

**Effect of MMORPG Vocabulary on Students' Willingness to Communicate:  
A Narrative Inquiry**

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**Abstract**

Learning is not only done in the classroom but also outside the classroom through game media. This study focuses on the effect of vocabulary knowledge from massively multiplayer online role-playing games on students' willingness to communicate. The subjects of this research are three EFL learners who play MMORPG games. This study uses a biographical narrative inquiry method and collects data through semi-structured interviews and artefacts. EFL learners were assigned to share their experiences playing MMORPGs related to vocabulary knowledge and the desire to communicate. The data is analysed using thematic analysis. The findings highlight the positive impact of vocabulary knowledge on participants' self-confidence and pronunciation skills. A solid grasp of game-related vocabulary increases participants' self-confidence, making them more comfortable engaging in conversations and less afraid of making mistakes. It also improves pronunciation skills, as participants better understand word pronunciation through in-game interactions. Through collaboration among teachers, institutions, and parents, using MMORPGs as a learning tool is expected to provide maximum benefits for students in improving their English communication skills.

Keywords: Vocabulary; Willingness to communicate; MMORPG; Game; EFL

**INTRODUCTION**

The gaming industry in Indonesia has experienced exponential growth, making it one of the largest gaming markets globally. According to the We Are Social survey, 94.5% of internet users between 16 and 64 in Indonesia engage in video game activities. This popularity has sparked interest in integrating gaming and education, particularly in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has highlighted the need for innovative educational approaches to address learning loss and enhance student competency. Given their widespread appeal and immersive nature, Chen et al. (2019) emphasize the potential

of incorporating learning into games. This study explores the impact of vocabulary knowledge gained from MMORPGs, or massively multiplayer online role-playing, on the willingness of learners to speak in English, emphasising intergroup motivation.

The Merdeka Curriculum, an adaptable educational framework implemented in Indonesia, offers educators the flexibility to provide quality learning experiences tailored to student's needs and learning environments. It prioritizes character development and allows for in-depth exploration of subjects, empowering educators to create engaging and effective learning environments. As part of the Merdeka Curriculum, IDLE (Informal Digital Learning English) encourages students to engage in independent learning outside the traditional classroom, utilizing digital tools and platforms. This approach aligns with the findings of Gee (2007) and Squire (2008), who highlight the potential of games to foster critical thinking, problem-solving, and language acquisition. By investigating the connection among MMORPGs, vocabulary knowledge, and the willingness of learners to speak in English., this study seeks to contribute to the understanding of gaming to enhance language skills and intergroup motivation.

Although previous studies have examined various factors influencing students' willingness to communicate in a second language, there still needs to be a research gap in Indonesia. Lee and Hsieh (2019) emphasize the benefits of digital communication techniques in creating a supportive and less intimidating environment for language students. Additionally, Tai and Chen (2020) emphasise the benefits of science-based interactions in digital settings on engagement, motivation, and a desire to speak in the chosen language. However, more investigation is required to investigate MMORPGs' impact on students' communication propensity. This study seeks to fill that vacuum by elucidating how gaming settings can increase language acquisition and intergroup motivation, thereby guiding educational practices and curriculum development in Indonesia.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### 1. The role of intergroup motivation in willingness to communicate

The Willingness to Communicate (WTC) has been a topic of study for the past three decades. McCroskey and Baer (1985) pioneered the WTC concept as a character feature that affects an individual's first language communication. They linked WTC to personal qualities such as self-esteem, introversion/extraversion, communication anxiety, and more. MacIntyre et al. (1998) defined a connection between WTC and the second language as the willingness to participate in communication with specific individuals at particular times. They proposed a theoretical pyramidal framework for classifying L2 and WTC conceptions according to their properties and how they were articulated in the literature. The three top levels in this model are the actual use of L2, the attitude of the seriousness of L2 users in communicating, and the desire to speak with specific interlocutors. These three levels are regarded as more dynamic and situation-specific outcomes in L2 and WTC. The stability of L2 and WTC is demonstrated by the behaviour's consistency over time and the context's appearance in the bottom three levels.

