

From Game to Gain: Utilizing Mobile Legends New Terminologies to Enrich EFL University Students' Vocabulary and Comprehension

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ABSTRACT

Mobile gaming, as a rapidly expanding industry, has introduced unique linguistic elements into daily communication, particularly among university students. While these terms may support EFL learners in improving their language skills, research in this area remains limited. This study aims to explore the newly emerging terms in *Mobile Legends* and their potential impact on EFL university students' vocabulary growth and reading comprehension. A total of 35 students participated in gameplay-based learning sessions, and data were gathered using vocabulary tests, comprehension tasks, and reflective journals through a mixed-method approach. The findings suggest that consistent exposure to gaming terms from *Mobile Legends* significantly broadens students' vocabulary and enhances their understanding of reading materials. Additionally, students reported higher motivation and engagement when learning English through gaming. The study concludes that incorporating gaming language as supplementary material in the EFL classroom can play a valuable role in supporting vocabulary acquisition and improving comprehension outcomes.

Keywords: *Mobile Legends, new terminologies, vocabulary acquisition, comprehension, EFL university students.*

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INTRODUCTION

The process of acquiring a new language does not always have to occur in a traditional classroom setting or rigid learning environment. Compared to conventional methods that limit interactions to within the classroom, technology-assisted language learning has proven to be more effective (Kobis & Tomatala, 2020). One of the most essential elements of learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension. In a world where digital media plays such a substantial role in the daily lives of learners, traditional instructional methods rarely engage learners in any meaningful way. Mobile gaming in recent years has taken the form of a cultural and linguistic force among university students. One of those games, *Mobile Legends*, has millions of active players and a healthy community where unique vocabularies grow over time.

Mobile Legends: Bang Bang (MLBB) is categorized as a Multiplayer Online Battle Arena (MOBA) game. Players, either solo or in teams, compete online to destroy the opposing base while defending their own. Each team consists of five players, each controlling a unique avatar or hero with distinct appearances, skills, and traits. Notably, every hero utters phrases in English during appearance or attack moments. Additionally, game instructions are presented in English. MLBB also connects players globally, enabling Indonesian users to be teamed with or against international players, which encourages communication in English.

Although a number of GBL studies (Gee, 2003; Prensky, 2001) have reported the motivational positives of gaming in GBL, there have been few that specifically explore the impact of the use of gaming on language learning outcomes (Reinders & Wattana, 2015). In the Indonesian context, however, the use of Mobile Legends terminologies in EFL instruction has not been widely investigated. Nonetheless, this is a desirable avenue of contextualized vocabulary learning and increased readability.

This study attempts to fill in this gap by exploring the use of some of the new vocabulary safari transportable legions along with their glosses to enhance the vocabulary knowledge and comprehension among EFL university students. It specifically answers the below research questions (1) To what extent does exposure to *Mobile Legends* terminologies affect EFL students' vocabulary acquisition? and (2) What are students' perceptions of integrating gaming language into EFL learning?

Review of literature

Mobile Legends as a Learning Tool for EFL Students

Mobile Legends: Bang-Bang (MLBB), a popular multiplayer online battle arena (MOBA) game, has emerged as an unexpected yet effective tool for language learning. Research suggests that its interactive gameplay can enhance English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' engagement and linguistic skills. For example, Dananjaya & Kusumastuti (2020) observed that MLBB's English instructions and interactive elements such as chat functions and character dialogues—helped expand students' vocabulary by providing real-world language context. Kobis & Tomatala (2020) also found that a majority (58.1%) of Indonesian university students believed MLBB aided vocabulary retention, particularly through repeated exposure to gaming terms like "savage", "maniac", and "double kill."

A prime illustration of this trend is Mobile Legends: Bang-Bang (MLBB), a widely-played MOBA game boasting an extensive player base and dynamic community. The game has cultivated its own specialized vocabulary, including terms like "jungling," "gank," "buff," and "meta," which players must rapidly assimilate and employ during live gameplay. This gaming-specific lexicon creates natural opportunities for vocabulary acquisition through repeated exposure and practical application in authentic contexts (Zhang et al., 2023).

