
ELT STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES ON THE IMPACT OF ONLINE ROLE-PLAYING GAMES IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

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Abstract: *Online RPGs are games that establish a highly detailed world where players can immerse themselves to become any character they have dreamed of. For the past three years, Online RPGs have been used creatively by students as a learning medium beyond conventional classroom learning because this approach makes the learning process much more bearable and enjoyable, and doesn't make students bored easily. The purpose of this study is to examine ELT students' perspectives on online RPGs in English language acquisition. The study was conducted at Universitas Tanjungpura, specifically in the English Education Department. The study employs a qualitative survey that combines open-ended and closed-ended questions to gather detailed responses from respondents. The participants consisted of 15 sixth-semester students who were active online RPG players. The findings showed that online RPGs offer many benefits for language acquisition. One of the profound aspects was their enhanced reading comprehension. However, an internal issue, such as a student's confidence, and an external issue, such as a toxic player, could interfere with their language acquisition. In conclusion, ELT students have a positive attitude toward online RPGs in English language acquisition.*

Keywords: *Online RPG games; Language acquisition; Students' perspective*

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INTRODUCTION

Online RPGs are games that create highly detailed worlds in which players can immerse themselves and become any character they have dreamed of (Miftahudin & Malihah, 2022). In the game, players can be whomever they want and interact with other players from around the world. (Sun et al., 2024). For the past three years, Online RPGs have been used creatively by students as a learning medium beyond conventional

classroom learning, due to the Kurikulum Merdeka, which gives them the freedom to adjust their learning style (Salsabil et al., 2023). This kind of approach makes the learning process much more bearable and enjoyable, and doesn't make the students bored easily.

Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game (MMORPG), as the name implies, is a genre that combines role-playing elements and multiplayer into a massive world that players can explore. In the context of language acquisition, an MMORPG can facilitate the process. For instance, through the consistent use of proper expressions in sociolinguistics, learners can improve their language acquisition skills (Zhang et al., 2017). Moreover, MMORPGs have been shown to provide the stimulation learners need to fill knowledge gaps as they play (Kholodniak, 2025). Surprisingly, a study conducted by Raghbir et al. (2025) shows that ESL learners improve specifically in lexical knowledge through in-game communication with peers, discussing the meaning of a sentence while completing the quest. Moreover, this interaction was also related to incidental language learning, since the learners' main focus is playing MMORPG, while peer in-game communication happens naturally and subconsciously due to the nature of MMORPG.

Language acquisition is a learning process in which students study a language, typically a second language they couldn't master as children (Troike & Barto, 2017). Krashen (1981) suggested two language learning settings: artificial and natural. Artificial settings are formal learning environments that are highly structured and organized, such as classrooms. Meanwhile, natural settings are an informal learning environment that aren't formally established and occur naturally. Specifically in the context of English language acquisition, the two settings complement each other. Since the artificial settings provide language-theoretical knowledge. Natural settings provide an environment where students can apply their theoretical knowledge.

Game-based learning (GBL) is a classroom teaching approach that incorporates language-learning materials into games to support the teaching process. Game-based learning programs should ensure that game content can be applied in real-life contexts (Adipat et al., 2021). Game-based learning has become a solution for improving an important student's skill, which is critical thinking. For instance, students are required to gather a hint and make an assumption to solve a puzzle to advance to another level; in

this way, they are required to use their thinking skills to overcome the problem. Additionally, game-based learning can nurture students' engagement during learning, ensuring long-term positive learning outcomes (Taub et al., 2017). In the digital age, game-based learning has evolved into digital game-based learning. Digital game-based learning serves the same purpose as the previous version but offers students a better learning experience. Students, especially in the digital age, absorb knowledge better through digital game-based learning than through classroom tasks (Anastasiadis et al., 2018). Through digital game-based learning, students are presented with a set of issues that evoke their curiosity and lead to an increase in their self-esteem once they manage to solve them (Nadeem et al., 2023).

Incidental language learning is a process in which someone acquires new language knowledge through exposure to the surrounding environment rather than through conventional instruction. Incidental language learning is unplanned and can occur anywhere, at any time (Prandi et al., 2023). In this way, language learners can seamlessly acquire knowledge through informative contexts, as input from people around us can play an important role in incidental language learning (Chen et al., 2021).

