


The Role of MMOGs in English Language Development of EFL Students

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ABSTRACT

Massively Multiplayer Online Games (MMOGs) are increasingly popular and widely played, but their use as an English language learning medium remains under-recognized. This study aims to analyze the role of MMOGs in developing the English language skills of students in the English Language Education Study Program at Sriwijaya University. This study used a qualitative approach with a case study design and involved five participants who actively used English while playing. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and game recording documentation, then analyzed using thematic analysis. The results showed that MMOGs were highly effective, increasing students' motivation and complementing formal English learning, as well as supporting the development of speaking, listening, reading, writing, vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. Students used English through text chat, voice chat, quests, instructions, and story-lines, so that interactions were natural and meaningful. Thus, MMOGs can be pedagogically utilized as an effective complementary English learning medium by providing educators with alternative strategies to promote authentic and motivating language practice beyond the classroom.

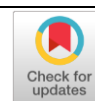
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INTRODUCTION

The integration of digital technology into education has increasingly influenced the way English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is learned and practiced. Digital learning environments enable learners to access learning resources more flexibly and interactively, allowing English learning to extend beyond traditional classroom settings. Technology-supported learning also encourages more active engagement, as learners can interact with content and others in meaningful ways. As noted by Fox-Turnbull (2017), the shift from traditional learning systems to technology-based approaches has made teaching and learning processes more interactive, flexible, and engaging.

Within digital learning contexts, various technology-based media have been utilized to support English language learning, including learning applications, social media, and digital games. Among these, online games have become one of the most commonly used forms of digital media in students' daily lives. Although online games were initially viewed primarily as entertainment, recent studies have begun to explore their educational potential, particularly in relation to language learning. Online games offer interactive and immersive experiences that allow users to participate actively rather than passively consume information.

English plays a crucial role in online gaming environments due to its status as an international language widely used for global communication. In online games, English is commonly used in instructions, dialogues, and player interactions, especially when players come from different countries and cultural backgrounds. However, in the context of formal learning, opportunities to use English freely are still limited; interactions are usually tied to

the curriculum, take place in the classroom, and focus on assessment (Aziz & Kashinathan, 2021). As a result, students often find it difficult to practice the language naturally, so an alternative medium is needed that provides spontaneous and meaningful use of English.

Previous studies have shown that the use of online games can support language skill development. Salsabil et al. (2023) found that interactions in games can increase speaking confidence. Jabbari and Peterson (2023) reported that the continuous use of English in a gaming environment can improve fluency and vocabulary. In addition, Reinders and Wattana (2015) highlighted that the game environment encourages an increase in willingness to communicate (WTC) and reduces communication anxiety. Similar findings were also expressed by Adris and Yamat (2015) and Horowitz (2019), who showed that online games can increase language motivation and confidence.

MMOGs

Massively Multiplayer Online Games (MMOGs) have grown to become one of the most popular forms of digital entertainment globally. In MMOGs, players can develop characters, form groups, complete missions, and follow stories in a virtual world. The main characteristics of MMOGs include a persistent world, real-time interaction, and goal-based game structure. Persistent worlds allow the game environment to continue changing and evolving even when players are not playing (Sinclair et al., 2023).

Real-time interaction is a key aspect that allows players to communicate through text, voice, and visual symbols. According to Azman and Dollsaid (2018), spontaneous and natural communication in games mimics real-world conversations, thereby increasing players' social and linguistic engagement. Meanwhile, goal-based game structures present players with challenges that require understanding instructions or dialogues in English, thereby encouraging contextual language learning.

MMOGs can be categorized into several subgenres, such as Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games (MMORPG), Massively Multiplayer Online First-Person Shooter (MMOFPS), and Massively Multiplayer Online Real-Time Strategy (MMORTS). In MMORPGs, players control fictional characters in a vast world, complete quests, and collaborate with other players to achieve specific goals (Hammady & Arnab, 2022). These games are typically rich in narrative and encourage exploration. In MMOFPS, the focus of the game is real-time shooting with teamwork, which requires fast and efficient communication. Meanwhile, MMORTS emphasizes strategy and resource management on a large scale (Herdiansyah & Napitupulu, 2023), requiring players to analyze information and interact through tactical instructions.