MacIntyre et al. (1998) explained the WTC cognitive pyramid within a set of digital English learning and willingness to communicate. The pyramid's six categories or strata correspond with the student's communication in L2. The fourth layer contains motivational propensities, which are more likely to be steady and long-lasting. Motivational tendencies comprise interpersonal motivation, intergroup motivation, and L2 self-confidence.

## **2. The role of intergroup motivation in learning English in an informal context**

Intergroup connections' affective and cognitive conditions are the foundation for motivational tendencies, resulting in confidence in themselves and a desire to associate with a specific individual. Motivation comprises three components: interpersonal, intergroup, and trust in themselves (MacIntyre, 1998). Intergroup motivation emphasises the desire to associate and interact with the neighbourhood residents and students' social responsibilities within a group. Learners' affinity with a particular group can manifest in intergroup motivation, according to MacIntyre (2007). Control and affiliation motives are two essential ideas to consider when selecting the interlocutors one engages with. The motivational orientation of control causes communication behaviours that restrict the communicators' freedom of thought, emotion, and behaviour. Affiliation, on the other hand, has its roots in the degree of interest in forging a bond with the interlocutor. The degree to which students are willing to communicate depends on how comfortable they are in a group and how they interact. Small groups typically have people who are more familiar with one another, which would enhance learners' WTC, according to Zarrinabadi et al. (2021). According to Lee (2019), connection with intimate foreign interlocutors and acquaintance with online networks may help to foster a propensity to communicate. However, because they are more likely to know one another, students in small online groups would want to communicate more. Group projects requiring English-language communication from every student could aid English-language learners in improving their proficiency, according to Darasawang (2021). Engaging in online communities with non-native speakers is a crucial component of intergroup motivation while learning outside the classroom, particularly in small groups.

## **3. Learning Vocabulary in EFL Context**

Vocabulary is crucial in second language acquisition since it is required for communication skills and acquiring L2 (Schmitt, 2000). According to Richards (2000 in Schmitt, 2000), vocabulary and lexical units are at the heart of education and interaction, and no grammatical or other linguistic knowledge can be used in communication or discourse without the mediation of vocabulary. Vocabulary knowledge is classified as receptive or productive, with receptive vocabulary referring to the capacity to remember and identify a term while listening or reading and productive vocabulary relating to using it while speaking and writing (Nation, 2001). There are three indicators of vocabulary knowledge: form, meaning, and use, and Laufer (1998) created a third category indicating the shift from passive/receptive to active/productive vocabulary knowledge by using the phrases 'active' and 'passive' vocabulary for similar ideas. Vocabulary knowledge is essential in acquiring all four linguistic abilities and broadening pupils' total English knowledge. Learners could only undertake the development of language

activities like reading, writing, and grammar assignments with sufficient vocabulary (Groot, 2000). There are two techniques for learning vocabulary: intentional and incidental. Intentional vocabulary acquisition involves practising a specific task while learning new words.

In contrast, incidental vocabulary learning involves learning new words from a specific activity without the aim of learning those terms (Barcroft, 2009). Vocabulary size has been plagued by major methodological issues, most notably "What constitutes a word?", "How can we create a vocabulary exam from a sample of words from a dictionary?" and "How do we determine whether or not a word is known?" (Nation, 1993a; Lorge & Chall, 1963; Thorndike, 1924). Measures of native speakers' vocabulary size may interest ESL teachers because they may indicate the scope of the learning problem that second language learners face. Currently, the most conservative guideline of reference is that native speakers should expect to add around 1000-word families per year up to a vocabulary size of around 20,000-word families.

#### **4. Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games**

A massively multiplayer online role-playing game, or MMORPG, is a shared online setting where several individuals can simultaneously engage in numerous role-playing games (Griffiths et al., 2004). Players select animated characters or personas to represent themselves in the self-contained online universe of an MMORPG executed on an Internet platform. The player controls and maintains the character, which can move, communicate, and take a variety of acts (Chuang, 2006). One crucial aspect of MMORPGs is how people command their "persona" or animated character and decide how they behave during the game (Achterbosch et al., 2008). The existence of a "guild," which is a group of people connected through the game, is another typical trait of MMORPGs. The guild may alternatively be referred to as a "clan." Several MMORPGs offer guild members with chatroom and direct messaging features to encourage contact among members. Guild members frequently interact while playing together in the game world (Brignall & Valey, 2007). Through the creation of social networks, this communication, a crucial element of MMORPGs, enhances social connections, gaming efficiency, and satisfaction (Williams, 2006). According to studies, When there are significant differences between virtual and actual personas, users are less happy about their avatars, and gamers see their avatars as an idealised representation of their personalities (Ducheneaut et al., 2009).