Sonita et al. (2024) found that students had a positive response to online RPG games, as the games are easy to access, which motivates students to learn English. Additionally, a study conducted by Lin & Guo (2021) shows that students view online RPGs as a fun and relaxing way to learn English, especially vocabulary. Even though previous studies show that online RPGs are effective for gaining vocabulary knowledge. But previous studies involved only common students as participants and specified a single English skill. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to find out what ELT students think regarding the impact of online RPG games on English language acquisition as a whole.

The researcher hoped that this study would provide theoretical significance in the field of English language acquisition. Since this study would fill the gap that the previous studies haven't discussed by exploring the ELT students' perspective on Online RPG games in increasing their overall English language acquisition, and also exploring the challenges and advantages that they gained throughout the process.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, specifically a qualitative survey to gather primary data and elicit insightful responses from participants. A qualitative survey aimed to elicit detailed responses from respondents while still using closed-ended questions to complement the open-ended responses (Bora & Altun, 2025). The target sample of this study is Universitas Tanjungpura students, specifically in the English Language Education Study; the accessible sample is taken from sixth-semester students in this department. This study used purposive sampling to select participants. Purposive sampling can identify which participants are relevant to this study's topic (Thomas, 2022). There are 15 participants who meet the researcher's criteria (e.g., those who have played online RPGs before and play them for more than 50 minutes per day). Therefore, the researcher could obtain clear primary data on how Online RPG games influence students' language acquisition skills and on the advantages and challenges students face while playing.

Data Collection

The researcher employs the triangulation method, specifically the within-method triangulation. Because using more than one data collection instrument is required when the researcher wants to prove or confirm the study results (Arias Valencia, 2022). The research instrument is a questionnaire with both closed-ended and open-ended questions. The open-ended questions require the student to explain how Online RPGs affect their English acquisition skills, whether they are motivated after playing Online RPGs, and so on. Additionally, the closed-ended questions are on a Likert scale. Likert scales are commonly used when a researcher wants to assess respondents' attitudes towards certain topics (Batterton & Hale, 2017).

Data Analyze

There are several steps involved in collecting the data. First, the researcher collected data from the questionnaire and drew conclusions based on it. Then, the researcher input the results of closed-ended questions within the questionnaire into SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) with descriptive statistics to know about the students'

perspectives. Then, the statistics were shown in the form of charts that also included the mean and standard deviation (SD) from each of the questions within the questionnaire.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

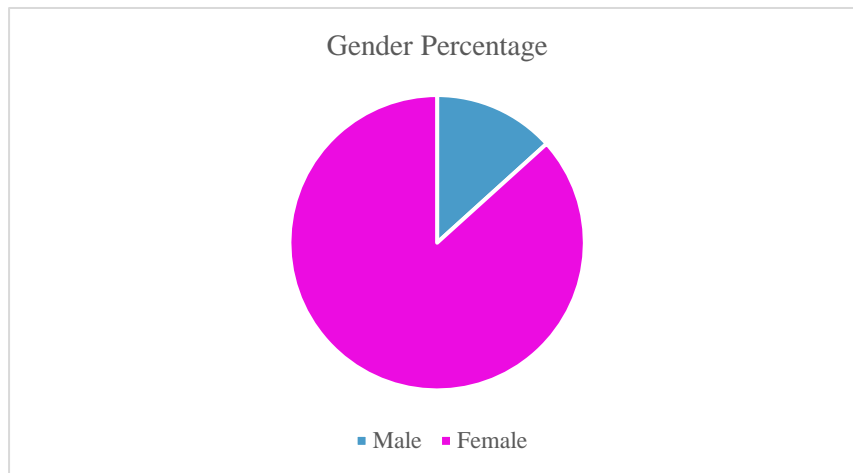


Figure 1. Pie Chart of Gender

After a thorough analysis, the participants who met the study's minimum requirements were selected. There are 15 sixth-semester students at Universitas Tanjungpura in the English Language Education Study who are active online RPG players. Interestingly, based on the demographics, the participants in this study are predominantly female (N = 13; 86.7%) compared with males (N = 2; 13.3%).

