

## INDONESIAN UNIVERSITY EFL STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS ON USING ROBLOX GAMES FOR VOCABULARY ENRICHMENT: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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**Abstract:** *This study examines the use of Roblox games to improve English vocabulary among students of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) at Indonesian universities. Although there is a wealth of literature on digital games in language learning, studies focusing on Roblox and its impact on vocabulary acquisition among EFL students in Indonesia are still limited. This descriptive qualitative study involved 15 students from the English Education Study Program at UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, who were selected using the snowball sampling method. Data collection methods included semi-structured interviews, questionnaires with open-ended questions, and documentation within the game. Thematic analysis showed that students acquired new vocabulary in context, such as game instructions, mission objectives, and interactions between players. They used strategies such as contextual understanding and peer support to understand unfamiliar words. These findings suggest that Roblox serves as an effective and interactive vocabulary learning tool, which has the potential to be useful in higher education settings.*

**Keywords:** *Roblox, vocabulary development, EFL students, game-based learning, qualitative research.*

**Abstrak:** Penelitian ini mengkaji penggunaan permainan Roblox untuk meningkatkan kosakata bahasa Inggris di kalangan mahasiswa Bahasa Inggris sebagai Bahasa Asing (EFL) di universitas Indonesia. Meskipun terdapat banyak literatur tentang permainan digital dalam pembelajaran bahasa, studi yang fokus pada Roblox dan dampaknya terhadap penguasaan kosakata di kalangan mahasiswa EFL di Indonesia masih terbatas. Studi kualitatif deskriptif ini melibatkan 15 mahasiswa dari Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris di UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, yang dipilih melalui metode sampling bola salju. Metode pengumpulan data meliputi wawancara semi-terstruktur, kuesioner dengan pertanyaan terbuka, dan dokumentasi dalam permainan. Analisis tematik menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa memperoleh kosakata baru sesuai konteks seperti instruksi dalam permainan, tujuan misi, dan interaksi antar pemain. Mereka menggunakan



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strategi seperti pemahaman melalui kontekstual dan dukungan teman sebaya untuk memahami kata-kata yang tidak dikenal. Temuan ini menyarankan bahwa Roblox berfungsi sebagai alat pembelajaran kosakata yang efektif dan interaktif, yang berpotensi bermanfaat di lingkungan pendidikan tinggi.

**Kata Kunci:** Roblox, pengembangan kosakata, pelajar EFL, pembelajaran berbasis game, penelitian kualitatif.

## INTRODUCTION

Recent transformations in EFL practices in Indonesia, driven by digital technology, have shifted students from traditional materials to interactive platforms like Roblox, a virtual world promoting play, creativity, communication, and collaboration. This platform facilitates vocabulary acquisition through cross-player interactions in English as a lingua franca, offering incidental and explicit learning via instructions, dialogues, mission hints, and tasks across game genres. While existing studies on game-based learning highlight motivational benefits and retention through engagement, they primarily focus on general digital games or younger learners. In sharp contrast, Roblox-specific research for thematic vocabulary in university-level EFL contexts remains scarce, especially for students requiring advanced vocabulary for academic and professional purposes.

The open-ended and flexible nature of Roblox has made it a worldwide phenomenon because players across different countries can communicate with one another through the use of the lingua franca (English). Within the language learning context, such a cross-player interaction can give students an opportunity to discover, comprehend, and apply new vocabulary within a contextual situation. Incidental and explicit learning is abundant in instructions, player-player dialogue, mission hints, and other forms of activities that involve tasks in hundreds of game genres on Roblox. In the case of EFL students, such exposure is priceless because in many situations, they do not get an opportunity to practice language outside the classroom.

Up to now, some studies have established that digital games can be of great help to vocabulary learning. Research like the one conducted by Kamila et al. (2025) demonstrates that games that incorporate the gamification factor can enhance student motivation and interest. Another experiment by Patra et al. (2022) underscores that digital games contribute to the preservation of a vocabulary better because the participants directly engage in the meaningful activities. Moreover, the flow theory created by Wang and Feng (2025) allows the participants to understand vocabulary more organically because it is believed that a state of attention and immersion into the games allow learners not to be overwhelmed by the formal study process. Most of these studies have however been based on digital games in general or school age students.