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

### **Research Design**

The narrative inquiry design was utilised in this study because the aim is to examine the effects of game activities using the participants' experiences and stories. In the "narrative inquiry" method, stories are employed as data. (Barkhuizen et al., 2014). Narrative inquiry, narrative study, and narrative research are terms used to describe leading interdisciplinary publications on the subject. In fields where it is critical to understand phenomena from the perspective of those who encounter them, a significant advantage of narrative inquiry is its emphasis on how individuals use tales to correlate with what they have experienced. In narrative inquiry, the interaction between researcher and participant can be biographical or autobiographical. This story fits into a qualitative research framework, emphasising experiences and components of life and education. A story and narrative inquiry study can use one of five alternative methods: (1) unofficial accounts of language learning experiences written by autobiographical language memoirists intended for a non-academic audience. (2) investigation of linguistic memoir biographies because researchers need guidelines on how to write the story being studied. (3) for an academic audience, autobiographical case studies detailing teacher and student experiences were published. (4) biographical case studies are written about a particular person by the researcher and contain experience or knowledge of the subject. (5) multi-narrative studies can be compared to biographical case studies in that they inform a larger audience about other people's experiences. One type of narrative research used by researchers is biography. The term "biographical method" refers to examining people where the researcher collects information from the subject and then writes it down as a story (Barkhuizen et al., 2014).

### **Data Collection**

The data was collected over two months from various sources, including interviews and artefacts such as gameplay images. The researchers used an interview guide as a source to control the interview procedure, and open-ended questions let participants discuss their thoughts and share their experiences (Barkhuizen et al., 2014). Throughout the procedure, participants were interviewed one-on-one about their experiences playing MMORPGs as an activity to increase their willingness to communicate. The researchers also used additional data, such as screenshots of MMORPG games played by participants and screenshots of conversations with foreigners. According to Creswell (2014), there are four types of interviews: (1) one on one; (2) focus groups; (3) telephone; and (4) electronic mail. In one-on-one interviews, the researcher talks to only one participant while asking several questions, and that person responds to each question individually (Creswell, 2014). This interview was conducted three times to answer research questions. The artefacts are supporting data, and the interview results are primary data.

## The Participants

The study had three participants, all EFL learners from Highschool in Surakarta, who were considered active gamers because they played at least 1-2 hours daily. The researcher asked the participants if they were interested in participating in the study, and only three were willing to be interviewed. Researchers used informants' information about the research topic to collect data. The participants' details are shown in the table below, which includes their name (with a pseudonym), age, gender, and gaming experience.

## Data Analysis

This study uses thematic analysis to examine EFL learners' experiences. Thematic analysis is a qualitative strategy that involves structuring and analysing complex data sets to identify common themes and patterns of meaning (Barkhuizen et al., 2014). The data analysis method is used because this research topic has various concepts. The data analysis steps are reading each data set several times, coding and categorising each, and completing thematic headings. The researcher reviewed the data multiple times to understand the individual's stories better and sought clarification of the information spoken by the participants to eliminate bias. The interview data were coded into several codes, and the critical information was then divided into several categories. The researcher used several codes for intergroup motivation and the influence of vocabulary knowledge on participants' willingness to communicate. At the final stage, the researcher conducted thematic coding by identifying data or codes linked to the word indicators employed in this study. This research is divided into eight thematic titles, namely, Control: social roles in MMORPG, Control: cross-situational influences in MMORPG, Affiliation: attractiveness in MMORPG, Affiliation: similarity in MMORPG, Affiliation: physical proximity in MMORPG, Affiliation: repeated Exposure in MMORPG, Vocabulary knowledge increases self-confidence concerning readiness to speak using English, and Vocabulary knowledge improves pronunciation concerning readiness to speak using English.