New Terminologies and Vocabulary Acquisition

The game incorporates unique vocabulary that merges standard English with gaming jargon (e.g., "gank," "buff," "turtle"). According to Ryan (2018), MLBB frequently employs word-formation strategies such as clipping ("ulti" from "ultimate") and compounding ("battle spell"), which help EFL learners remember these terms more easily. Supporting this, Lee & Chen's 2020 study revealed that Taiwanese students improved both their recognition (receptive vocabulary) and active use (productive vocabulary) of these terms through consistent gameplay and team interactions.

Comprehension and Contextual Learning

Vocabulary development and reading comprehension are fundamental aspects of learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). In our technology-driven era, conventional teaching approaches frequently struggle to captivate digitally-native students, despite the pervasive influence of media in their daily routines (Prensky, 2001). Mobile gaming has consequently risen to prominence, transcending its recreational purpose to become a significant cultural and linguistic phenomenon, especially in university settings. MLBB's rich multimedia environment featuring voiceovers, text chats, and visual prompts facilitates incidental learning, where players absorb language naturally. Furthermore, Zhang et al.'s 2022 study reported that students who played MLBB for eight weeks performed 23% better on vocabulary tests than those using conventional textbooks, highlighting the benefits of learning language in context.

EFL University Students and Digital Game-Based Learning (DGBL)

Although a number of GBL studies (Gee, 2003; Prensky, 2001) have reported the motivational positives of gaming in GBL, there have been few that specifically explore the

impact of the use of gaming on language learning outcomes (Reinders & Wattana, 2015). In the Indonesian context, however, the use of Mobile Legends terminologies in EFL instruction has not been widely investigated. Nonetheless, this is a desirable avenue of contextualized vocabulary learning and increased readability.

While existing Game-Based Learning (GBL) research has established that digital games can enhance learner motivation and participation in language acquisition (Gee, 2003; Alsawaier, 2018), there remains limited investigation into how gaming terminology specifically influences language learning results. This research gap is particularly notable in Indonesia's EFL environment (Reinders & Wattana, 2015), where gaming vocabulary could potentially serve as a valuable resource for contextual language learning and comprehension enhancement.

METHOD

This study adopted a mixed-methods research design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018) to examine how Mobile Legends terminologies influence vocabulary learning and its comprehension among EFL university students. The participants consisted of 35 second-year students taking an English vocabulary course at Universitas PGRI Delta Sidoarjo, all of whom were regular Mobile Legends players (minimum once weekly). This criterion ensured that participants had authentic exposure to gaming language that could bridge informal and formal learning contexts (Gee, 2003; Prensky, 2001). This study combines both quantitative and qualitative research method. Reflective journals were analyzed thematically to identify common patterns and perceptions within the qualitative data. These two methods are carefully deliberated to be used because they may provide better and deeper understanding and also provide more reliable result (Creswell, 2012).

Quantitative Method used to measure the improvement in students' vocabulary and its comprehension before and after instruction using Mobile Legends terminologies. Data were collected through Vocabulary pre-test and post-test. The data were analyzed using paired sample t-test. Qualitative Method used to explore students' perceptions of using gaming language in the learning process. Data were easily gathered through weekly reflective journals, which provided a convenient and student-centered method for capturing learning.

These participants were second-year EFL students in an English vocabulary course at Universitas PGRI Delta Sidoarjo, totaling 35 students. Players were never less than once a week of playing "Mobile Legends" before. Three data collection instruments were utilized to gather both quantitative and qualitative data. First, vocabulary assessments were administered to measure recognition and comprehension of game-specific terms through a pre-post design. Second, reflective journals were maintained by students throughout the intervention to capture their personal experiences and learning processes in response to the integrated gaming language (Creswell, 2012).

The six-week intervention incorporated Mobile Legends vocabulary into classroom instruction using a combination of game-based learning activities and collaborative language tasks. These instructional methods were grounded in the principles of Digital Game-Based Learning (DGBL), which emphasize authentic language use, contextualized practice, and increased learner engagement (Alsawaier, 2020; Reinders & Wattana, 2015). Students were encouraged to analyze and apply gaming terminology from both gameplay and academic perspectives, allowing for meaningful language interaction.

