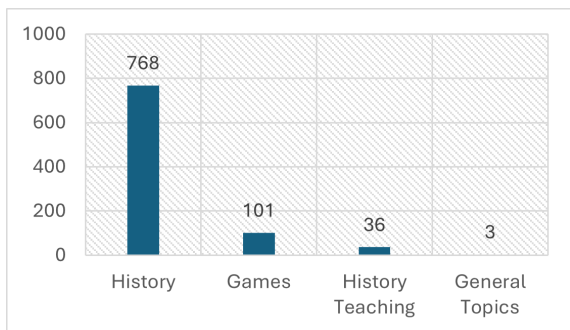


Figure 2 Comments and posts are categorised by themes.

When examining the collected data, it was observed that discussions on history and history-teaching topics on Reddit included the use of games for teaching history, and people shared their ideas on teaching history with games in game-related topics as well.

In addition to these topics, discussions on cinema and games also included conversations about teaching history through

games. When evaluated based on the languages used in the posts, it was observed that only 18 comments were in Turkish. During the data analysis, the usernames of the data sources were kept confidential, and each user was assigned a unique code to distinguish them and facilitate the analysis. For example, users commenting in English on the r/history-teachers subreddit were coded as T.1.1 (teacher, 1st post, 1st comment) or T.2.1, while other users were coded as P.1.1 (participant, 1st post, 1st comment) or P.1.2. The creators of the posts were coded as S.1 (starter, 1st post) or S.2.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the analysed data, the NVIVO and the MAXQDA applications were used. The data uploaded to these applications were coded, categorised, and analysed to determine the commenters' approaches toward digital games. Cross-analyses were conducted to enhance validity and reliability, with researchers in both author and expert roles analysing the data simultaneously and comparing their interpretations (Creswell, 2020, p. 244; Merriam & Grenier, 2019, p. 27).

Findings

Findings on Users' Opinions on the Use of Digital Games in History Education

In this study, 80 comments were taken as the basis to represent the examined comments. When these 80 comments were analysed in terms of their general themes, it was observed that 28 people shared their personal experiences regarding the use of digital games in history education on the platform, in other words, "I learned this from these games, I did this with my students...", 17 shared game recommendations,

in other words, "I liked the historical narration of game A and I recommend it to you, I applied game B in history class, I recommend it to you." 32 people shared their opinions about digital games. 2 people reviewed digital games, and 1 person asked questions to the users. The reason for classifying the comments this way is that although some comments were only one or two lines long, they provided valuable information, while some were paragraphs long. Among these comments, those that shared both personal experiences and game recommendations were classified according to the main theme of the comment. For example, below is the comment of a Turkish user coded P.2.1., who shared their experience and recommendation about the game they played (Reddit, 2024):

"I learned a lot from games like Europa Universalis, Sid Meier's Civilization, and COD 2, and I recommend them to those who are interested. I think these kinds of strategy games contribute a lot to both historical and geographical knowledge."

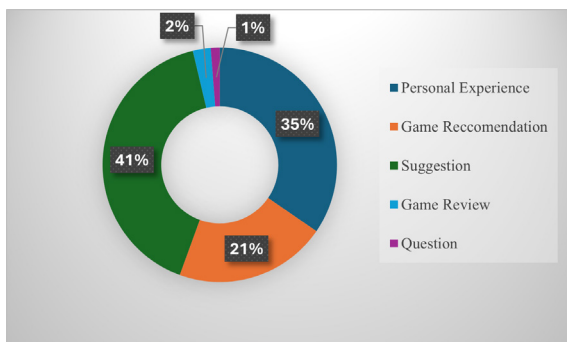


Figure 3 Comments and posts are categorised by their purposes.

Although this comment states a personal experience, it was evaluated as a game recommendation because it gave general and not very detailed information about their experience. Rich comments sharing both opinions and experiences and also recommendations were evaluated only with the "opinion" theme because they included monologues and ideas as well. The pie chart reflecting the percentages of comments is shown in Figure 3.

When these comments are analysed in relation to the main research question: Is it possible to learn history through games? It is observed that they coalesce around four main perspectives. Based on the judgments and conclusions derived from the respondents' statements, their opinions can be categorised as follows:

- Learning history through games is not possible,
- It is possible,
- It depends on the circumstances,
- Respondents were undecided or did not reach a definitive conclusion.

