

MMORPG Gamification as an Innovative Method of Teaching English in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

The relevance of study is determined by ever increasing integration of innovative technologies into teaching and learning process at all levels of educational system, as well as evident change in the population of today students. Generation Z representatives are 'digital natives', thus educators have to search for appropriate methods and didactics to motivate and engage them, to enable their high performance results in changing landscape of education. Numerous studies have discovered innovative methods to design environments that are appropriate for ESL/EFL learners' needs in order to guarantee successful mastery of their target language through the integration of technology in language learning. The results of several studies have shown the effectiveness of such a platform through the use of particular video game genres, such as MMORPG. Based on narrative review methodology, with the elements of case study approach, the current study attempted to identify and systematize existing key concepts and the overall scope of evidence in the domain of MMORPG gamification embodying to the process of teaching English. The findings tie MMORPG educational integration with the connectivism paradigm in modern pedagogy, and show that MMORPGs activate metacognitive and cognitive skills in learners, significantly contributing to vocabulary acquisition, reading and writing skills, as well as English communication skills. At the same time, some actually latent pitfalls should be taken into account – such as assimilation of non-standard English, slang, or game-specific language, as well as the risk of addiction development. Thus, we conclude that a balanced perspective should be applied in the process of MMORPG gamification integration into the teaching process and curricula, and further empirical studies are needed in this domain.

Keywords: Gamification in teaching English; MMORPG in education; connectivism in pedagogy; ESL/EFL instruction

INTRODUCTION

Today, innovation in the field of English language teaching (ELT) brings fresh and unique components to content, design, technique, and, of course, technology. However, as innovation is about addressing and resolving present problems and providing novel solutions, it shouldn't be used merely for the sake of utilizing the newest technology. It is about improving learning outcomes and adjusting to shifting demands and environments. It involves trying novel pedagogies and rethinking traditional teaching and learning methods. To put it another way, innovation is about advancing our methods since it can make things more efficient and successful for both learners and educators.

The advent of techniques like gamification and interactive learning environments has changed the field of language instruction. Digital tools and gamified approaches are gradually replacing traditional language learning

methods in an effort to increase student engagement and competency. This study explores how these two trends interact, concentrating on how gamification ideas are incorporated into language learning resources and how they affect language education outcomes, specifically in the context of learning English.

Gamification, the process of introducing game aspects into educational environments, has grown in popularity as a way to improve learning and inspire students. The goal of gamified activities is to increase learners' intrinsic motivation and make the learning process more interesting and captivating by incorporating elements like points, badges, levels, and rewards. This method presents chances to design interactive language learning environments that accommodate a range of student choices and encourage involvement in language-related activities.

In a similar vein, interactive language learning systems use technology to provide users with engaging and customized learning experiences. These platforms provide a variety of tools, including multimedia materials, collaborative features, and quick feedback systems, to aid with language acquisition and skill development. Interactive platforms mimic language usage and communication scenarios, giving students opportunities to engage with classmates and teachers, practice language use in real-world contexts, and get feedback on their progress^[1].

One of the most significant advantages of gamification in language training is its ability to suit a diverse variety of learning preferences and styles. Teachers can use game concepts to create dynamic learning experiences that engage kinesthetic, visual, auditory, and social learners^[2-3]. Interactive language learning games, for example, can provide tactile feedback through touchscreen interactions, auditory feedback through sound effects and narration, and visual feedback via images and animations. According to Kristian Küili et al.^[4], taking a multimodal approach to learning not only improves enjoyment but also fosters deeper engagement and comprehension of language themes.

Overall, gamification has great potential as a teaching strategy for increasing student interest and competence in language learning. By using the motivational power of games, teachers can create dynamic and interactive learning experiences that encourage students to actively engage with the language and achieve their learning objectives.

Increasingly more teachers are incorporating gaming elements into the classroom, as research shows that gamification can boost student engagement. Gamification has become a popular method of enriching the classroom, and many people have made optimistic forecasts regarding its adoption. Previous research has demonstrated that game-based learning might increase students' engagement and involvement in their learning processes, thereby improving their performance^[5]. Massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPG) have grown in popularity as a result of the internet's expansion, and they can be an effective tool for second language learning. However, incorporating games into an instructional setting remains a challenging undertaking. Many gamification projects are expected to fail because teachers lack knowledge of gamification design and implementation. They also have trouble defining learning principles, planning classroom games, and engaging kids. As a result, the goal of this study is to investigate the process of gamification from the standpoint of learning motivation provided by MMORPGs, including their features, benefits, and problems.