Unlike these studies, there is a relatively small amount of research on the application of Roblox as a vocabulary learning tool. Although various studies have explained how Roblox served as a collaborative and creative learning environment, the role of the tool in formal education, particularly at the university level, is understudied. Indeed, students of English Language Education possess more complicated vocabulary requirements, not only in the field of study as needed by an academic individual, but also in the field of preparing themselves as future teachers. The use of Roblox by this group of students is worth examining since they need not only general vocabulary used in everyday communication, but also thematic vocabulary common when in certain situations of a game, including instructions on technical aspects, terms of a story, and vocabulary connected to solving problems in a game.

This is even more becoming applicable in the context of increasing popularity of Roblox among Indonesian students. The platform can be accessed with a lot of ease, the devices are easy to use and the global community is highly active hence making Roblox a platform that can be used anywhere and anytime. The current age of learning, which promotes the incorporation of technology in learning, is more inclined in the exploration of alternative media that would bridge the academic world with the interest of the students. In this case, Roblox can fill the vocabulary acquisition requirements of students with their more relaxed creative and experiential learning approaches. How can Roblox be used as a tool to enrich English vocabulary for English as a foreign language (EFL) students? What are students' experiences and perceptions of learning vocabulary using Roblox? The questions were never researched specifically in the context of English Language Education student community in UIN Jakarta. Thus, the proposed study will help to address this gap and get to know better the experiences of students who use Roblox as a vocabulary enrichment tool.

This study aims to know not only the things that students learn in Roblox, but also how it happens, how they do it, and their idea of its effectiveness. Placing the research on a higher education context, this study is likely to reveal some new information about the application of popular digital media in the English language teaching, and further expand our knowledge about how technology can be applied to acquire vocabulary in more advanced EFL classrooms.

## **Literature Review**

Vocabulary mastery plays a significant role in EFL learners but is difficult since vocabulary mastery forms the basis of language skills (Octoberlina, 2021). Digital games have become the new trend in the vocabulary enrichment tools in the era of high technology as they provide us with the opportunity to work with them in an interactive and entertaining manner and in place of the conventional ones. Such platforms as Roblox,

Spellingcity, Duolingo, etc. help learn vocabulary through an immersive learning approach, in which learners are exposed to English in a real-world situation, which improves retention and motivation (Kamila et al., 2025; Patra et al., 2022). Research also emphasizes that gamification components, including rewards and problems, increase the interest in the learning process and confidence in learners, and the process of vocabulary learning is not scary and better than rote learning (Zainal, 2023; Panmei et al., 2023). Besides, flow theory promotes organic learning as it provides the optimal level of challenge, which enables learners to learn words without direct pressure (Wang and Feng, 2025). Nonetheless, these advantages are well-studied, although much of the studying is on younger learners or general digital games without paying much attention to university-level EFL situations where advanced and thematic vocabulary is required both academically and in the work environment.

A thematic arrangement of the literature helps to identify some of the main concepts necessary in the analysis of vocabulary acquisition within the digital game: contextual vocabulary learning (words in meaningful situations, developing a better application in real-world contexts), incidental learning (incidental picking of words through playing), learner autonomy (self-directed strategies such as self-pacing and selecting the resources), and experiential learning (learning by doing). As an example, the use of contextual vocabulary can be observed in the studies in which the game as a type of interaction offers the learner a situational interaction that learning the meaning of words by dialogues and instructions (Asari, 2023; Fauzan et al., 2025). This is supplemented by incidental learning that allows learning in a subconscious way in the process of playing, lessening the load of intentional study (Patra et al., 2022). Learner autonomy enables the students to use the strategies such as peer-to-peer collaboration or online tools to enhance their independence outside the classroom environment (Zainal, 2023). Cognitive and non-cognitive skills (i.e. problem-solving and cultural awareness) are developed through experiential learning involving actual involvement in game activities (Kamila et al., 2025). The notions are interrelated, e.g., gamification can be combined with the aspects of autonomy and experience to break the motivation barriers, e.g. when comparing it to traditional approaches where engagement is a lesser concern (Octaberlina, 2023).