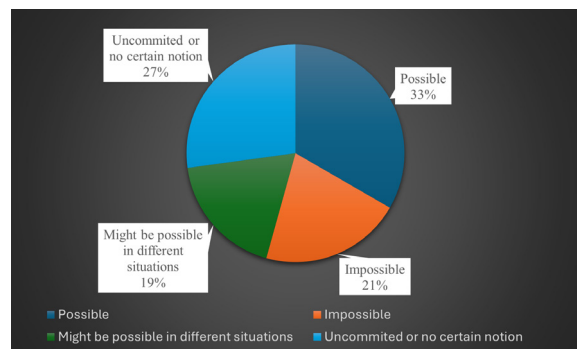


Figure 4 Judgments on learning history from games.

Among the selected representative comments, 27 individuals stated that it is possible to learn history through games, while 17 asserted that it is not. Additionally, 15 participants indicated that it depends on the context, whereas no definitive judgment could be obtained from 22 respondents, suggesting that they perceive historical learning through games as situational and contingent upon specific conditions. A pie chart visualising these findings are presented in Figure 4.

In Table 2, the gains provided by the games, as indicated by users who stated that learning history through games is possible, situational, or who did not conclude, are presented.

In the study, it was noted as a foreseeable finding that games contribute to general knowledge and cultural awareness. These games are already meticulously designed to attract more sales and interest, making it entirely normal for players to acquire general knowledge from them. The unexpected finding, however, was the number of individuals who claimed that these games had directly contributed to their academic success. Among these comments, four were selected based

on their consistency, level of detail, and credibility. The comments are presented below.

S.4: *"History 287- History of Islam... I had to write short essay answer definitions and descriptions, specifically about Janissaries. I wrote WORD FOR WORD what the Assassins Creed revelations had as their historical background. Later that week my professor hands back tests... I received a score of 100%... He'd ever read and asked where I got my supplemental information... I straight up told him about AC revelations and that I got my answer from there. He chuckled..."* (Reddit, 2022a).

S.4 explains that, in addition to achieving academic success, they also earned their teacher's recognition and established a positive interaction with them through the game.

P:3.1. *"I had a similar experience in my Philosophy 201 class... I had to write an in-class essay on various historical philosophers. Everything I wrote about Machiavelli was directly based on his representation in the Brotherhood. I got an A- on that paper..."* (Reddit, 2022a).

Table 2 Gains Provided by Computer Games According to Users.

Perceived Gains	Groups Indicating	Frequency	%
Provides general culture and knowledge about history and auxiliary sciences	r/tarih, r/historyteachers	9	47%
Led to success in courses	r/badhistory, r/tarih	6	32%
Improves map knowledge	r/tarih, r/EU	2	11%
Provides advantages in assessment and evaluation	r/historyteachers	1	5%
Inspires academic studies	r/badhistory	1	5%

In this comment, P.3.1 explained that he/she applied knowledge about the important historical figure Niccolò Machiavelli, which they had learned through a historical video game, in a non-history course, and so achieved academic success.

P.3.2. *"The same thing happened to me! The only differences being that it was AC 3 that helped me... We were discussing the American Revolution and the Battle of Bunker Hill (Breed's Hill) and how Major John Pitcairn led the British during the battle... Playing the game helped me remember that Pitcairn was killed during the battle and I casually mentioned this to my professor"* (Reddit, 2022a).

P.3.3, expressed that he/she succeeded in a discussion in the class and presented his knowledge without any hesitation, thanks to knowledge from a video game.

P.3.4. *"...The day of the test comes, and I was so happy to see a question from the US Independence chapter because I had literally finished playing AC3 a week ago. The question was worth just 1 point of the whole paper, but I still am super proud that I was the only one who could answer that..."* (Reddit, 2022a).

Statements in this comment, similar to statements are expressed by S.4. one difference is that obtained in a rare succession in a classroom.

Besides these comments, one user mentioned using a game called Micropolis (Micropolis, 1989) in their classes to allow students to simulate the Industrial Revolution, fostering competition among them. Another user stated that the tower-climbing mechanics in Assassin's Creed (Ubisoft, 2012)

contributed to their success in academic research. Additionally, users suggested some games for learning or teaching through digital games. These games are shown in Figure 5 as a word cloud.

The list includes the names of game series; however, sequels in these series were not expressed by all users. Therefore, they are not included in the list. It was determined that the majority of the games recommended by users were commercial computer games. Among the listed games, only *Mission US* (Mission US, 2010), *Micropolis* (Micropolis, 1989), *Do I Have a Right?* (iCivics, 2008) and *Be Washington* (BeWashington.org, t.y.) are educational games rather than commercially driven ones. Additionally, while *Civilization* (Fraxis Games) and *Minecraft* (Mojang, 2011) have educational versions, users did not specify whether they were referring to these versions or the standard commercial releases.