MATERIALS and METHODS

The study employed a qualitative perspective, based on narrative review methodology and the elements of the case study approach. The choice of narrative review methodology is determined by the fact that it is useful for exploring a topic in a general way, identifying key concepts, and providing context, often based on the author's perspective^[6]. Case study elements served to support findings revealed through the narrative review.

For the initial search of sources for analysis, to facilitate and enhance searching and cover as much as possible broad array of publications during the search, we employed the Concensus app (<https://consensus.app/>). The following keywords were set in the inquiry for search: innovative ESL instruction methods; innovative EFL instruction methods; interactive methods in teaching English; gamification in teaching English; MMORPG in education; MMORPG in teaching English. This allowed us to find 346 relevant publications, which we then screened for the possibility of inclusion into the final sample. Screening was carried out predominantly based on abstracts, highlights, as well as, in some cases, introduction, results, and conclusion sections. Criteria for inclusion were a strong theoretical perspective or empirical results, an innovative approach, and relevance to higher education (replicability in HE, even if the study was based on high school data). The final sample was then processed based on either a narrative review or a case study approach, accordingly. The search for statistical data regarding the size and forecast of the MMORPG market was carried out directly in the Google search engine.

RESULTS

Interactive methods in teaching English: theory and practice

Teachers are most successful when they use a variety of methods and approaches to teach students. They encourage students to actively participate in taking on different roles in the actual classroom environment. Teachers must create a well-structured learning environment that takes into account a number of factors, including the age

group of the students, their motivations and attitudes toward learning, and their willingness to actively participate in the learning process, in order to effectively engage students in the classroom. Teachers can use alternative methods that depart from traditional teaching practices to introduce students to a variety of learning experiences^[7].

Using particular strategies and techniques is part of the pedagogical practice of using an interactive approach in the teaching-learning process. Cerghit^[8] claims that the interactive method, which places a strong emphasis on interactive learning, is one of the modern techniques in education. This approach, which leads to a certain degree of success, is based on the sharing of information, concepts, experiences, viewpoints, values, and impressions. The importance of interactive techniques has been emphasized by Bonwell and Eison^[9], Aaker-Smith^[10], Crawford et al.^[11], and Oprea^[12] in a number of academic papers and review articles in the field of pedagogy, both domestically and abroad. Similarly, Aaker-Smith^[10], Oprea^[12] and Petruța^[13] have stated the viewpoint that the utilization of interactive techniques and tactics helps the progress of students with varied intelligences within the educational setting. Additionally, different types of stimuli include the development of cognitive functions, the development of creative talents, and the growth of creative aptitude in each student in a classroom, all of which can be successfully supported by activities that are done in small groups or pairs. Albulescu^[14] claims that the interactive method encourages moral principles like genuine camaraderie, sincerity, honesty, modesty, and generosity while also making it easier for students to participate in demonstration and consolidation exercises. According to Mukhamedyarova and Cotter^[15], interactive teaching methods cover a number of democratization-related topics, such as creating an open environment, advancing understanding between people, motivating support from one another, developing a sense of accountability, and growing a sense of responsibility. Students become engaged contributors to society and active participants in their own education by participating in these activities.

Based on active learning, interactive learning incorporates experiential and computer-based learning, provides immediate feedback, and encourages reflection. It links the critical thinking and material delivery in language classes^[16]. With several iterations of theory, model, exercise, solution, and reflection, interactive learning integrates tutorials and activities into interactive classes^[16]. Teachers use brief cycles to teach and practice discrete knowledge. In large classes, they use quick replies in exercises to enhance the learning process so that students may readily reflect and apply their information^[17].

Interactive learning, according to Rusli et al.^[18], is a practical strategy to increase students' confidence and involvement. Students can strengthen their critical thinking and problem-solving skills while studying a second language thanks to new innovations in interactive learning. Both teachers and ESL students can gain from the innovative interactive tool that the authors devised and developed for teaching second languages. The four fundamental skills in ESL classes - reading, speaking, listening, and writing - can be taught and learned with this instrument. The study involved 30 pupils from a public secondary school in a rural area. The authors conclude that this interactive application can assist students become more motivated to learn, especially those with low proficiency, and develop self-directed learners who like learning English.