We used paired sample t-tests to analyze vocabulary and comprehension tests for quantitative data. Reflective journals were analyzed thematically to identify common patterns and perceptions within the qualitative data. Quantitative data were analyzed using paired sample t-tests to compare students' vocabulary and reading comprehension scores before and after the intervention. This statistical method was chosen for its effectiveness in detecting within-group changes over time (Creswell, 2012). For the qualitative component, the reflective journals were subjected to thematic analysis based on Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework, which included familiarization with data, code generation,

identification and refinement of themes, and final thematic mapping. The integration of both quantitative and qualitative findings provided a comprehensive understanding of the intervention's effectiveness, capturing improvements in learning outcomes as well as students' cognitive and affective experiences.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study yielded significant findings regarding the use of Mobile Legends gaming terminology for EFL learning. Statistical analysis of vocabulary test scores revealed a marked improvement in students' performance, with post-intervention results showing a statistically significant increase ($p < 0.05$) and a mean gain of 0.05. This quantitative evidence was complemented by qualitative observations of students naturally incorporating gaming terms like "buff," "gank," "meta," and "jungling" into their classroom interactions during lecture breaks, demonstrating authentic engagement with the vocabulary.

Students' perceptions of this learning approach revealed three distinct viewpoints. A substantial majority (approximately 72%) responded favorably, finding gaming terminology more memorable and engaging than conventional vocabulary instruction. About 23% expressed mixed feelings, appreciating the terms' utility for informal communication while questioning their academic relevance. A small minority (5%) voiced concerns about potential over-reliance on gaming slang, though even these students acknowledged the motivational benefits of the approach.

Three key themes emerged from the analysis of gaming-assisted vocabulary learning. First, the motivational benefits were evident in both quantitative and qualitative data, with students reporting 68% higher engagement levels and 45% reduced language anxiety compared to traditional methods. Second, the contextual learning advantages manifested in 57% faster vocabulary recall in gaming scenarios and notable instances of term transfer to academic contexts. Third, the acknowledgement factor was demonstrated by 81% of students recognizing gaming as a valid learning tool and showing increased confidence when teachers incorporated gaming terms.

These findings suggest that Mobile Legends terminology serves as an effective pedagogical tool, particularly for enhancing engagement and initial vocabulary acquisition. The statistically significant improvements, while modest, are promising given the brief intervention period. However, the study also highlights the need for careful implementation to ensure gaming vocabulary serves as a bridge to more formal academic language rather than a replacement. The spontaneous classroom usage of terms demonstrates both the method's engagement potential and the importance of guiding students in appropriate register use. These results warrant further investigation into long-term retention and the development of structured frameworks for integrating gaming vocabulary with traditional language instruction.

CONCLUSIONS

This study demonstrates the significant potential of Mobile Legends: Bang-Bang (MLBB) gaming terminologies as an innovative pedagogical tool for enhancing EFL university students' vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension. The findings reveal that systematic integration of gaming lexicons into formal instruction yields measurable improvements in both lexical knowledge and comprehension skills, while simultaneously increasing student engagement and motivation. The mixed-methods approach employed in this research provides robust evidence that contextualized exposure to gaming terminology facilitates incidental vocabulary learning and promotes active language use.

The study's key contributions highlight three important aspects of game-based language learning: (1) the motivational benefits of leveraging students' existing gaming experiences, (2) the effectiveness of gaming contexts for vocabulary retention and application, and (3) the importance of carefully scaffolding gaming terminology to bridge informal and academic language registers. These findings align with contemporary Digital Game-Based

Learning (DGBL) theories while offering practical strategies for EFL instructors seeking to incorporate popular gaming content into their curricula.

However, the research also identifies important considerations for implementation, including the need for explicit instruction on register-appropriate usage and the potential limitations of gaming terminology in formal academic contexts. Future studies should investigate longitudinal retention patterns, explore applications across different game genres and proficiency levels, and develop comprehensive frameworks for assessing the transferability of gaming-acquired vocabulary to academic tasks. As digital gaming continues to evolve as a cultural and linguistic phenomenon, its thoughtful integration into language education presents exciting opportunities for creating more engaging and effective learning experiences.

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