Figure 5 Games suggested by teachers and users

The findings shown in Figure 5 indicate that, despite the availability of educational games designed for history instruction, the consensus among users leaned toward commercial games. This raises questions about the awareness and visibility of educational computer games. Furthermore, apart from *Do I Have a Right* (iCivics, 2008) and *Minecraft* (Mojang, 2011), all the games in the list are history-themed. The inclusion of *Quizlet* (Quizlet.org, t.y.) as an example by two users is likely due to a misunderstanding of the term “digital game” yet it was still incorporated into the list for reference.

When the games were categorised based on the groups that recommended them, more predictable patterns emerged. For instance, *Mission US* (Mission US, 2010), *Micropolis* (Micropolis, 1989), *Do I Have a Right* (iCivics, 2008), and *Be Washington* (BeWashington.org, t.y.) were exclusively suggested in discussions initiated by history teachers, with no mention of

these games in other groups. Similarly, commercial computer games were also recommended by history teachers. However, explanations regarding how these games contribute to learning history were more detailed and clearly articulated within these discussions. For instance, the teacher is coded as T.1.14 wrote this comment on how he/she uses historical video games in the classroom:

“I’ve used Battlefield 1 to show No Man’s Land and trench systems during WWI, and I’ve used one of the Assassin’s Creed games to show colonial cities and the Boston Massacre” (Reddit, 2022b).

Sub-Problem 1: According to the opinions and perceptions of Reddit users, what contributions can digital games have on learning history?

Based on comments gathered from the participants, the findings regarding the benefits of digital games for history education are shown in Figure 6 as a word cloud.

As seen in the figure, the most commonly expressed opinion regarding the contribution of digital games to learning history is that playing these games increases players’ interest in history. One related perspective is as follows:

P.4.6.: *“Age of Empires was the game that made me love history. My curiosity continued with the Total War series. Of course, these games do not reflect history exactly as it was, but they make you wonder—‘Is this how it happened?’—and encourage you to research further...”* (Reddit, 2024).



Figure 6 Perceived benefits of digital games for learning history according to user comments

In this comment, the user shares their personal experience and perspective on how games can enhance interest in history. Additionally, the statement reflects ideas closely related to evidence-based inquiry skills and the ability to interpret sources.

The second most frequently mentioned benefit is the claim that digital games help develop *spatial perception and spatial thinking skills*. Regarding this topic, history teachers identified as T.1.3 and T.1.9: describe their experiences with fostering spatial awareness as follows:

T.1.3: *"I use the discovery tour mode for Assassins Creed Odyssey for Ancient Greece. They have premade tours that are fairly good. I also let them take turns free-roaming for 5 minutes each around Ancient Athens, Sparta, Crete..."* (Reddit, 2022b).

T.1.9: *"I used Total War: Warhammer to teach about mythological creatures and warfare a few times. I also used a video of Assassin's Creed 2 to teach about Renaissance Florence, and urban medieval environments in general. In both cases, though the students enjoyed them and their novelty..."* (Reddit, 2022b).

Other benefits related to historical video games expressed by P.3.4:

"In college, I started taking Art History partly because of the architecture AC2 and AC:Brotherhood - eventually, I ended up turning it into a major! Wrote about Gothic Cathedral Towers and Spires for my thesis... I had "climbed"

a LOT of church towers by that point over the years" (Reddit, 2022a). This comment, is a very beautiful example in terms of show that how historical video games can contribute to ability to perceive historical sites.

Among the remaining benefits, the most notable ones are the perceived contributions of digital games to developing historical empathy and understanding the concept of time. In one comment, a user with the code P.4.2 states:

"...The Unity game takes you to the Notre Dame Cathedral. It shows the freedom protests that took place under the conditions of that period. Seeing this here should make us curious enough to go and research what happened..." (Reddit, 2024).

This comment highlights the role of historical digital games in fostering historical empathy and enhancing the perception of time. Similarly, two comments from the teachers' section mention that certain games can help players develop historical empathy and a sense of time through gameplay and that using these games can be beneficial for fostering these skills: T.1.4: *"I also use Minecraft a bit. I ran a feudal life simulation with one of my classes that went decently well..."* (Reddit, 2022b). T.2.5: *"I have used Be Washington a few times and it went amazing... Great for Washington Presidency and Revolution!"* (Reddit, 2018).

Sub-Problem 2: According to the opinions and perceptions of Reddit users, what are the disadvantages and drawbacks of learning/teaching history through digital games?