Students can be encouraged to be independent by using interactive learning resources. Since education is currently moving toward a student-centered approach, students should have more flexibility in the teaching and learning process^[19]. Students can advance through the advantages of this method, which enhances their language learning, especially if they give it a favorable evaluation. In addition, because of their entertaining and engaging features, it is typical for students to be more than eager to use them in their language learning^[20].

Ari Sandy and Bram's study^[21] examined how well interactive techniques can improve ESL students' vocabulary acquisition. The study focused on cutting-edge teaching techniques and investigated the effects of interactive exercises, including role-playing, games, and technology-assisted learning, on vocabulary usage and retention. For this study, 100 students from the Sukoharjo Branch of Marine Cruise Yogyakarta, Indonesia, were chosen. A combination of open-ended questionnaires, interviews, and observation was used to gather the data. The findings demonstrated that interactive methods, particularly those that involve 1) student participation, 2) technology integration, and 3) collaborative learning, greatly improve vocabulary in second language learners of English.

Interactive learning emphasizes how important student participation is to knowledge construction. Effective teaching and learning are said to be fueled by real-life and practice-based experiences in authentic settings. As the fundamental elements of learning a second language, teachers must strike a balance between facts, practicality, and life experience.

In a study on several interactive English teaching strategies in colleges with an information technology environment, Li^[22] asserts that practical exercises in the classroom maintain students' enthusiasm and commitment while allowing for ongoing evaluation throughout the semester. Students' critical thinking abilities, which form the basis of their analytical reasoning, are strengthened by interactive learning. Instead of just memorizing facts, students who are able to use their imagination and reasoning to explore learning are learning how to make decisions. Furthermore, interactive learning teaches students how to collaborate and work successfully in groups, which will be an important skill in the future workplace. Furthermore, this strategy anticipates students' active participation and the use of technology in the study hall. Blending technological improvements with face-to-face

instruction in formal classrooms can strengthen learning and provide engaging environments for second language acquisition^[23].

The interactive methods of teaching, especially in teaching languages, are often considered within the paradigm of connectivism, a conceptual framework that refers to learning as technology and socialization influenced. According to the connectivism paradigm, students' involvement and participation in the learning community activate information, which marks the start of the learning process. Students and other community members might start discussions as a result of engagement. In the Web 2.0 era, these discussions include images, videos, interactive media, and more in addition to text^[24]. It is inappropriate to think of learning as merely the internal evolution of knowledge, as the connectivism theory suggests. In actuality, students' access to external networks actually contributes to their learning^[25]. Gamification became the natural implication of embedding the connectivism paradigm into ESL teaching/learning theory and practice.

Gamification approach in teaching English: generational implications

In recent years, gamification has arisen as an innovative educational tool, notably for teaching English to young learners. By incorporating gaming aspects into the learning process, instructors hope to increase engagement, motivation, and, eventually, language acquisition. Practitioners distinguish a range of benefits and concerns of gamification in teaching English, which are briefly summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Benefits and concerns of gamification in teaching English^[26]

Benefits	Concerns
<p><i>Increased Motivation and Engagement</i> - Gamification makes learning more dynamic and interesting, grabbing the attention of young students who would otherwise find traditional techniques boring. Points, badges, and leaderboards are used to push students to participate actively and strive for higher performance. This increased interest frequently translates into greater time spent on learning activities, resulting in improved language abilities.</p>	<p><i>Excessive Focus on Competition</i>: Although competition can be a strong motivator, if it is not handled appropriately, it can also have unfavorable effects. Stress and anxiety may result from certain students' excessive focus on winning. Furthermore, people who perform poorly could get demotivated or have a pessimistic outlook on education.</p>
<p><i>Instant Feedback</i>: Because games offer instant feedback, students may recognize and fix their errors in real time. This immediate reaction promotes a more efficient learning process by ensuring that mistakes are corrected quickly and reinforcing learning.</p>	<p><i>Possibility of Distraction</i>: Students may become more engaged in playing games than in learning because they are occasionally more captivating than the actual instructional material. If the game components take precedence over the instructional goals, this could lessen the impact of gamification.</p>
<p><i>Encourages Collaborative Learning</i>: A lot of gamified activities encourage cooperation and teamwork. Working together to solve issues or accomplish shared objectives helps students practice communication in a real-world setting. In addition to improving language skills, this cooperative setting helps students develop their social skills and sense of belonging.</p>	<p><i>Resource-intensive</i>: It can take a lot of resources to create and execute gamified learning activities. It calls for patience, hard work, and frequently a large financial outlay for technology. Effective use of these tools requires training for educators, and maintaining the equipment might present extra difficulties.</p>
<p><i>'Customized' Learning Experiences</i>: Adaptive learning experiences, in which the degree of difficulty changes based on the learner's progress, are frequently provided by gamified learning systems. This individualized strategy maintains the ideal degree of challenge and advancement by ensuring that students are neither bored by too-easy assignments nor deterred by too-difficult ones.</p>	<p><i>Limited Depth of Learning</i> - Gamification can improve engagement and basic language skills, but it may not be as successful at improving higher-order language talents like critical thinking and creative writing. Games are often intended for repetitive practice rather than serious, analytical learning.</p>
<p><i>Improved Retention</i> - Games' interactive and repeated elements help players retain linguistic structures and vocabulary better. Students are more likely to recall and utilize words and phrases appropriately if they are exposed to them in a variety of settings and through a variety of game mechanisms.</p>	<p><i>Issues of Accessibility</i> - Access to the technology needed for gamified learning is not equitable among students. Inequalities in learning possibilities may result from this digital divide, especially in communities or schools with few resources. One major issue that must be resolved is making sure that gamification can benefit every learner.</p>