English Language Development

Language is the primary communication tool used by humans to express ideas and feelings (Tseng, 2018). Language development does not happen instantly, but rather through a gradual process that includes understanding meaning, sentence structure, and the use of language in social contexts. In the context of learning English as a foreign language (EFL), language development involves the continuous improvement of receptive skills (listening and reading) and productive skills (speaking and writing) (Ellis, 2008).

In the language learning process, there are seven main interrelated aspects: listening, speaking, reading, writing, pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar. Listening is the ability to understand spoken language (Liando et al., 2018). Speaking relates to the ability to convey ideas orally in a clear and socially appropriate manner (Saglam & Arslan, 2018). Reading helps students expand their vocabulary and understand language structures through texts (Saglam & Arslan, 2018), while writing requires the logical and coherent construction of sentences (Rambe et al., 2023). Pronunciation plays an important role in producing understandable speech (Mualyaningsih, 2019; Khan, 2019). Vocabulary is the foundation of language that influences the ability to understand and express meaning (Tiansoodeenon et al., 2023). Grammar encompasses the rules and structures that form language (Ilam et al., 2022). These aspects are not separate, but rather influence each other.

MMOGs and Informal English Language Development

MMOGs offer an informal, flexible, and interactive learning environment, making them a potential platform for English language learning. Social interactions in games encourage players to use English to collaborate, discuss strategies, and build relationships. According to Azman and Dollsaid (2018), this environment helps players expand their vocabulary, understand sentence structure, and practice speaking skills.

Digital games increase willingness to communicate (WTC), where students feel more comfortable using English in casual interactions (Reinders & Wattana, 2015). This situation reduces language anxiety, so players are more confident to speak without fear of making mistakes. Zhao (2018) emphasizes that language use in MMOGs is contextual and goal-oriented, in line with players' interests and targets, thus creating a meaningful learning experience.

However, research on the role of online games in developing English language skills in the context of Indonesian students—especially English Language Education—is still limited. In addition, previous studies have generally focused on specific aspects, such as speaking or vocabulary skills, so there has not been much discussion of the development of more comprehensive aspects of English, such as speaking, listening, reading, writing, vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation in one comprehensive study. Therefore, this study was conducted to explore students' perceptions of the use of Massively Multiplayer Online Games (MMOGs) in developing English language skills, identify features in games that support this development, and determine which aspects of English language skills improve through gaming activities.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design because it aims to understand in depth the experiences and perceptions of students regarding the use of Massively Multiplayer Online Games (MMOGs) in developing English language skills (Creswell, 2014). The case study design was selected because this research examines a contemporary phenomenon in a real-life context (Yin, 2018), where the use of MMOGs and English language learning cannot be clearly separated from the participants' experiences. The research participants consisted of five students from the English Education Study Program at Sriwijaya University who had been playing MMOGs for at least six months and actively used English while playing. Participants were selected using snowball sampling, which began with one informant who then recommended other participants who met the criteria (Gierczyk et al., 2023; Naderifar et al., 2017).

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and game recording documentation. Interviews were conducted twice with each participant to obtain more in-depth information about their perceptions and experiences of using MMOGs in the context of language development. Documentation in the form of game session recordings was used to capture the actual use of English during gameplay. The collected data were then analyzed using the thematic analysis technique developed by Braun and Clarke (2006), which includes coding, grouping, and theme extraction activities.

To ensure data validity, this study applied triangulation and member checking. Triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from interviews and documentation to enhance the credibility of the findings (Stahl & King, 2020; Morgan, 2024). Meanwhile, member checking was conducted by asking participants to verify interview transcripts to ensure that the information obtained accurately reflected their experiences (Varpio et al., 2017; Candela, 2019).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Perception of MMOGs in English Language Development

MMOG as an Effective Language Learning Tool

Overall, participants' perceptions confirm that MMOGs play an important role in supporting English language learning because they provide an authentic, motivating, and

complementary communication environment to formal learning. Participants view MMOGs as an effective learning tool because within the game they are required to use English in real communication contexts, both through text and voice, so that language skills develop naturally through meaningful interaction. This situation allows language to be learned in an unstructured but intensive manner, in line with the findings of Salsabil et al. (2023), which show that collaborative interactions in MMORPGs can increase communication confidence and reduce speaking anxiety. Activities such as reading instructions, understanding storylines, processing messages, giving directions, and responding to conversations encourage players to use English flexibly in goal-oriented contexts, so that language is processed not merely as academic material but as a tool for communication in real situations.

