

English Vocabulary Acquisition through MMORPGs: A Case Study of Ragnarok M Players

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ABSTRAK

Penguasaan kosakata memegang peranan penting dalam pembelajaran bahasa Inggris, tetapi banyak pelajar yang kesulitan untuk memperluas kosakata mereka melalui pembelajaran konvensional di kelas. Perkembangan teknologi digital terkini telah memperkenalkan platform alternatif untuk penguasaan bahasa, termasuk Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games (MMORPG), yang menawarkan masukan linguistik yang kaya dan lingkungan yang interaktif. Studi ini menyelidiki bagaimana pelajar EFL Indonesia menguasai kosakata bahasa Inggris melalui keterlibatan mereka dengan Ragnarok M: Eternal Love, sebuah MMORPG yang populer. Dengan menggunakan desain penelitian kualitatif deskriptif, data dikumpulkan dari 50 pemain aktif melalui kuesioner daring yang terdiri dari item tertutup dan terbuka. Temuan penelitian mengungkapkan bahwa kosakata diperoleh secara tidak sengaja melalui paparan berulang terhadap teks dalam permainan seperti instruksi pencarian, dialog NPC, deskripsi item, dan komunikasi pemain. Pemain menggunakan berbagai strategi untuk pembelajaran kosakata, termasuk menebak kontekstual, alat penerjemahan, dan dukungan sebaya. Interaksi sosial, motivasi, dan keterlibatan dalam permainan diidentifikasi sebagai faktor signifikan yang memengaruhi retensi kosakata. Hasil-hasil ini mendukung perspektif teoritis seperti Hipotesis Input Krashen, Teori Sosiokultural Vygotsky, dan Pembelajaran Situasional Gee. Studi ini menyoroti potensi MMORPG sebagai lingkungan pembelajaran informal dan memberikan implikasi pedagogis untuk mengintegrasikan pembelajaran berbasis permainan ke dalam pengajaran bahasa Inggris.

Kata Kunci: MMORPG, Pembelajaran Berbasis Permainan, Pembelajaran Informal, Ragnarok M, Akuisisi Kosakata

ABSTRACT

Vocabulary acquisition plays a central role in English language learning, yet many learners struggle to expand their vocabulary through conventional classroom instruction. Recent developments in digital technology have introduced alternative platforms for language acquisition, including Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games (MMORPGs), which offer rich linguistic input and interactive environments. This study investigates how Indonesian EFL learners acquire English vocabulary through their engagement with Ragnarok M: Eternal Love, a popular MMORPG. Employing a descriptive qualitative research design, data were collected from 50 active players via an online questionnaire consisting of both closed- and open-ended items. The findings reveal that vocabulary is acquired incidentally through repeated exposure to in-game texts such as quest instructions, NPC dialogues, item descriptions, and player communication. Players employed various strategies for vocabulary learning, including contextual guessing, translation tools, and peer support. Social interaction, motivation, and gameplay immersion were identified as significant factors influencing

vocabulary retention. These results support theoretical perspectives such as Krashen's Input Hypothesis, Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, and Gee's Situated Learning. The study highlights the potential of MMORPGs as informal learning environments and provides pedagogical implications for integrating game-based learning into English language instruction.

Keywords: A MMORPG, Game-Based Learning, Informal Learning, Ragnarok M, Vocabulary Acquisition

INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary is a fundamental element in language learning and teaching, serving as the cornerstone of communicative competence that enables learners to understand and express meaning in both spoken and written forms. Mastery of the four language macro skills listening, speaking, reading, and writing is heavily dependent on the breadth and depth of one's vocabulary knowledge. As Wilkins (1972) famously asserted, "Without grammar, very little can be conveyed; without vocabulary, nothing can be conveyed," highlighting that vocabulary is not merely supportive but essential to communication. This importance becomes even more pronounced in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings, where learners with a richer vocabulary repertoire tend to perform better in both academic and real-world communicative tasks.