Gamification is the process of introducing aspects of games, like competitions, challenges, points, and prizes, into educational settings. This approach makes it possible for teachers to create dynamic, individualized lessons in the language classroom, turning the process of learning into one that is both interactive and quantifiable. When game design features and gameful experiences are included in learning processes, this is known as gamification in education. This adoption encourages learning to address linked attitudes, behaviors, and actions in a variety of contexts. The "Educational Gamification Five-Step Model" of Huang and Soman^[27] (see Figure 1) makes it simple to understand how gamification is used in education.

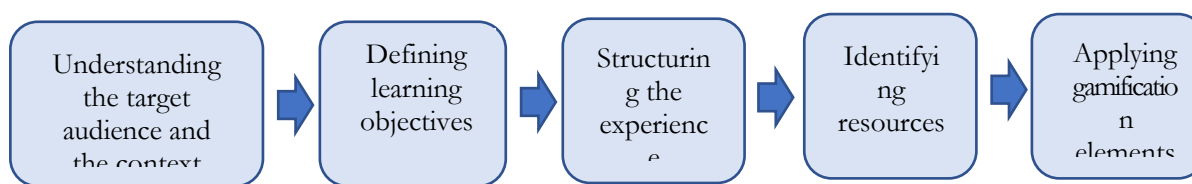


Figure 1. Educational gamification five-step model ^[27]

A set of rules, a distinct objective or goal, a competitive aspect, and a chance element are the four fundamental components around which games are built. The use of levels, points, badges, leaderboards, feedback, and challenges is a further components of gamification that engage and motivate ^[28].

According to Veljković Michos^[29], educators should employ gamification to improve motivation, focus, effort, and other positive values that are present in all games. The advantages of gamification mentioned here make it simple for teachers of foreign and second languages to establish a positive atmosphere in the classroom. Flores^[30] asserts that learners take control of their education when game elements are incorporated into L2 lessons. In other words, gamification can lead to learner autonomy. Additionally, Flores^[30] contends that students progress from a stage of reserve and disengagement to one of greater motivation. Dehghanzadeh et al.^[31] have confirmed the beneficial impacts of gamification on learners' learning experiences and learning results after reviewing twenty-two papers from 2008 to 2019. They list subject language learning, engagement, motivation, and satisfaction as the four specific learning outcomes of gamified studying English as a second language (LESL). Because teachers must inspire and include students in the learning process, gamification can be used in both LESL and foreign language acquisition.

The advent of the digital age has sparked a renewed interest in the use of technology for second language acquisition^[32]. The computer-assisted language learning (CALL) literature is seeing an increase in discussion on the prospects for second language learning provided by digital games. CALL researchers discovered that digital gaming has benefits for language learners, including increased motivation and learning engagement, which contribute to meaningful learning^[33], broad vocabulary use and gain ^[34-35], and enhanced communicative competence in the target language^[36].

In his study, Hazar^[37] aimed to compare games with pen and paper exercises and investigate the impact of digital games on the vocabulary growth and learning of third-grade English. The study question for this reason was whether playing video games has an impact on learning vocabulary in English. The study's findings showed that the experimental class's post-test scores were noticeably higher than the control group's following a semester of exposure to digital game-based activities. A statistically significant difference in test scores between the experimental and control groups of students was indicated using an independent sample t-test.