According to user comments, the primary drawbacks and disadvantages of teaching and learning history through digital games include logistical constraints, lack of time, the compatibility of the game with the curriculum, and the accuracy of the information provided. These issues were outlined in a response to question T.1.1 in the history teachers' group, where they were explained in a structured list format:

T.1.1: *"...The four main problems that would stop me from potentially trying to do something like this would be: Time commitment, in game learning curves, engagement, software availability, strategy games such as the ones you listed take a long time to get going and are a bit of a niche genre to your average teenage gamer..."* (Reddit, 2022b).

Another comment states that digital games provide incorrect historical information, and this misinformation tends to persist, meaning they contribute to the spread of distorted historical knowledge. The full comment regarding the distortion of history by games is as follows: P.1.1:

"One of the things I've noticed about Total War games is that they don't put any real value in treating historical tactics in a truly accurate manner..." (Reddit, 2019).

Another issue concerning the harmful effects of digital games on historical knowledge is the use of games as a tool for propaganda. Regarding this topic, a user with the code P.5.1 responded to a discussion initiated by user S.6, who requested game recommendations, with the following comment:

"A good gateway to learn geography... a good way to get interested in history. But no... It's a not a good way to learn the specifics. Video games really aren't nuanced enough to teach history..." (Reddit, 2023).

In this comment, it is mentioned that digital games can be a good starting point for developing an interest in history. However, since the overall tone of the comment is negative, it would be more appropriate to categorise it among the negative-themed comments.

Table 3 Disadvantages and Drawbacks of Learning/Teaching History through Digital Games

Disadvantages and drawbacks	Groups Indicating	Frequency	%
Gives incorrect or incomplete information	All groups	25	%58
Games are not curriculum-compliant	r/historyteachers	7	%16
Technological facilities in classrooms are insufficient for teaching history with digital games	r/historyteachers	4	%10
Games are too long for the lesson duration	r/historyteachers	4	%10
Games include propaganda	r/tarih, r/assassin'screed	3	%6

Another disadvantage of teaching history through digital games might face parents opposition. On this situation, a history teacher user with the code T.1.8 explains their concerns as follows:

"Incorporating the games are great in theory, but how do you realistically assess students on it? If you can't justify it to parents and admin it's going to be a tough fight..." (Reddit, 2022b).

The issue of explaining what is taught in class to parents is, in theory, a situation that should not occur. However, in reality, some overly involved parents may intervene in how teaching is conducted. Explained the findings is related to sub-problem 2, also shown in Table 3 for a clearer understanding.

Discussion

In the study, it was observed that the findings align or diverge with the results of different studies related to the field. For instance, in an application conducted by Karsenti and Parent (2020), it was found that students learned the most about historical events and the least about cultural features from the game they used in the application. Based on these findings, they concluded that detailed learning was not achieved through the games (37). Parallel to this finding, it was determined in this study that digital games could provide general knowledge and culture but not detailed information. Another topic where the findings of this research coincide with different studies is related to game recommendations gathered from comments. In this research, it was seen that the most recommended digital games were the *Assassin's*

Creed series and the *Civilization* series. Looking at the studies conducted on teaching history through digital games, it is observed that one of the most prolific academics in this area, Jeremiah McCall, frequently mentions and gives examples from the *Civilization* series in both of his studies (McCall, 2011, p. 3-4; McCall, 2012, p. 15-17). In a study conducted by Gonchar (2020), the potential contributions of *Assassin's Creed* (Ubisoft, 2012) and *Final Fantasy* (Square Enix, 1987) to history education were evaluated. In this study, it was stated that *Assassin's Creed* (Ubisoft, 2012) is realistic in terms of location and character costumes and can be beneficial in teaching historical sites. These claims were also supported by survey results (p. 15-25). In a study conducted by Karsenti and Parent (2020), using the *Assassin's Creed* (Ubisoft, 2012) games in practice, they stated that this game is successful in conveying historical context (p. 31-32). Furthermore, findings stated in this research about the impact of video games on the perception of historical sites and enhance chronological or historical thinking skills are similar to resembling studies (Aydođan, 2020; Erdem, 2019; McCready, 2021). In addition to studies which are conducted in the field of history, the studies from other fields are conducted also coincide with this study's result. For instance, Marcelino, Fernandes, and Cerqueira (2023) conducted an action study with twenty-three primary and secondary school students on game-based learning. They investigated the impact of educational video games on mathematical learning through a video game named *Planeta em Perigo: Uma Aventura Espacial* (gbl4deaf, t.y.). As a result of their study, they found that video games positively influenced students' interest in math classes (p. 36-37). Similarly, in this study, it was identified that some users expressed increased interest in history due to video games.