The specific studies on Roblox concentrate on its potential in acquiring EFL vocabulary in terms of global connections and multimodality. Roblox exposes thematic vocabulary through in-game chats, mission and item descriptions, which are consistent with contextual and incidental

learning (Wicaksono et al., 2024; Han et al., 2023). Workers are autonomous and can modify their approaches to such challenges as slang or text speed, and such experiential approaches facilitate cultural exchange and cooperation. Nevertheless, a literature is common (and commonly emphasizes the benefits of interactivity without full integration of concepts to analyze at the university level), some of it states the limitations such as cyberbullying or poor design, which indicates the necessity to conduct targeted research (Han et al., 2023).

Summing up these themes, the literature indicates that there is a research gap on the theme of Roblox in higher education EFL settings, especially among learners in special subjects such as English Education at UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta. Although general game based studies prove motivational and retention benefits, it seldom translates such concepts as incidental and experiential learning to thematic vocabulary in higher contexts. These ideas are combined in this review in order to put the present study into perspective, and show how Roblox may be used to fit formal education with student engagement, and provide a self-directed contextual means of vocabulary building. The comparison with alternative platforms or retention in the long-term could be applied in future studies, yet the gap in the present case is bridged by the phenomenological knowledge of university EFL experiences.

## **METHOD**

The research design that was used in this study was a phenomenological-oriented qualitative descriptive research design. This method was chosen to gain a profound insight into the lived experiences, perceptions, and strategies of students in terms of using Roblox as a tool of learning English vocabulary. The research was not intended to quantitatively assess vocabulary improvement but was a description of how students are exposed to new vocabulary, how they make sense of meanings, and how they experience the learning experience in interactive digital gaming. Descriptive qualitative design is said to be suitable because it enables the researcher to investigate naturally occurring learning phenomena without controlling variables.

The respondents of this research were undergraduate students who were enrolled in the English Language Education Study Program at UIN Syarif

Hidayatullah Jakarta and actively played Roblox. The last sample was composed of 15-20 students, seven of whom were included in the in-depth semi-structured interviews. Snowball sampling was used whereby purposely sampled participants were used as the starting point since they met the inclusion criteria and then referred to other eligible participants.

The inclusion criteria were the following: (1) the participants had to play Roblox at least three times a week and (2) the participants had to be willing to take part in interviews and observations. Students who were not playing Roblox regularly or were not willing to share their learning experiences were excluded. This population was deemed appropriate to the study since the students of English Education have enough language awareness to be able to reflect on the process of vocabulary learning during informal gaming activities on the digital platform. In qualitative study, the researcher was the main tool that would collect and interpret data. To facilitate this position, a number of tools were used such as semi-structured interview guidelines, open-ended questionnaires, and field notes.

The semi-structured interview guide was composed of 14 questions that were aimed at investigating the experiences of the students in regards to Roblox, the kind of vocabulary that they have been exposed to, how they comprehend new vocabulary, how they feel about it, what they face, and what they think about the learning process. Examples of sample interview questions were: What are the kinds of English words that you typically come across when playing Roblox? and "What do you make of new vocabulary that comes up in the course of the game? Additional reflections were collected using open-ended questionnaires among the participants who were not interviewed. Contextual observations were recorded in the form of field notes during the gameplay, such as reactions, interactions, and learning behaviors of students.

The semi-structured interviews, open-ended questionnaires, and documentation were used to collect data through various sources. The first participants were identified according to the inclusion criteria and then recommended other eligible participants, which made the number of participants 15-20. Semi-structured interviews were carried out face-to-face with seven participants and were audio-taped with their consent. The interviews were based on the experiences of students during the gameplay, exposure to vocabulary, learning strategies, and perceived challenges.