Researchers have determined why technology is necessary, as well as why it is necessary for interactive activities and games. Since there are many online options for gamifying ELT classrooms, the widespread use of technology in various sectors has undoubtedly given gamification new dimensions. Additionally, Gen Z comprises the vast majority of students now enrolled in higher education. They are, in other words, "digital natives," having grown up surrounded by social media and the internet. Because of this, gamification has become very popular as educators have come to recognize the possibilities that games can have for their students. Different learning styles, changing attitudes toward the learning process, and increased demands for teaching and learning are characteristics of the current generation of students^[38]. However, to achieve good outcomes, elements including the choice, development, and application of web-based games and interactive activities must be carefully considered.

According to certain research findings, students find interactive exercises and web-based gamification technologies more engaging. For example, Kahoot! is regarded by Wichadee & Pattanapichet^[39] as a suitable digital game alternative since it boosts students' enthusiasm in language learning. It also adds enjoyment to learning. According to Sartor^[40], H5P is a helpful tool for making interactive films. She also believes that more interactive language-learning videos will be produced in the future. It is obvious that more research is needed to determine the precise effects of the aforementioned technologies and concepts on students' learning in gamified online

courses. For example, more research is required to determine how well H5P interactive exercises work for speaking and listening abilities.

Consequently, developments in gaming technology and the enormous expansion of the Internet have accelerated the development of online games. Second language acquisition researchers are particularly interested in massively multiplayer online role-playing games like *Second Life* and *World of Warcraft*³⁴⁻³⁶. Researchers suggested that MMORPGs' virtual worlds provide great opportunities for language development, particularly communicative ability. What makes these environments useful for second language learning is their applicability to real-life situations, such as the process of negotiating while buying and selling⁴¹.

MMORPG: Paradigm Shifting

Previous research has demonstrated that game-based learning might increase students' engagement and involvement in their learning processes, thereby improving their performance. Massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs) have grown in popularity as a result of the internet's expansion, and they can be an effective tool for second language learning. Recently, a growing number of research have been conducted on the integration of MMORPGs into the learning process and curricula. Adris and Yamat⁴² conducted a study that looked into how players perceived the effectiveness of MMORPGs as an interactive setting for second language learning. A questionnaire was designed and distributed to 121 randomly selected experienced Ragnarok Online players on foreign servers. The findings revealed that participants have a generally positive impression of the utility of MMORPG as an interactive setting for second language acquisition. According to the findings, participants generally agreed that playing MMORPGs is beneficial in improving communicative competence in the target language through interactions with other players. The game's anonymity reduces language anxiety and enhances players' confidence in communicating in the target language. The participants also believed that MMORPGs are beneficial in offering a realistic environment for using English in communication, enhancing learning motivation, and providing a broad repertoire of vocabulary through gameplay. Furthermore, participants have a generally good attitude toward the idea of incorporating MMORPGs to augment English teaching and learning. The difficulties and solutions for how playing MMORPGs could inform or transform second language instruction were examined.

Kongmee et al.⁴³ investigated the use of freely available MMORPGs to enhance second language instruction for higher education students. The study looks into the experiences, performances, skills, and English exam results of a group of English as a Second Language (ESL) students at a Thai institution, as well as how an MMORPG can help them develop their second language. The authors believe that MMORPGs provide informal virtual environments in which students can communicate in their second language with people from all over the world. The study methodology integrates ethnography and action research in both the virtual and real worlds. Both through casual classroom discussions and screen captures of students playing MMORPGs, the researcher watches how students interact with these games in the real world. In order to observe the virtual world from the perspective of another game character, the researcher also assumes the role of a character in the MMORPG. The researcher plans, observes, and then engages with the students' MMORPG characters in the game as part of action research. This makes it possible for the researcher to offer the students anonymous but customized help, such as guidance on how to play the game, encouragement when needed, a sympathetic ear when required, and assistance with language barriers. Action research is also utilized in the real world to offer tutorial exercises and discussions that are based on the students' experiences with the MMORPG, allowing them additional possibilities to improve their language skills.

Particularly for the development of English vocabulary, MMORPGs have become a promising instrument in the growing field of second language acquisition. MMORPGs and other digital game settings provide a real, context-rich setting that can help with language acquisition through interaction. These immersive settings help with application and retention by embedding vocabulary in situations that closely resemble real-world language use⁴⁴.