A more refined understanding of vocabulary learning is provided by Nation (2001), who distinguishes between receptive vocabulary knowledge words that learners can recognize and understand while reading or listening and productive knowledge words that learners can actively produce in speaking and writing. Vocabulary acquisition can occur through intentional learning, such as memorization and explicit instruction, or through incidental learning, which takes place naturally as learners encounter language in meaningful contexts. Schmitt (2008) highlights the importance of incidental vocabulary acquisition, particularly when learners are repeatedly exposed to comprehensible input embedded in authentic communication. Key factors such as frequency of exposure, contextual cues, and learner strategies like guessing from context, repetition, or social interaction play crucial roles in fostering long-term vocabulary retention.

In exploring how learners approach vocabulary acquisition, Oxford (1990) categorizes vocabulary learning strategies into memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, and social strategies, noting that learners in autonomous or informal settings tend to use these adaptively depending on the context. This flexibility becomes especially relevant in digital environments that promote independent learning. Cobb (1999) adds to this perspective by arguing that vocabulary learning thrives when learners actively construct meaning through inference a process that is naturally supported in task-based and exploratory digital platforms.

Traditional vocabulary instruction has long relied on classroom-based techniques such as drilling, rote memorization, and textbook learning. While these methods are structured and effective to a certain degree, they often lack the authentic,

dynamic engagement that characterizes real-life language use. In contrast, recent research has shifted toward exploring interactive, technology-enhanced learning modalities. For example, Syakur et al. (2020) found that online learning platforms that emphasize social interaction and task-based communication significantly improve learners' English proficiency in higher education contexts. These findings resonate with the interactive nature of digital games, which offer immersive environments for natural language exposure.

Game-Based Language Learning (GBLL) leverages the motivational, interactive, and contextual aspects of digital games to foster meaningful language learning. Gee's (2003) Situated Learning Theory supports the idea that games provide authentic, goal-oriented situations in which language becomes a tool for action, problem-solving, and social interaction. In such environments, vocabulary acquisition occurs not through isolated drills but through purposeful language use situated in real-time contexts. Hung et al. (2018) categorized digital game-based language learning environments into exploratory, communicative, and immersive types, asserting that MMORPGs occupy all three categories due to their emphasis on interaction, player agency, and contextually grounded tasks. This classification underscores the multifaceted potential of MMORPGs for fostering vocabulary growth.

In addition, Godwin-Jones (2014) emphasizes that digital games are not only engaging but also provide repeated and meaningful language input in richly contextualized settings. This repeated exposure aligns well with the principles of incidental learning and helps reinforce word knowledge over time. Among various game genres, Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games (MMORPGs) are particularly conducive to vocabulary development. These games immerse players in expansive virtual worlds filled with quests, dialogues, item descriptions, and social interaction most often in English offering repeated exposure to diverse language forms. Sykes et al. (2010) describe MMORPGs as rich sociolinguistic environments in which learners interact with authentic English in real-time and collaborative settings. Reinders and Wattana (2015) further demonstrate that MMORPGs can lead to significant vocabulary gains when compared to traditional classroom instruction, largely due to the immersive and communicative nature of the gameplay experience.

In such environments, players are consistently exposed to vocabulary through various textual and dialogic forms such as mission briefings, non-player character (NPC) dialogues, item descriptions, and real-time player communication all situated within meaningful gameplay. This dynamic aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory, which emphasizes the importance of social interaction and mediation in the learner's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) for cognitive development. Additionally, Krashen's (1982) Input Hypothesis reinforces the role of comprehensible input in supporting naturalistic vocabulary acquisition, especially when learners are engaged and motivated.

Despite robust evidence supporting MMORPGs as effective environments for vocabulary development, little research has specifically examined the linguistic features of Ragnarok M: Eternal Love and their role in English vocabulary acquisition,

particularly in the context of Indonesian players. This game, which remains highly popular in Indonesia, immerses users in a richly designed fantasy world where quests, narratives, and social interactions are primarily conducted in English. It offers abundant, meaningful vocabulary exposure in contexts that require active engagement and comprehension.