There was also the collection of documentation like screenshots of in-game instructions, mission texts, and chat interactions with English vocabulary. During the process of data collection, the researcher kept field notes where observations and reflections were recorded. All the data were stored safely and were only used in academic purposes and the identity of the participants was confidential.

The thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. It started with the transcription of the interview recordings and the repetitive reading of the transcripts, questionnaire responses, field notes and documentation to have a general idea of the data. Relevant data were subsequently coded and reduced into meaningful units in terms of vocabulary source, strategies, challenges, and recommendations. The codes were categorized into larger themes, which were then explained concerning the theories of vocabulary learning and digital learning based on a game.

In order to make the findings credible, data triangulation was used, which involved comparing the results of interviews, questionnaires, and documentation. Member checking involved validation of major interpretations with a subset of participants whereas peer debriefing with fellow scholars was employed to evaluate coding decisions and minimize researcher bias. These measures increased the validity and reliability of the research.

## RESULTS

The data collected by the researchers was analyzed using thematic analysis. Researchers analyzed the results of open-ended questionnaires and interviews with all of the students' experiences and perceptions regarding using Roblox as a tool to enhance vocabulary.

Following a questionnaire conducted to the students of English Language Education Study Program at UIN Jakarta about using Roblox as a tool of learning English vocabulary. The respondents were rather eager to use Roblox, which stems mostly from its interactive, entertaining, and realistic character when applied to the field of communicating in English.

**Table 1.** Students Experiences and Perceptions towards Roblox as a Tools to Enhance Vocabulary in the questionnaire with open ended questions (n=15).

Theme	Frequency (n=15)	Example of Data	Main Pattern
Vocabulary Source	13/15 (87%)	(10) "Instructions/missions (Fish It, Hiking Maps)  (8) "Player Chats"	Instructions/missions from Game (67%) > Chats (53%)

<p><b>Strategy</b></p>	<p><b>14/15 (93%)</b></p>	<p>(12) "Guess context"</p> <p>(9) "Translate from web/application"</p> <p>(7) "Ask Friends"</p>	<p>Context (80%) &gt; Technology (60%) &gt; Social (47%)</p>
<p><b>Challenges</b></p>	<p><b>11/15 (73%)</b></p>	<p>(9) "Slang"</p> <p>(6) "Can't/difficult to translate mid-game"</p> <p>(4) Lag/bugs</p>	<p>Slang (60%) &gt; Technology (40%)</p>
<p><b>Recommendation</b></p>	<p><b>13/15 (87%)</b></p>	<p>(10) "Fun and Interactive"</p> <p>(5) "Support Tool"</p>	<p>Recommend (87%)</p>

Based on students' perceptions, students gain new vocabulary while playing Roblox, and get motivation in self-learning because it is very enjoyable and fun learning. The majority of the respondents indicated that they knew and played Roblox. Some of the games that they were interested in included Fish It, Brookhaven, Blox Fruits, Obby Games and Escape Room Maps. The general interaction of players is social interaction and player to player interaction, which offers natural possibilities of learning new words.

To ensure data validity, researchers used source triangulation by comparing findings from interviews with semi-structured questions. Interview data with seven students who actively play Roblox was used to gain in-depth insight into their experiences, perspectives, strategies, and motivations for improving their English vocabulary through this game. This was then matched with the open-ended questionnaire responses from 15 participants, which indicated that Roblox is an interactive, fun, and effective tool for enriching students' vocabulary. This allowed for the appropriateness of the data sources to be analyzed, thus making the findings regarding the use of Roblox as a tool for enriching EFL learners' vocabulary, especially for university students, more credible and reliable.