MMORPGs' intrinsic focus on social interaction is one of their main benefits. Gamers interact with the game world and cooperate, bargain, and converse with other players. Because players work inside the "Zone of Proximal Development", expanding their language bounds via practice and necessity, this social factor can be particularly effective for vocabulary acquisition⁴⁵. Players can interact and collaborate in a virtual world thanks to the unique social atmosphere that MMORPGs generate. MMORPGs provide a platform for people to engage with like-minded players, creating communities and friendships in an increasingly interconnected globe.

Some experts claim that the authentic, context-rich environments of MMORPGs facilitate language learning through spontaneous interaction⁴⁶. Players must frequently work together on objectives, negotiate methods, and barter in-game resources. These interactions necessitate comprehending and creating the target language in real time, providing a true linguistic input and output platform. Notably, the conversations could be more stilted and forced, but they are bolstered by a sense of purpose inherent in the game's goals.

Other scholars have looked into the mechanics of these exchanges and concluded that MMORPGs offer numerous chances for players to negotiate meaning. When confronted with linguistic ambiguity or unfamiliar phrases, players frequently seek explanation, modify their statements, or employ other metalinguistic tactics essential to language development. The continual loop of generating, receiving feedback, and changing is central to communicative language teaching, and MMORPGs naturally assist this process^[47].

Martins^[48] examines the complex relationship between MMORPGs and learning a second language, emphasizing how social interaction and motivation are interwoven. The study emphasizes how MMORPGs offer realistic and engaging language practice environments. According to the author, by immersing players in intricate linguistic interactions and culturally rich stories, MMORPGs help players develop both receptive and productive language skills. The intrinsic incentive components of gaming, along with the social dynamics of MMORPGs, create an engaging learning environment. However, the report recognizes issues such as cognitive overload, the use of informal language, the potential spread of inappropriate language use, and the risk of unfavorable social interactions. In conclusion, the author stressed that, while MMORPGs provide new venues for language acquisition, careful analysis of their benefits and drawbacks is required.

DISCUSSION

The motivational power of MMORPGs cannot be overstated. Rama et al.^[49] argue that the intrinsic motivating mechanisms in digital games can be used for educational objectives, such as language acquisition. This is consistent with the notion of incidental learning, in which learners gain vocabulary implicitly while focusing on game objectives and interactions. Rama et al.^[49] conducted a qualitative study on the experiences of two college-aged Spanish learners who played the Spanish-language version of the massively multiplayer online game *World of Warcraft*. The authors explain how the game's design, cultural norms surrounding its use, and participants' individual skills interact to provide these two students with unique opportunities for language learning through data gathered from participant observation, interviews, in-game chat logs, and student journal entries. The main topic of discussion is how online games could be utilized to teach and learn languages in ways that fully utilize the affordances of the medium for both novice and expert players.

Also, *League of Legends (LoL)* can be a valuable tool for teaching and learning English, especially for young learners. Due to its widespread popularity, wide range of content, and online format, the game provides a wealth of options for language learning through participation and immersion. Communication in this game is typically very active and diverse due to the wide variety of characters and quests, as well as the opportunities to buy and sell weapons and ammunition. As a result, this MMORPG is a great place to improve vocabulary as well as writing, reading, and speaking abilities.

Ng et al.^[50] present an intriguing and worthwhile study. The study looks into how MMORPGs affect players' use of vocabulary-learning techniques. The participants are seasoned internet gamers in the 24- to 25-year-old age range. In addition to identifying the vocabulary learning strategies employed by ESL players when playing online games, information was also gathered through online semi-structured interviews with these players of *Guild Wars 2*, a well-known MMORPG computer game, to determine how MMORPG-related factors affect the use of strategies. To finish the story quests in the game, a party (team) of four players is required. Additionally, while playing *Guild Wars 2*, the participants had to communicate using an online push-to-talk computer tool. At the same time, the researcher conducted semi-structured online interviews with the four participants and recorded audio and video of the 12-hour game-play sessions using Open Broadcaster Studio (OBS) software. These ESL players employ metacognitive, cognitive, memory, and activation strategies to acquire game-related vocabulary throughout the MMORPG game-play sessions, according to Gu and Johnson's (1996) classification of vocabulary learning strategies (VLS). Furthermore, according to the authors, there are four elements that influence players' vocabulary language learning experiences: (a) how game plots contribute to MMORPG gaming immersion; (b) the ability to learn without being constrained by classroom regulations; (c) social interaction that enhances players' learning experiences; and (d) how cooperation within the MMORPG community enhances learning experiences.

