

English as a Foreign Language Preservice Teachers' Experience in Playing Online Games for Reading Comprehension

Fikry Khaikal¹, Dr. Ventje Jany Kalukar, M.A², Effendi Limbong, M.Ed., Ed.D³

1) Mulawarman University, Samarinda, +(62)823-8280-4350

2) Mulawarman University, Samarinda, +(62)812-5893-009

3) Mulawarman University, Samarinda, +(62)852-5056-7789

1)fikrykhaikal@gmail.com; 2)ventjekalukar@fkip.unmul.ac.id;

3) effendilimbong@fkip.unmul.ac.id

Abstract

This research was conducted to determine whether playing games affects English-speaking students, especially students' reading comprehension skills in the academic field/in the classroom. The students studied were students of the English language education program at the Faculty of English, Mulawarman University, class of 2019. This research used a mixed methods approach with a case study design. This research involved 5 English students from the English Faculty of Mulawarman University class of 2019. Mixed method data is taken from interviews and quantitative data is taken from tests as a tool to validate and convince interview data. This research found that students felt helped by playing online games and improving their English language skills, especially their ability to read and understand in class. This research also found that although in theory, online games can improve students' English skills, there are also challenges behind it all. For the students themselves, they face challenges such as unfamiliar words which make it difficult for them to understand the context/message they want to convey when reading while playing online games.

Keywords: Reading, Reading Comprehension, Online Game

1. Introduction

Reading comprehension is an essential skill for academic success and lifelong learning. In the digital era, where information is predominantly conveyed through text, the ability to effectively interpret and analyze written content has become even more critical. However, recent trends in digital entertainment, particularly the rise of online gaming, have sparked debates about their potential effects on cognitive and academic abilities, including reading comprehension.

Online games are increasingly popular among university students, offering interactive and immersive experiences. While gaming is often associated with leisure and entertainment, it also provides opportunities for players to engage with text-based narratives, in-game instructions, and real-time communication with other players. These interactions may indirectly influence players' reading skills, especially when conducted in a second or foreign language, such as English.

This study focuses on students from the Class of 2019 in the English Education Program at Mulawarman University, a group familiar with both academic reading tasks and online gaming environments. The research explores whether their engagement with online games, often involving complex language processing, has any correlation with their academic reading comprehension. By combining qualitative and quantitative methods, this study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the interplay between gaming habits and academic performance.

The findings of this research may offer valuable insights into how digital platforms can either hinder or enhance essential academic skills. Furthermore, it seeks to contribute to the growing body of literature on the educational implications of online gaming, offering recommendations for educators and policymakers on leveraging these platforms for academic purposes.

2. Literature Review

Reading is a fundamental process that involves decoding and understanding written texts. Grallet (2004) describes reading as a continuous guessing process, emphasizing the importance of context and prior knowledge. Similarly, Brown (2004) highlights reading as both a skill expected of learners and a process of negotiating meaning from texts. Dewi et al. (2020) explain that reading involves applying skills to comprehend written content, enabling readers to extract information effectively. This process requires both word recognition and comprehension to interpret written material successfully.

Reading comprehension refers to the ability to extract and construct meaning from written texts. Snow (2002) defines it as an interactive process involving the reader and the text, while Klingner (2007) highlights the complexity of coordinating word recognition, fluency, and background knowledge. Healy (2002) emphasizes that reading comprehension enables readers to interpret texts, not only by understanding individual words but also by grasping the overall meaning. It is a crucial skill for gaining knowledge and making inferences from written materials.

Online games are interactive digital platforms that connect players via the internet. Severin et al. (2005) describe them as internet-based entertainment that enables real-time communication among players. Derryberry (2007) notes that online games often feature interactive multimedia elements and require internet access for multiplayer functionality. Kaustar (2019) adds that online games can be accessed anytime and offer visually engaging content, supporting collaboration and communication among players worldwide.

Online games can serve as effective tools for enhancing language learning. Rauuf et al. (2020) explain that games motivate learners by making language acquisition enjoyable. However, while games encourage vocabulary development and comprehension, some students are skeptical about their overall effectiveness and worry about potential distractions. Despite these concerns, video games offer interactive environments that can improve language skills through immersive experiences.

Several studies have explored the connection between online games and English learning. Fenny Yutika Seli and Imam Sentosa (2020) found that video games positively influenced English acquisition, especially in reading comprehension. Similarly, Surya Kelana Putra et al. (2023) showed that using games in lessons increased students'

enthusiasm, vocabulary retention, and reading skills. Lakuana et al. (2023) discovered that online games improved students' speaking, reading, writing, and listening skills. Jingjing Zhang et al. (2023) highlighted how online games like "Glory of Kings" fostered personal growth and cognitive development, benefiting language learning. Lastly, Adil Dananjaya (2019) found that Mobile Legends helped students expand their vocabulary and integrate it into daily use.