Questions from researchers are: What are the students' experiences, strategies, advantages, features that support and those that are not in learning English vocabulary using Roblox? What challenges and motivations do students have when learning the English vocabulary using Roblox? And it gains positive responses from students. The students clarified that their experience in learning vocabulary of the English language using Roblox was actually natural as they used it in their play activities which had become a routine. Even though at the start of their play their first aim is to have fun, they have noticed that Roblox constantly exposed them to new words they could hardly hear in the classroom setting. As they were playing missions, reading game directions or communicating with other players they encountered a wide range of vocabulary in both slang and abbreviations

and technical and instructional. Such terms as AFK, clutch, trajectory, upgrade, checkpoint, and loot were put into a vivid context, which enabled them to be understood more readily. The visuals, live action and the game situations helped them relate the words with the meaning without any formal explanations, such as when they saw the word upgrade the moment they were leveling up an item or when they got the meaning of the word checkpoint when they had to pass through a specific checkpoint to proceed with the game.

Based on the answer from students above, students usually resorted to adaptable methods depending on a situation to grasp new vocabulary. The most common way of seeing meaning in the context is the guessing of the meaning, which occurred most frequently when they had no time to look in a dictionary as the games were played in a fast manner. Google translate, inquiring friends, or investigating the meaning of words were also used after playing. Exposure to missions and actions in the game facilitated the formation of memory because words that were used repeatedly were better remembered. They also said that the necessity to complete missions or interact with foreign players was the subconscious reason why they had to learn the vocabulary. Even though they did not think that Roblox was a major source of language learning, all students said that the game had great opportunities in terms of vocabulary learning. This makes them more motivated since learning is relaxed, is combined with activities that they are fond of and that they feel competent when they can comprehend instructions or speak English. Roblox is a good supplement resource to supplement English vocabulary since the learning process is fun, interactive and relevant among teenagers.

In the case of new vocabulary, the majority of respondents employed such active techniques as deriving the meaning based on the context, consulting a dictionary or an online translator, and requesting friends. Others also said that they wrote down new words so that they can study them later, not in the game. These techniques reflect the learners autonomy as the students are actively involved in vocabulary building. This correlates with the idea of experiential learning that promotes direct engagement and reflecting.

## **DISCUSSION**

The results of this research show that participants learned English vocabulary naturally by playing Roblox, mostly by interaction with instructions on the game, descriptions of items, mission systems, and communication between players. Such results support the previous studies that claim that digital games offer contextual and meaningful exposure to language. As an example, studies by Cuenca and Pila (2025), Gowon and Peter (2024), and Patra et al. (2022) showed that digital games are able to improve vocabulary learning in an interactive and authentic setting that requires active engagement. The learning patterns evident among the participants of this study, which include unconscious, need-based and challenge-driven learning, are aligned to the concept of incidental learning that has been widely addressed in the literature on game based learning.

In this research, the respondents have mentioned that words like upgrade, checkpoint and loot were more easily understood since they were presented in relation with certain actions. This fact is aligned with the theory of multimodal learning and multimodal literacy as defined by Sinar et al. (2024) according to which text, visual, and action synthesis strengthens the cognitive mechanisms of word-meaning construction.

The methods used by participants to learn vocabulary, including contextual inferences, the use of online dictionaries, peer consultation, and post-play research, are consistent with previous studies. Ebadi et al. (2023) discovered that students who engaged in the extramural activities using mobile devices were more likely to use contextual inference together with digital tools to derive the meanings of new words. Similarly, Hadi and Wijaya (2025) affirmed that different game genres also invoke similar adaptive learning strategies as those that are evident among the respondents in this present study. Moreover, these findings are consistent with the study by Asari (2023), who found that long-term interaction in-game could lead to vocabulary competence due to exposure and the cooperation of players.

Fikri et al., (2025) states that game elements such as points, challenges, and collaborative tasks increase student motivation, vocabulary improvement and retention, and active participation. Students actively participate in group and individual activities, communicate effectively, and respond positively to learning challenges in using games. However, there are challenges including limited time and varying levels of student motivation. Some participants found the activities cumbersome, especially when balancing them with academic tasks. Overall, gamified learning contributes to a positive, interactive, and student-centered learning environment.