Moreover, limited research has investigated how Indonesian players interpret and process unfamiliar vocabulary encountered during MMORPG gameplay. While previous studies have demonstrated the vocabulary benefits of MMORPGs more generally, few have focused on the specific mechanisms and textual features of Ragnarok M: Eternal Love, especially from the perspective of Indonesian players navigating the game in English. This gap highlights the need to explore how players encounter, make sense of, and retain English vocabulary through their gameplay experiences.

This study therefore investigates not only what vocabulary is acquired, but also how players engage with it through various strategies, motivational factors, and interactions with in-game texts. It focuses on strategies such as guessing from context, using dictionaries or translators, collaborating with peers, and benefiting from repeated exposure. Furthermore, the study examines how motivation to succeed in gameplay drives players to persist in learning and understanding new vocabulary. It also explores which in-game texts such as mission instructions, NPC dialogues, item descriptions, and chat communications are perceived as most effective in supporting vocabulary acquisition.

Given these aims, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. How do Indonesian players acquire English vocabulary through exposure during gameplay in Ragnarok M: Eternal Love and strategies do they employ to comprehend and retain unfamiliar English vocabulary encountered in the game?
2. Which types of in-game texts and dialogues most effectively support vocabulary development?

The primary objective of this research is to deepen understanding of how MMORPGs, particularly Ragnarok M, function as informal yet rich platforms for both incidental and intentional vocabulary learning among Indonesian players. While the participants are not formally enrolled as EFL learners in the game context, their experiences reveal meaningful implications for second language acquisition (SLA) theory and EFL pedagogy. This study contributes to the broader SLA discourse by illustrating how authentic, task-driven, and socially mediated digital environments foster vocabulary acquisition. The findings also offer practical insights for educators and curriculum designers, suggesting that MMORPG-inspired content and game-based activities may serve as engaging supplements to formal English instruction, especially in vocabulary development.

METHODS

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to explore how Indonesian players acquire English vocabulary through engagement with the MMORPG Ragnarok M: Eternal Love. The participants consisted of 50 Indonesian players who had been actively playing the game in English for at least three months. They were recruited through online gaming communities and forums using purposive sampling to ensure relevance. The participants varied in age, gender, educational background, and English proficiency, providing diverse perspectives on vocabulary acquisition through gaming.

Data were collected over two weeks via an online questionnaire distributed through a WhatsApp group of Indonesian Ragnarok M players. The questionnaire included four sections: (1) participant demographics and gaming habits, (2) exposure to and use of English vocabulary in-game, (3) vocabulary learning strategies, and (4) open-ended reflections on vocabulary learning experiences. Participants provided informed consent and responded anonymously to encourage honest answers. Responses were monitored for completeness and quality, with no follow-up interviews, as the open-ended questions were designed to elicit detailed narratives.

The researcher served as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis, overseeing questionnaire design, dissemination, data management, and interpretation. Quantitative data from closed-ended questions were analyzed using descriptive statistics frequencies and percentages to identify trends such as frequency of unfamiliar vocabulary encounters, prevalent learning strategies, and types of in-game texts accessed. These results were presented in tables to support the narrative discussion.

Qualitative data from open-ended responses were analyzed thematically following Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña's (2014) procedures, involving iterative coding, categorization, and data reduction. Emergent themes included vocabulary exposure, comprehension strategies, motivational factors, and the role of various in-game texts. Representative participant quotations were included to illustrate key patterns and learner perspectives.

Findings were interpreted through established second language acquisition and sociocultural learning theories, including Krashen's (1982) Input and Affective Filter Hypotheses, Nation's (2001) vocabulary learning strategies framework, Schmitt's (2000, 2008) vocabulary processing models, Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory, and Gee's (2003) Situated Learning Theory. These theoretical perspectives provided a foundation for linking gameplay experiences with language acquisition processes. Grounded in relevant literature on vocabulary development and game-based learning, the combined quantitative and qualitative analysis offers a comprehensive understanding of MMORPGs as informal yet effective environments for English vocabulary acquisition.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study aimed to investigate how English vocabulary is acquired by Indonesian players through their engagement with the MMORPG Ragnarok M: Eternal Love. The data, obtained from 50 participants, were analyzed qualitatively to address three main research objectives: (1) to examine how players of Ragnarok M acquire English vocabulary through in-game exposure, and what strategies they use to comprehend and retain unfamiliar words, (2) to identify the types of in-game texts contribute to vocabulary development.