MMOG as a Motivating Tool

MMOG is also perceived as a highly motivating medium for language learning. Motivation arises because fluency in English often has a direct impact on players' success in completing missions, collaborating, and communicating effectively within a team. The intuitive environment, interesting storyline, and enjoyable social interactions encourage participants to practice without feeling pressured. This is in line with Alrajhi (2020), who reported that online games encourage learners to actively communicate in English because the atmosphere is supportive and free from academic pressure. In addition, Reinders and Wattana (2015) explain that digital games can reduce language anxiety while increasing confidence, because communication practices are carried out spontaneously and repeatedly. Thus, the use of English in MMOGs occurs naturally because students feel the need to participate and succeed in the game, not because of formal learning requirements. This condition makes students more comfortable practicing the language and increases their willingness to communicate, which is formed through various collaborative activities and spontaneous interactions.

MMOG as a Complement to Formal Learning

Participants assessed that MMOGs serve as a complement to formal classroom learning because they provide opportunities to apply the linguistic knowledge acquired in a real-world context. Participants explained that the theories they learned in lectures, such as sentence structure, grammar, and vocabulary, could be directly applied when reading game instructions, discussing, or communicating with other players. Thus, MMOGs serve as a bridge between theoretical learning and more practical and contextual language experiences. These findings are in line with Azman & Dollsaid (2018), who emphasize that MMOGs serve as informal learning environments that support blended learning. Reinders and Wattana (2015) also add that a relaxed gaming environment can foster confidence and courage to speak, making it easier for players to practice language fluently and naturally.

Through the combination of these three aspects, MMOGs become a potential tool for English language learners. The immersive and interactive gaming environment allows players to receive input and produce output in English simultaneously, creating a natural, continuous, and meaningful learning process. This overall perception illustrates that games are not merely entertainment platforms, but dynamic and productive social spaces for building English language competence.

MMOG Features that Contribute to English Language Learning

The features found in MMOGs have been proven to contribute significantly to the development of participants' English language skills. In general, the three main features that most influence the learning process are text chat, voice chat, and text-based elements such as quests, instructions, and storylines. All three allow players to actively and continuously use English, both in written and spoken form, thereby creating a dynamic, multimodal, and meaningful learning environment. These features not only facilitate the delivery of game-related information but also serve as a platform for interaction that helps players practice English in a social and communicative context. These findings are in line with Alrajhi (2020), who asserts that language practice in games can support the development of communication competence because it involves goal-oriented and collaborative activities.

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Text Chat

Text chat is the feature most frequently used by players to collaborate and focus on the game's objectives. Through text chat, players participate in short conversations to convey important information, coordinate strategies, and respond to game conditions in real time. This written interaction gives players the opportunity to practice their ability to process messages concisely, clearly, and efficiently. In addition to being a useful means of communication, text chat also develops literacy skills, particularly in understanding messages conveyed by other players and the language structure used in various contexts.



Figure 1. screen recording

The use of text chat encourages players to construct sentences with attention to meaning and regularity, thereby helping them understand grammar and sentence structure in context. This situation is in line with the views of Jabbari and Peterson (2023), who state that engagement in text-based interactions in MMORPGs can promote linguistic abilities, especially in terms of understanding language structure and written expression. Additionally, Alrajhi (2020) emphasizes that text chat encourages improved writing skills because players become accustomed to producing messages in English for direct communication. Thus, text chat plays a significant role in supporting the development of reading and writing skills that occur repeatedly and meaningfully.

Voice Chat

Voice chat is one of the main features that supports speaking and listening skills. This feature allows players to discuss directly with team members to give instructions, respond to game situations, or build effective coordination. Voice interactions are spontaneous and often take place quickly, encouraging players to understand messages and respond appropriately according to the needs of the game.



Figure 2. screen recording

The use of voice chat facilitates learners to practice spoken English in situations that resemble real-life contexts. This is in line with the findings of Reinders and Wattana (2015), who stated that language practice in games can increase willingness to communicate because participants are engaged in relevant and interactive verbal activities. In addition, involvement in voice chat provides exposure to variations in intonation, pronunciation, and language rhythm, thereby helping to improve phonological skills. The collaborative nature of the game environment also reduces language anxiety and increases confidence in speaking, making the learning process more natural and effective.