The effectiveness of Roblox as a vocabulary learning tool is also justified by the literature on gamification and game-based learning. Budianto et al. (2023), Cancino Avila and Castillo Fonseca (2022), and Genc Ersoy and Boyaci (2021) stress that such aspects of the game as challenges, reward systems, and user interaction increase the motivation and interest of learners in acquiring a language. The participants always mentioned that they were more motivated to learn vocabulary due to the necessity to complete missions or interact with foreign players. This study identifies adaptive learning strategies used by college students, where learning strategies are tailored to their experiences and learning styles, such as understanding context in interacting and asking questions with peers. Although previous studies have recognized the importance of peer interaction, this study emphasizes the important role of vocabulary acquisition in the context of students learning English as a foreign language (EFL) in Indonesia. Participants reported that their interactions while playing Roblox significantly improved their vocabulary comprehension, indicating positive results. In addition, this study found that the importance of active engagement supported by game challenges increased motivation among students. This is in line with the construct of flow in learning as explained by

Wang and Feng (2025) who observed that high involvement in games may enhance vocabulary persistence and retention.

The challenges mentioned by the participants, including the speed at which on-screen text is disappearing, the use of slang, and the fear of making a mistake, have also been recorded in the previous literature. According to the results of Kottacheruvu (2023) and Khairati (2024), the use of slang, abbreviations, and register variations in games may be used as an obstacle, especially when it comes to novice EFL learners. However, the literature by Mafulah et al. (2025) and Octaberlina (2023) confirms that these challenges have the potential to provoke the creation of new mental strategies in the learning process.

Lastly, the findings of this paper are in line with those studies that directly study the connection between Roblox and English language proficiency. Fauzan et al. (2025) found that the intensity of Roblox gameplay was significantly correlated with the size of vocabulary in students, whereas Ramanujam and Ismail (2024) emphasized that it has a great potential to learn the language because of its interactive and multimodal nature and the ability to communicate in a global environment. As a result, the results of this research not only support the existing literature but also prove that Roblox is a relevant and efficient tool of teaching vocabulary in EFL classrooms.

## **CONCLUSION**

The results of the current study indicate that Roblox is a useful and entertaining auxiliary tool of enriching vocabulary of students participating in the English Language Education Study Program at UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta. New lexical items are learned naturally by learners in a variety of in-game ways, such as mission instructions, descriptions of items, system messages, and asynchronous communication with other players. This exposure provides contextualized and significant learning

environments that support incidental vocabulary learning, which is unintentional but effective learning that is brought about by a repeated exposure in real-life situations.

The research also indicates that the students use a range of adaptive methods of understanding new vocabulary, including contextual inference, use of digital dictionaries, consultation with peers, and post-playback lexical review. These strategies represent learner autonomy and are consistent with the principles of experiential learning, which give precedence to learning based on direct experience and reflective practice. The interactive, playful, and immersive nature of Roblox increases the motivation of the learners, making the process of acquiring vocabulary more enjoyable, less stressful, and relevant to their daily digital lives.

In spite of the various benefits that Roblox imparts on the learner participants, there were a number of challenges that were faced. These included the use of unknown slang or abbreviations, fast text delivery, and occasional problems with the understanding of complex lexical words. However, these difficulties were mostly manageable and they often encouraged learners to seek further clarification or use other tools thus aiding deeper learning. Despite these obstacles, the respondents uniformly believed that Roblox was beneficial to vocabulary learning, citing increased confidence and interest in learning the English language.

To summarize, Roblox can be used as a facilitating digital platform in the enrichment of the vocabulary of EFL students through the provision of meaningful contextual exposure, learner autonomy, and motivation to learn. Although it will probably not replace formal teaching, Roblox significantly supports classroom teaching and provides genuine English-language experiences, which are difficult to achieve in traditional learning. It is suggested that future studies should consider bigger samples, mixed methods or experimental designs, and study long-term vocabulary retention

to further confirm the usefulness of Roblox and other digital games in teaching EFL vocabulary.

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