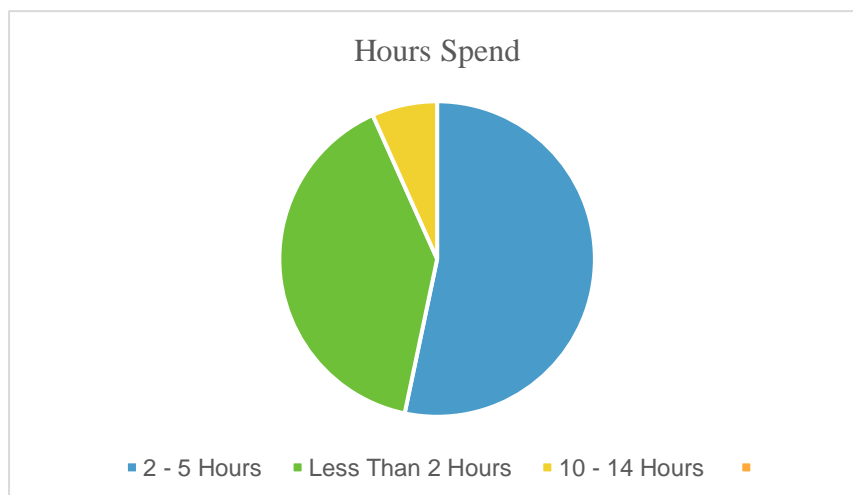


Figure 2. Pie Chart of Gaming Duration

Regarding the number of hours that they spend when playing games, most of the participants are spending 2 – 5 hours per day (N = 8; 53.3%) followed by less than 2 hours (N = 6; 40%), and the highest spending hours is from 10 – 14 hours per day (N = 1; 6.7%). Based on these profiles, the participants in this study are eligible to take part.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics of Questionnaire

Statements (Scale 1-5)	Means	SD
L1: Playing online RPGs has helped me find new English vocabulary words.	4.33	0.61
L2: Reading quest descriptions, lore, and character dialogue in games has improved my English reading comprehension.	4.46	0.63
L3: Typing in game chats (to coordinate with teammates) has improved my ability to write in English quickly.	4.33	0.72
L4: Playing online RPGs makes me feel less nervous about making grammar mistakes when writing an English text.	3.93	1.03
L5: Using voice chat with international players has made me more confident in speaking English.	3.66	1.29
L6: Because of online RPGs, I am more motivated to improve my English skills outside of the game.	4.06	0.96
L7: I believe I have learned more practical English from gaming rather than from traditional classroom lessons.	4.00	1.19