While previous studies focused on specific language skills or games, this research aims to explore how various online games affect reading comprehension, providing a broader perspective on the role of gaming in language learning.

3. Methods

This study employs a mixed-method case study approach to investigate the impact of online gaming on students' reading comprehension in online games and classroom contexts. Creswell (2018) defines mixed methods as integrating qualitative and quantitative approaches to gain a comprehensive understanding of research problems. This design mitigates the limitations of each approach while maximizing their strengths

Purposive sampling was used to select participants who met specific criteria. The participants were students from the English Education program, Class of 2019, at Mulawarman University. They were chosen for their accessibility, recent experience (3–4 months) with online gaming, and willingness to participate in interviews and reading comprehension tests.

The data for this study were collected using two instruments: structured interviews and a reading comprehension test. The interviews, featuring open-ended questions, explored participants' experiences and perceptions of how online gaming influenced their reading skills, with responses recorded and transcribed for analysis. To validate the interview data, a descriptive reading comprehension test adapted from a TOEFL test provider (EDUPAC ID) was administered. Participants read a passage and answered 10 multiple-choice questions, providing measurable insights into their reading performance.

Initially, nine participants were targeted, but only seven met the criteria during the first phase. Following a results seminar, re-interviews and tests were conducted, leaving five participants who were still eligible due to others graduating. Participants were recruited through announcements and collaboration with class representatives.

The data were analyzed using a mixed-method approach (Creswell, 2018) and thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Qualitative data were coded, categorized, and thematically analyzed, while test results provided quantitative validation. The process followed the Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) framework, including data reduction, visualization, and conclusion drawing.

To ensure data reliability and validity, methodological and theoretical triangulation were employed. Findings from interviews and tests were cross-verified with relevant theories (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

4. Result

The study investigated the impact of online gaming on students' reading comprehension in both gaming environments and classroom settings through interviews and reading tests with five participants. The findings indicate that integrating online games into English learning effectively enhances students' reading abilities and overall English proficiency. Participants reported increased enthusiasm for English subjects and found games to be an engaging medium that facilitates the acquisition of new vocabulary and improves comprehension skills. This aligns with the research of Al-Jifri & Elyas (2017) and Hung et al. (2018), which highlight the positive relationship between gaming and language proficiency.

Furthermore, the study revealed that online games offer a distinct reading experience compared to traditional printed texts. The incorporation of sound and visual elements in games made reading more interesting and immersive, as supported by Mizrachi Diane (2014). Games also promoted strategic thinking, analysis, and problem-solving, which contributed to enhanced reading comprehension (Fenny Yutika Seli & Imam Sentosa, 2020; Lakuana et al., 2023). Despite these benefits, participants faced challenges such as encountering unfamiliar vocabulary and complex sentence structures, consistent with findings by Husna et al. (2022).

Quantitative test results corroborated the qualitative data, with all five participants scoring above 7 out of 10 in reading comprehension tests. This improvement validates the participants' self-reported experiences and demonstrates that online gaming can positively influence academic reading performance. These results are in line with studies by Rochimah and Muslim (2021) and Ronimus et al. (2014), which emphasize the effectiveness of digital games as educational tools.

5. Discussion

Overall, the study concludes that online gaming not only makes English learning more enjoyable but also significantly enhances students' reading comprehension skills in academic contexts. The positive correlation between gaming and improved reading abilities suggests that well-designed digital games can be a valuable asset in language education, fostering both engagement and academic achievement.

6. Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate whether playing online games while reading stories or text within the game can enhance students' reading abilities, how students understand and assess their reading skills, and whether there is a potential link between playing games and students' reading comprehension in class. The findings confirmed that there is a positive impact from reading text or stories in online games on students' reading comprehension in academic settings.

The study revealed several valuable outcomes. First, it was found that playing online games contributes to vocabulary development and contextual understanding, which in turn aids comprehension of formal academic texts. Second, the research expanded knowledge on the benefits of gaming, particularly in the area of academic reading—an often overlooked field.

The study highlighted the accessibility and playability of online games, along with advancements in technology and the availability of free online games with strong narratives, such as Arknights, Genshin Impact, Grand Theft Auto, and Command and Conquer.

However, the study also identified several challenges, including unreliable internet connections in Indonesia, especially in rural areas, and the difficulty students face in accessing modern technology and the internet. Additionally, many students struggled with reading and comprehending formal English used in games.

In conclusion, the study demonstrates that playing online games can improve students' reading comprehension skills, despite some obstacles like poor internet and access issues. The research contributes to the growing body of knowledge on the potential benefits of integrating online games into language learning programs, particularly in enhancing reading comprehension abilities.

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