Acquisition of English Vocabulary Through In-Game Exposure and the Strategies Employed by Players in Ragnarok M

Table 1. Frequency of Unfamiliar Vocabulary Encounters (n = 50)

Response	Percentage
Always	28 %
Often	42 %
Sometimes	30 %
Rarely	0 %
Never	0%

Source: Primary Data, 2025

This study found that English vocabulary acquisition among Ragnarok M players occurs through a combination of repeated exposure in meaningful gameplay contexts and the active use of strategies to comprehend unfamiliar words. A substantial 100% of respondents reported encountering new vocabulary while playing, with 28% indicating they “always” and 42% “often” encountered unfamiliar terms. Even those who selected “sometimes” (30%) still reflected on meaningful learning experiences. Notably, none of the participants selected “rarely” or “never,” suggesting that lexical exposure is a consistent and integral feature of Ragnarok M gameplay. Frequently mentioned vocabulary included terms such as penetration, vulnerable, resistance, and purification, as well as common in-game phrases like AFK, crowd control, and chance to cast.

These lexical items frequently appear in functional, gameplay-specific contexts such as when selecting skills, upgrading weapons, or understanding item mechanics. This pattern aligns with Krashen’s (1982) Input Hypothesis, which posits that language acquisition is facilitated when learners are exposed to input slightly beyond their current competence level, especially when contextualized. In the gaming environment, these words are not merely read but encountered repeatedly in meaningful and task-driven interactions. As one participant (R15) noted, “I remember the word ‘penetration’ because I needed to understand its meaning to succeed in PvP”. Another respondent (R31) reflected on the contrast between learning in a classroom and learning through gaming, saying, “Class is textbook, but the game is practice. I remember words more easily because I need them to progress.”

Table 2. Common Strategies When Facing Unfamiliar Words

Strategy	Chosen by (%)
Guess from context	72 %
Use dictionary/translator	68 %
Ask other players	42 %
Ignore it	8 %

Source: Primary Data, 2025

In addition to passive exposure, players employed various strategies to actively process unfamiliar vocabulary. As shown in Table 2, the most commonly used strategies included guessing meaning from context (72%) and using dictionaries or translation tools (68%). According to Nation (2001), robust vocabulary acquisition is best achieved through the integration of meaning-focused input such as reading quest dialogues and language-focused learning strategies like dictionary use, both of which are present in MMORPG gameplay. Furthermore, 42% of respondents reported asking other players for help, demonstrating the role of social interaction in language learning. This supports Vygotsky's (1978) assertion that learning is mediated through interaction within the learner's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where social exchanges guide learners to perform tasks they could not accomplish alone.

Motivation also appeared to play a supporting role in how players processed and retained unfamiliar vocabulary. Approximately 72% of participants reported that they were driven to understand English terms in order to enhance their character's performance or to communicate more effectively within their guilds. As R8 noted, "I have to understand the words to find out what abilities and equipment that are compatible with my character. That motivates me to learn more." This motivational engagement can also be understood through Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis, which posits emotional variables such as motivation and anxiety influence language acquisition. A low affective filter caused by enjoyment, immersion, and achievement in gaming facilitates more effective intake of language input. One player (R43) shared, "Because I play every day, I'm exposed to more words and I can remember them more easily." This observation suggests that motivation not only influenced the intensity of exposure but also sustained the use of learning strategies over time. Nation (2001) emphasizes that frequency of exposure reinforces retention, but it is the learner's willingness to engage that transforms exposure into acquisition. In this case, motivation serves as an affective catalyst that enhances the effectiveness of both incidental and intentional vocabulary learning.