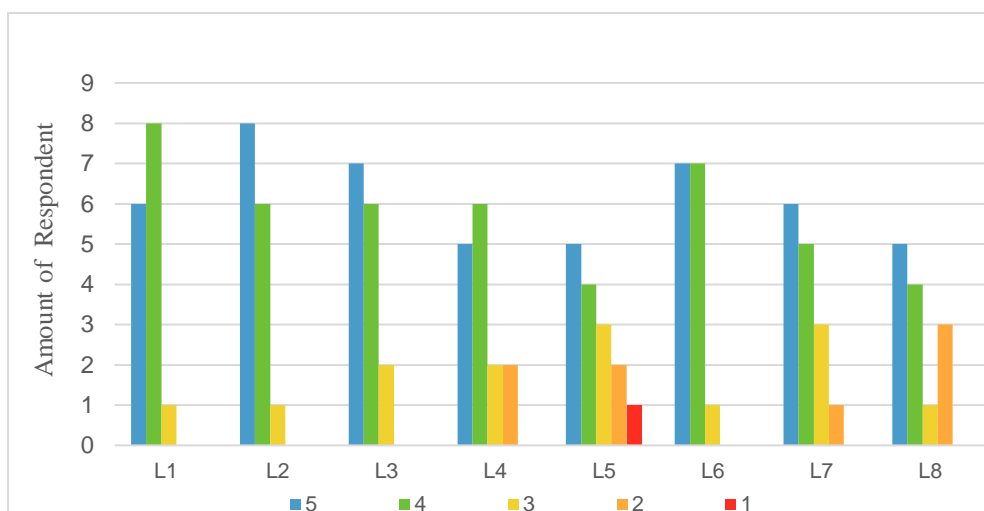


Figure 3. Bar Chart of Questionnaire

Based on the data, the highest results on the questionnaire are in receptive skills, specifically in reading comprehension, as measured by question 2 (**L2, Mean = 4.46**). On the other hand, productive skills yielded similar but slightly lower results than receptive skills. Starting with question three (**L3, Mean = 4.33**). Followed by question four (**L4, Mean = 3.93**). And ended with question five (**L5, Mean = 3.66**). Additionally, general language acquisition aspects, such as vocabulary knowledge and direct practical experience in real-life contexts, yielded results similar to those in the receptive skills field. Starting with question one (**L1, Mean = 4.33**). Followed by question six (**L6, Mean = 4.06**). And ended with question seven (**L7, Mean = 4.00**). The results indicate that each participant has a diverse response to each question in the questionnaire.

1. Narrative Engagement in Reading Comprehension

The reason the reading comprehension aspect (L2) achieved the highest mean score is reflected in the participants' responses in the open-ended questions section. The high exposure to lore and text dialogue isn't seen as a learning burden; instead, it is seen as an entertaining element that keeps the player engaged in the game. Their intrinsic motivation to understand the storyline is shown to increase their reading. This statement is supported by one of the participants:

"I feel like my reading comprehension skills increased because the story and the dialogues in game are interesting to me." (P14).

The statement above shows that RPG games serve as a learning medium because students implicitly learn while being entertained by playing online RPGs.

2. Writing Skill Improvement Through Global Chat

The reason the writing aspect (L3) received the third-highest mean score is reflected in the participants' responses in the open-ended questions section. When they frequently communicate with other players who share a similar interest in the global chat, they are constantly writing text in the global chat. In this way, they are indirectly enhancing their writing skills through the constant direct practice with global chat. This statement is supported by three of the participants:

“I got to interact more with people that have the same interests as I am.” (P8).

“There are many new words and vocabulary I have learn..” (P2)

“It made me learn about new vocabularies.” (P9)

The statements above clearly show that Online RPG games can enhance players' writing skills through global chat, as they frequently communicate and subconsciously practice their writing by typing messages to other players.

3. Vocabulary Knowledge Enhancement

The reason the vocabulary aspect (L1) received the second-highest mean score is reflected in the participants' responses in the open-ended questions section. When they are playing Online RPG games, they frequently encounter vocabulary they rarely see in real-life contexts, and that appears only in the fantasy settings of Online RPG games. Therefore, they always acquire new vocabulary while playing the game and subconsciously broaden their vocabulary. This statement is supported by two participants

“When I first started playing RPGs, I noticed that learned a lot of new English vocabularies that isn't commonly used.” (P15).

“I feel more confident in using English because I practice it while playing and communicating with other players.” (P1)

The statement above clearly shows that the learners' vocabulary knowledge is improving.

4. Difficulty in Maintaining a Proper Tone

However, the communication aspect gained the lowest score (**L5**) in this study. Analysis revealed that participants faced internal barriers. The participants often find it difficult to communicate with other players, especially those overseas, because they struggle to maintain an appropriate tone to avoid misunderstandings, especially when speaking English. This statement is supported by one of the participants:

“Trying to set tone of my conversation, because I don't want to offend people accidentally.” (P2).

The statement above clearly shows that the learners are having difficulty, especially in speaking to other players. Since they are still learners who have tried to figure out the proper tone in verbal communication.

5. Racial Discrimination by Other Players

Additionally, another reason why the communication aspect gained the lowest score (**L5**) of this study is because of external barriers. After analyzing it, it was revealed that there are external barriers that participants faced. The external barriers come from the other player's behavior who has a racist sentiment and often mock other speaking style especially towards Asian players. This statement are supported by one of the participant:

“Sometimes people are not friendly and only choose to mock my speaking style.” (P9).

The statement above clearly shows that the learners are having difficulty, especially in verbal communications. They are discouraged by the racism act that some of the players made towards them. They are reluctant to speak to other players verbally to avoid this problem.