## FINDINGS

### a. Vocabulary knowledge increases self-confidence related to willingness to communicate using English

Knowing game-related vocabulary can boost one's confidence when conversing in English. Understanding game terminology, such as game phrases, characters, goods, or game mechanics, allows one to communicate with other players in the game effortlessly and confidently. An in-depth understanding of game language aids in developing confidence while providing directions, coordinating, and actively participating in in-game dialogues, resulting in a more profound and enjoyable communication experience in English.

As stated in the interview data below, the participants said that vocabulary knowledge in MMORPG games could increase their confidence and make them more willing to communicate with foreigners.

Because knowing the form and sound of words makes us more confident in communicating with foreigners.

IZ/RQ2/ Apr.23

From the interview data above, the participants explained that knowing the form and sound of a word in an MMORPG game can increase their confidence in communicating with foreigners because they are not afraid of being wrong because they already know what is right. This finding is supported by Figure 4.1, which shows that participants communicate with foreigners confidently.

**Figure 4. 1**

*Participants communicate with foreigners confidently*



In addition, participants added that there were difficulties when communicating with foreigners in the game. As stated in the interview data below, the difficulties where when the participants did not know the meaning of the words spoken by the other person and could not understand what the other person said because of the difference in accent.

Yes, because sometimes we don't know the meaning of the word.

IZ/RQ2/ Apr.23

To overcome these difficulties, participants explained that when they encountered a word whose meaning was unknown, they would check it in the translation application or ask friends who understand English better, as stated in the interview data below.

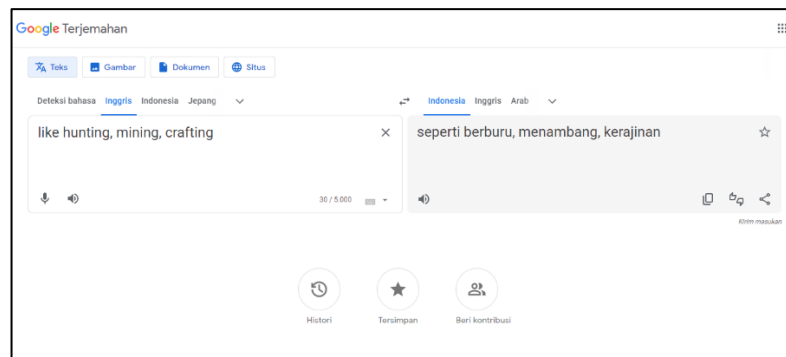
Through the help of google translate or asking friends who are more familiar with the vocabulary.

IX/RQ2/ Apr.23

This finding is supported by Figure 4.2 which shows when participants search for the meaning of a word through the Google Translate application.

**Figure 4. 2**

*Participants looked for the meaning of unknown words using the google translate application*



**b. Vocabulary knowledge improves pronunciation related to willingness to communicate using English**

Vocabulary knowledge related to games can improve one's English pronunciation skills. One can practise and enhance pronunciation by acquiring game vocabulary, including frequently used game nouns, character names, places, and typical gaming phrases. Because they can pronounce the words correctly and fluently, those who understand game vocabulary feel more confident speaking English. Furthermore, utilising the appropriate game jargon enhances the communication experience and helps one communicate more smoothly and competently with other players.

As stated in the interview data below, the participants said that knowing vocabulary in MMORPG games could improve their pronunciation and make them more willing to communicate with foreigners.

By knowing how a word is pronounced, we can know it is pronounced and understand it when we hear it.

IX/RQ2/Apr.23

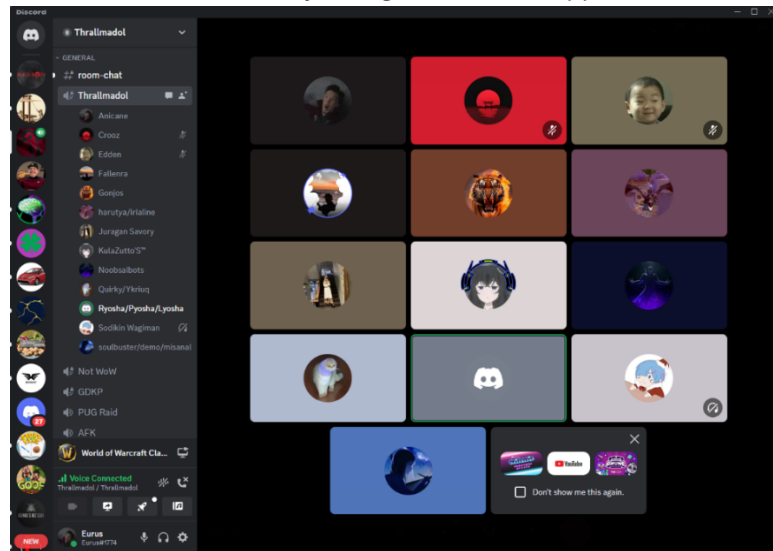
Participants also added that they used the Discord application or in-game microphone when communicating with their foreign game friends in the game.