The settings in which players interact with the game further shape their vocabulary learning experiences. A majority (86%) of players set the game's language to English, and those who communicated with international players exhibited deeper vocabulary knowledge and increased confidence in understanding the language. One player (R27) explained, "I used to rely on a translator, but now I can understand

without help.” This development illustrates what Schmitt (2008) describes as the role of learner strategies in fostering autonomy in language learning. The progression from external dependence to independent understanding highlights a shift toward self-directed vocabulary acquisition.

Overall, the study demonstrates that Ragnarok M players acquire English vocabulary through repeated, functional exposure and by employing active strategies such as context-based guessing, digital tools, social interactions, and affective motivation. In Gee’s (2003) framework, learning is not just about acquiring decontextualized knowledge, but about becoming part of a community of practice. In Ragnarok M, players don’t just learn words they learn how to use them in socially meaningful, goal-oriented tasks such as planning raids or organizing guild events.

In sum, the findings suggest that MMORPGs like Ragnarok M are not just entertainment platforms, but also effective environments for sustained, context-driven vocabulary development. While exposure and strategies are key, the forms of input specifically the types of texts and dialogues encountered in-game also shape the learning experience in significant ways.

Types of In-Game Texts and Dialogues Contributing to Vocabulary Learning

Table 3. Main Sources of Vocabulary

Source	Selected by (%)
Quest Texts	84 %
Item Descriptions	76 %
NPC Dialogues	68 %
Chatroom/Guilds	62 %

Source: Primary Data, 2025

This study identifies several types of in-game texts and dialogues in Ragnarok M that significantly contribute to the vocabulary learning process. The findings highlight that the most impactful sources of vocabulary acquisition are mission and quest instructions, NPC dialogues, item and skill descriptions, and player-to-player interactions. Each of these text types contributes uniquely to language acquisition by providing context-rich exposure to new vocabulary, facilitating both incidental and deliberate learning.

The most frequently encountered and influential type of text, reported by 84% of participants, is mission and quest instructions. These instructions are essential for gameplay progression, containing imperative phrases such as “defeat the boss,” “gather materials,” and “report back to the NPC.” These texts are central to advancing in the game, requiring players to understand the vocabulary to succeed. Schmitt (2000) argues that vocabulary learned in action-oriented contexts, where it is directly tied to goal achievement, is more easily retained. The functional nature of mission instructions, which necessitate active engagement with the vocabulary to complete tasks, enhances the salience and retention of the words. As one participant

expressed, "Because the instructions are in English and must be completed to level up, I memorize the words unconsciously." This statement reinforces the idea that vocabulary acquisition is deeply embedded in meaningful, goal-oriented contexts.

Similarly, item and skill descriptions emerged as a key source of vocabulary, cited by 76% of respondents. Item and skill descriptions also serve as a significant source of vocabulary learning. These descriptions provide detailed information about in-game items, weapons, and character abilities, often introducing functional terms such as penetration, cooldown, buff, and critical hit. According to Schmitt (2008), vocabulary encountered in functional contexts tends to be processed more deeply, as learners must comprehend these terms to make informed decisions and optimize gameplay strategies. In Ragnarok M, players are required to understand which skills to enhance in order to maximize their characters' effectiveness. Mastery of these descriptions is essential not only for improving individual performance but also for fulfilling specific team roles such as tank, healer, or damage dealer each of which carries distinct responsibilities in different gameplay scenarios. Players must also select appropriate equipment and understand role-specific mechanics that vary across gameplay types. As they experiment with different builds and strategies, they internalize the vocabulary through direct, purposeful engagement. One player shared, "I have to understand the words to find out what abilities and equipment that are compatible with my character" illustrating how vocabulary that directly influences gameplay success is more likely to be retained.