Quests, Instructions, and Story-lines

MMOG features related to text, such as quests, instructions, and storylines, also contribute significantly to the development of English language skills. These elements require players to read a variety of important information in order to understand the objectives of the

game, complete missions, and follow the storyline. The reading process provides opportunities for players to expand their vocabulary and improve their text comprehension skills.



Figure 3. screen recording

Through repeated reading activities, players learn to interpret new words and phrases in relevant contexts, thereby facilitating the process of vocabulary internalization. This activity is in line with Nation's (2001) previous study, which found that vocabulary can be developed through repeated contextual exposure. The combination of instructional and narrative text comprehension also helps players develop reading strategies, such as guessing the meaning of words based on context or identifying important information in the text. Thus, text-based features in MMOGs are not only a component of the game, but also an important part of supporting the continuous improvement of reading and vocabulary skills.

Overall, text chat, voice chat, quests, instructions, and story-lines in MMOGs help players develop their English skills because each provides opportunities to practice written and spoken language in meaningful contexts. These features encourage spontaneous language use, enrich vocabulary, and improve text comprehension, creating an effective and relevant learning experience.

Improved English Language Skills through MMOGs

The use of MMOGs has been proven to help improve participants' English language skills through a natural and contextual learning process. While playing, participants engage in interactions that require the use of English to communicate, understand instructions, and make decisions. This environment allows for spontaneous language practice, which ultimately improves speaking skills. Players must express their opinions, give directions, or respond to game situations in a short period of time, so they become accustomed to expressing ideas clearly and fluently. This condition is in line with Reinders and Wattana (2015), who state that the gaming environment can reduce language anxiety and increase willingness to communicate because interactions take place in a more relaxed and non-judgmental atmosphere.

In addition to speaking, listening comprehension skills also improve because players must grasp information from rapid conversations during the game. They need to understand instructions, strategies, and comments made by other team members, thereby training themselves to recognize meaning in various contexts. This process strengthens spoken language comprehension, as described by Liando et al. (2018), who emphasize that meaningful activities in a collaborative context can improve comprehension skills.

Reading skills also develop through activities that involve understanding texts that appear in games, such as quests, instructions, and storylines. Participants must read this information to understand the context and objectives of the game so that they can continue the mission correctly. By getting used to reading English texts, players become better able to interpret new vocabulary and understand sentence structure in different contexts. Nation (2001) emphasizes that exposure to context-rich texts can help learners build vocabulary understanding gradually.

At the same time, participants' writing skills also improve through the use of text chat features used to coordinate and discuss during the game. Participants often have to type short and clear messages to convey instructions or respond to rapidly changing conditions. This process encourages them to construct sentences effectively and choose the right vocabulary, so that their writing skills develop through repeated practice. This is reinforced by Jabbari and

Peterson (2023), who assert that engagement in written interaction within MMORPGs can improve learners' literacy skills.

In addition to these four main skills, there was also a significant improvement in vocabulary mastery. Participants learned many new words from the game texts and verbal interactions within the game. The vocabulary acquired included various terms related to the game context, thereby functionally expanding the participants' language knowledge. Salsabil et al. (2023) explain that online games are able to expand vocabulary knowledge through repeated contextual exposure. In addition, participants' pronunciation skills also developed because they were accustomed to hearing and imitating the way other players spoke. Exposure to authentic pronunciation helped them understand the rhythm and intonation of English more naturally. Finally, grammar skills improve implicitly because participants become accustomed to seeing and using sentence structures in meaningful contexts.

Thus, learning through MMOGs not only improves one aspect of English language proficiency, but also has a comprehensive impact on the development of participants' receptive and productive language skills. Meaningful interactions, continuous exposure, and the need to actively use English make these games a potential means of developing language skills in a real-world context.

CONCLUSIONS

This study shows that MMOGs play a role in supporting the development of EFL students' English language skills. Participants view MMOGs as an effective medium because they provide an authentic communication context, increase motivation and confidence, and complement formal learning. Features such as text chat, voice chat, quests, instructions, and storylines provide opportunities for players to use English orally and in writing in meaningful situations. Through these interactions, speaking, listening, reading, writing, vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar skills develop naturally and continuously. Thus, these findings indicate that educators can utilize MMOGs as a complementary learning medium to encourage authentic language practice, particularly oral interaction, beyond the formal classroom.

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