Discussion

Since this study examines the impact of online RPG games on English language acquisition among ELT students, several intriguing findings emerged from the research. The first finding is that if someone is constantly exposed to the lore or text dialogue of each character, it indirectly influences their reading comprehension and vocabulary knowledge; this finding was in line with incidental language learning. Incidental learning is a concept in which knowledge in a certain field is gained by completing familiar activities, rather than being deliberately learned through a conventional approach (Dang et al., 2022). Since online RPGs focus solely on comprehension, players are encouraged to understand the text's meaning to advance through the storyline. In this way, the participant's intrinsic motivation is ignited because they are engaged in something they like rather than in classroom learning. Intrinsic motivations are the driving force behind their willingness to engage and immerse themselves in the games (Reyes, 2024). If there is no intrinsic motivation, then language acquisition progress wouldn't exist, and they would be solely focusing on the entertainment aspects of the game.

Additionally, the finding regarding vocabulary acquisition (**L1**) received the third highest mean score ($M = 4.33$), which supports Lin & Guo (2021), who argued that Online RPG games are highly effective in a language learning context since they engage in enjoyable and fun activities and subconsciously gain a new vocabulary while playing Online RPG games. Moreover, the finding regarding reading comprehension gained the highest mean score ($M = 4.46$) supports Dang et al. (2022), who argued that incidental language learning possibly occurs when language learners subconsciously gain an improvement in English language acquisition through entertaining activities that indirectly affect their reading comprehension in a positive way.

However, in this study, the researcher also identifies major barriers, especially in communication. Even though most online RPG games provide voice chat features, there are still a handful of players who were discouraged when they were about to use these features. These internal barriers arise because players lack confidence or encouragement, or are overly careful not to offend anyone while communicating. When someone has a negative assumption about themselves, they tend to get discouraged when they are about to do something that were related to social aspects (Tanesini, 2018). Especially if they are

the type of player who focuses too much on thinking about how others would perceive their remarks. Being this type of person is exhausting because they have to think more than twice before doing something (Papayanis, 2023). These internal factors are the main reason some players are reluctant to use voice chat, even though the features are already available. But there are also external factors that make the players reluctant to speak through voice chat.

There are occasions when a certain group of players, especially those from overseas, exhibits racism towards other players, particularly those from Southeast Asia (Deveraux, 2023). These type of players is called toxic players, because they are constantly expressing toxic behaviors such as hate speech and racist remarks that ruin other people's gaming experiences (Ng et al., 2025). These internal and external factors are proof that, even though online RPGs provide social communication features like voice chat, they still depend on the individual's readiness and on game communities that indirectly discourage communication.

CONCLUSION

The study focuses on how ELT students' perspectives on online RPG games. The results of this study showed that students generally had a positive reaction to online RPGs. The students find that reading the quest lore and the character's dialogue have helped them increase their reading comprehension. It shows that online RPG games allowed them to indirectly improve their skills while doing something that they were good at and passionate about. Additionally, during this process, students are influenced by intrinsic motivation, as they voluntarily read the character's dialogue to get a clue or hint to proceed further in the game.

However, this study also revealed a hidden problem that students experienced while playing online RPGs. The students stated that they were discouraged from speaking to other players since some of them are afraid to hurt other people's feelings by anything that they were about to say. Also, some of them are discouraged from speaking to other players because they fear a toxic player might mock their English. In conclusion, even though the online RPGs are seen positively by the sixth – semester students. The findings also show that not every student has a pleasant experience playing online RPGs, which

indirectly negatively affects their language acquisition. The negative effects are also worth noting, as they pose a barrier for students and prevent them from fully utilizing the game's features to enhance their overall language acquisition.

SUGGESTION

There are still several issues that need to be addressed, but overall, they find that Online RPGs are truly beneficial for their English language. There is still a limitation that could be further elaborated on by future researchers. The first is that the researcher is restricted to sixth-semester students; this limitation could be used by future researchers to explore how students in other semesters think about the impact of online RPG games. The second limitation is that the researchers are assessing the entire English language acquisition process; future researchers could focus on a single aspect to obtain more precise and insightful findings. Based on the study's findings, the study could provide pedagogical implications for educators. The findings could be used to inform educators in implementing Online RPG games as a group-based activity within the teaching process to enhance students' language learning beyond the classroom. Additionally, educators should reconsider how they teach in the digital age, since students are more engaged with game-related activities than with conventional ones. Instead, educators should integrate specific Online RPG games into the current teaching process to ensure the student's engagement while maintaining the language learning objective is achievable.

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