NPC dialogues, highlighted by 76% of participants, also serve as a significant source of vocabulary learning. These dialogues are not only crucial for understanding the game's narrative but also introduce players to more complex terms related to the game's lore, such as artifact, curse, and ancient. According to Krashen's (1982) theory of second language acquisition, language learning occurs most naturally when learners are exposed to meaningful and comprehensible input in engaging, non-threatening contexts. NPC dialogues provide players with opportunities to absorb new vocabulary while navigating the game world, where understanding the dialogue enhances the player's immersive experience. This type of incidental learning through narrative interaction aligns with Krashen's view that exposure to language in context facilitates natural vocabulary acquisition.

Player-to-player interactions play a significant role in vocabulary acquisition, as noted by 62% of participants. Communication through in-game channels such as guild chat, party chat, and world chat enable players from diverse linguistic backgrounds to engage in English exchanges. These interactions frequently incorporate game-specific jargon, including terms like AFK (away from keyboard), DPS (damage per second), and CC (crowd control), providing authentic contexts for practicing and reinforcing vocabulary encountered in other game elements. The necessity of communication is underscored by the cooperative nature of Ragnarok M's gameplay; many dungeons cannot be completed individually and require coordinated teamwork. Furthermore, guild wars demand strategic communication and collaboration among guild members to successfully compete against rival guilds.

This social dynamic reflects Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory, which emphasizes the critical role of social interaction in cognitive development. The need for effective communication within these social environments encourages players to actively use new vocabulary, thereby facilitating both language learning and retention.

In summary, the various types of in-game texts and dialogues in Ragnarok M mission and quest instructions, NPC dialogues, item and skill descriptions, and player-to-player interactions each play a critical role in vocabulary acquisition. These texts offer a dynamic and contextually rich learning environment where vocabulary is acquired through both explicit and implicit processes. The combination of goal-oriented tasks, narrative immersion, functional descriptions, and social interaction facilitates the retention and application of new vocabulary. This aligns with Gee's (2003) Situated Learning Theory, which asserts that learning is most effective when it occurs within authentic, meaningful contexts. The study suggests that MMORPGs, such as Ragnarok M, are not only immersive entertainment platforms but also potent spaces for language acquisition, offering players opportunities to learn English in a natural, engaging, and context-driven manner.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion, this study concludes that Indonesian players of Ragnarok M: Eternal Love encounter and acquire English vocabulary through repeated exposure to meaningful, goal-oriented, and context-rich input embedded in gameplay. Players engaged with various vocabulary learning strategies such as guessing from context, using dictionaries or translators, and seeking assistance from peers demonstrating a dynamic interplay between incidental and intentional vocabulary learning. The most influential sources of lexical input identified were mission instructions, NPC dialogues, item and skill descriptions, and player-to-player communication. These in-game texts served as authentic, functional materials that motivated players to process and retain new vocabulary. Although the participants were not formal language learners in this context, their gaming experience reveals the potential of MMORPGs as informal yet effective environments for language development. This study contributes to Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theory, particularly by reinforcing Krashen's Input Hypothesis and sociocultural perspectives that emphasize the role of meaningful input and social interaction in language learning. Pedagogically, the findings suggest that digital games like Ragnarok M can complement formal English instruction by enhancing learner motivation, fostering autonomy, and providing immersive exposure to real-life language use. Educators may consider integrating game-based activities, vocabulary tasks drawn from MMORPG content, or learner reflection on game language experiences to support vocabulary acquisition in EFL contexts. Future studies are encouraged to examine long-term vocabulary retention, cross-game comparisons, and the influence of individual differences such as English proficiency and gaming frequency on learning outcomes.

Based on the findings, this study recommends that educators consider incorporating MMORPG content like *Ragnarok M: Eternal Love* into English language instruction to enrich vocabulary learning experiences. Game-based learning can enhance student motivation and autonomy by providing authentic, engaging, and context-rich language input. Teachers can design vocabulary tasks, reflective journals, or discussion activities centered on game language to support both incidental and intentional vocabulary acquisition. Additionally, curriculum developers should explore the pedagogical potential of digital games as supplementary tools that align with communicative language teaching principles. Further research should also investigate long-term effects and diverse learner profiles to better understand the full educational value of MMORPGs in EFL contexts.

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