I once communicated with my foreign friends verbally using the Discord application. The rest is limited only to written text.

IY/RQ2/Apr.23

This finding is supported by Figure 4.3 below, which shows when participants communicate verbally using the Discord application with many people.



**Figure 4. 3***Participants communicate verbally using the Discord application*

## DISCUSSION

The findings suggest that vocabulary knowledge significantly increases self-confidence and improves pronunciation, influencing participants' willingness to communicate using English in MMORPG games.

In terms of self-confidence, participants expressed that having a good grasp of vocabulary in the game boosted their confidence when communicating with foreigners. They felt more comfortable engaging in conversations and were less afraid of making mistakes since they had a solid understanding of the correct vocabulary usage. This study is consistent with the findings of Hazar (2020), who discovered that digital games might help language learners improve their English vocabulary and self-confidence. However, participants also mentioned encountering difficulties in understanding words spoken by others due to differences in accents. To overcome this, they resorted to using translation applications or seeking assistance from friends who better understood English. This study is consistent with the findings of Kai & Hua (2021), who discovered that using Google Translate considerably increases native students' ability to understand the English language. They now better comprehend the meaning of words in an English context and can utilise the terminology more confidently.

Regarding pronunciation, participants believed that their vocabulary knowledge in MMORPG games contributed to improving their pronunciation skills. This study is consistent with Dixon & Christison's (2018) findings, which claim that players who utilise voice communication have a more favourable experience, which can help them improve their pronunciation skills more than those who use text communication. They felt more confident verbally communicating with others, as demonstrated by using the Discord application to converse with multiple people. This study is consistent with the findings of Uong et al. (2022), who discovered that Discord was appropriate for teaching and learning purposes, except for the webcam-sharing feature, which was occasionally considered slow. By acquiring and practising vocabulary within the game context,

participants better understood word pronunciation and were more willing to communicate with foreign players actively.

These findings highlight the positive impact of vocabulary knowledge on participants' self-confidence and pronunciation skills, ultimately influencing their willingness to communicate using English in MMORPG games. Participants can enhance their English language skills and broaden their intercultural communication abilities within the gaming community by actively engaging in conversations with foreigners and overcoming language barriers.

## **CONCLUSION**

The study reveals the impacts of vocabulary knowledge on participants' willingness to communicate in English. A solid grasp of game-related vocabulary increases participants' self-confidence, making them more comfortable engaging in conversations and less afraid of making mistakes. It also contributes to improved pronunciation skills, as participants better understand word pronunciation through in-game interactions. These factors ultimately influence participants' willingness to communicate in English while playing MMORPGs. The study highlights the interplay between intergroup motivation, vocabulary knowledge, and willingness to communicate in English during MMORPG gameplay. By actively engaging with foreigners and utilizing their vocabulary knowledge, participants can enhance their English communication abilities and overcome language barriers within the gaming community.

This study suggests that MMORPGs can effectively motivate and enhance EFL learners' English communication skills. The vocabulary knowledge gained from MMORPGs also positively impacts participants' self-confidence and pronunciation abilities, increasing their willingness to communicate in English. These implications underscore the importance of maximizing the potential of gaming environments as supportive learning contexts where learners can engage in contextualized English interactions that transcend cultural boundaries. Future research can investigate the long-term effects of MMORPG-based language learning on EFL learners' overall language skills, explore the role of MMORPGs in developing other language skills, and check the effectiveness of different MMORPG features. By conducting such research, we can further optimize the integration of MMORPGs in language education and improve language learning outcomes for EFL learners.

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