In the scope of the second sub-problem in this research, the findings regarding learning history or using digital games in classes align with different studies. For instance, in a study conducted by Dhiyaneshwari and Renuga Devi (2022), a survey was conducted with 125 teachers to examine the benefits and obstacles of using digital games in lessons. In this study, it was stated that the biggest obstacle to using digital games in lessons was technological inadequacies in classrooms or schools. These findings are stated also in this study at sub-problem 2: According to the opinions of Reddit users, what are the disadvantages and drawbacks of learning/teaching history through digital games? Also this research shown that history teachers struggling with lacks of software, game duration problems and technological infrastructure issues. These findings were also stated, resembling studies on teaching or learning video games (Radetich & Jakubowicz, 2014, p. 13; Aydoğan & Karabağ 2020, p. 110).

The findings associated with the second sub-problem also indicate that users are aware of the potential risks associated with using digital games for learning history, particularly the dissemination of incomplete or inaccurate information and the lack of alignment with formal curricula. These concerns highlight the need for critical facilitation and structured guidance when integrating games into educational settings. As noted by Crookall (2010), debriefing—defined as the structured reflection that follows a serious game experience—is essential to help learners process game content, separate fact from fiction, and connect gameplay to curricular goals. Similarly, Mayer (2019) emphasises the importance of post-game discussions led by educators to promote critical thinking and historical accuracy. Therefore, for educational games

to be effective and reliable tools, they should be accompanied by teacher facilitation, pre- and post-game briefings, and critical analysis activities to contextualise the game experience.

When examining studies with differing findings, Kolek et al (2020) did not find clear evidence that the destruction and chaos scenes depicted in digital games significantly influence students' historical empathy skills or alter their perspectives on the past (p. 1356). However, in this study, some comments indicated that students could develop historical empathy skills through digital games.

Conclusion

The research found that students who stated that they learned history lessons through digital games and received passing grades, and teachers who reported using digital games in their lessons. In addition to these findings, some users, who questioned whether history lessons could be learned through digital games, received responses from other users indicating that basic information about historical events could be obtained through specific games. Despite these comments, there were also users who opposed the idea of teaching history through digital games due to their potential to distort history. The most significant benefits of using digital games in history education are increasing interest in history, enhancing spatial perception skills, and providing opportunities for historical empathy. The adverse opinions on the use of digital games in history education include technological inadequacies, the potential use of these games as propaganda tools, and the dissemination of incorrect or biased information. Also, it is important to note that this study

explores user perceptions and self-reported experiences rather than empirically measured learning outcomes. While such perceptions offer valuable insights into engagement and personal meaning-making, they do not substitute for objective assessments of historical learning.

Limitations and suggestions for future research

This research is limited to Turkish and English comments and posts on public topics and groups on the Reddit platform. There are no comments or content from hidden topics or groups. Comments and posts from other social media platforms are not included. In addition to these limitations, our research has some other limitations. Because platforms like Reddit reflect users' personal opinions, the data gathered is based on perceptions and does not show pure reality. Moreover, our research does not include certain demographic data because Reddit is an anonymous platform where users can hide their personal information from others.

Based on the findings and suggestions obtained from the research, the following recommendations are proposed:

- A direct survey can be conducted with teachers regarding the use of digital games in history education.
- Studies on the existence and use of educational computer games can be increased, or teachers can be informed about these games.
- Surveys with the same question can be applied on different social media platforms.

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Author Contributions

Ayşegül Nihan Erol Şahin: Conceptualisation, writing, reviewing and editing, validation. Muhammed Erdoğan: Conceptualisation, Methodology, data analysis, writing original draft.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest concerning this article's research, authorship, and/or publication.

Data Protection

All data examined in this research were collected from these Reddit groups and topics: r/historyteachers, r/assassinscreed, r/eu4, r/badhistory, r/tarih, r/veyakinevren, and r/history.

Since Reddit, the social media platform used as the data source for this research, is a publicly accessible platform, and the data were collected from public topics and groups, obtaining research permissions was deemed unnecessary as long as the names of contributors remained confidential and

their data was not shared (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2021, p. 234). Nevertheless, permissions were obtained from the moderators of the active groups r/tarih and r/historyteachers. Additionally, the Reddit administration was consulted to ensure that content could be analysed as long as the identities of contributors were kept anonymous.

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