Among the studies devoted to MMORPGs' role in ESL/EFL instruction, one should especially note the publication by Zhang et al.^[51]. It is essentially the only paper that discusses the introduction of MMORPGs from a neurological perspective in language training. Based on pertinent macroscopic and microscopic research, the paper examines the educational use of MMORPGs and demonstrates how real-time online peer interaction and game narratives or instructions integrated into MMORPGs can improve players' overall language proficiency or certain language skills. Both behavioral and neurological theories are used to explain the mechanisms behind MMORPGs' function as educational assistants in second language acquisition. According to the authors, attentional bias causes learners and gamers to automatically or consciously devote greater cognitive resources to task-related inputs. Furthermore, playing MMORPGs may improve or strengthen functional connections from seed regions such as the visual word form area and left anterior insular/frontal operculum (AI/FO) to other language-related brain areas, with the reward circuit activation acting as a moderating factor.

In their study on extramural English, Sylvén and Sundqvist^[52] looked into how extracurricular activities, particularly digital gaming, can improve language learning. The limits of learning have shifted outside of traditional classrooms in the era of digitalization. The significance of comprehending how these extracurricular activities, especially video games, affect language acquisition was emphasized by this study. Given that many games are in English, their findings showed that gamers are more likely than non-gamers to be exposed to the language and to acquire superior language skills. Together with the immersive and interactive aspects of video games, this increased exposure gives players real-world situations in which to hone their language abilities. Notably, gameplay's ability to motivate and interest players is a key factor in this learning trajectory. The significance of comprehending the level of language exposure in gaming was also underlined by the study. The interactive, problem-solving aspect of gaming, which frequently calls for cooperation and communication, offers a richer language experience, even when quantity does play a part. Thus, the work of Sylvén and Sundqvist suggests that the digital realm, in particular video games, can present potential opportunities for casual yet successful language learning experiences.

According to Rudis and Postic^[53], there has recently been a noticeable increase in the number of schoolchildren who are proficient in English. One of the causes is the quantity of English sessions offered every week, but the media's influence is far more crucial. Students are heavily exposed to video games. In their article, a survey was undertaken to determine the relationship between video game playing and English proficiency. Ninety-six kids completed the survey, answering a variety of questions about the number and quality of their video game playing. The finding was that video games had a significant impact on language learning. The areas that benefited the most were vocabulary and pronunciation. Video games, as a highly desirable type of entertainment, create a pleasant and stimulating environment ideal for learning a foreign language.

However, while MMORPGs offer high potential, there are specific challenges. Players may encounter nonstandard English, slang, or game-specific jargon. Moreover, the balance between the significant time commitment required by MMORPGs and efficient language acquisition remains disputed.

Another problem, albeit not necessarily related to the efficacy of language acquisition, is the possibility of addiction. Because MMO games have been shown to be more addictive than non-MMO games^[54], future research should look into the specific aspects of MMORPGs that may lead to addiction in this game genre when studying English. Back in 2008, Smahel et al.^[55] stated that addiction to online role-playing games is one of the most discussed areas of current cyberpsychology, owing to its possibly harmful impact on young people's social lives. The authors of the study focus on some elements of juvenile and teenage addiction to MMORPGs. The authors explored the relationships between players and their gaming characters, determining whether and in what ways the players' relationship to their characters influenced potential addiction. Gamers' attitudes toward their characters appear to have a special role, as addicted gamers perceive their characters to be superior and frequently aspire to be like their characters in real life. The study also indicated that younger players are more susceptible to addiction. These effects may be even more strengthened due to continuous technological advances in MMORPGs. Improved visuals and higher internet speeds are leading the way, improving the gaming experience and drawing a larger player base. Interactive gaming elements are increasing in popularity, boosting community involvement and player loyalty. These changes claim to improve the game experience, resulting in increased player engagement and retention rates. According to Mordor Intelligence research, the MMORPG gaming market is predicted to be worth USD 28.06 billion in 2025 and USD 46.76 billion by 2030, growing at a CAGR of 10.75% throughout the forecast period^[56].

Thus, MMORPG gamification embodying to the ESL/EFL instruction represents a rather complex landscape, bearing both great advantages and latent concerns. Nevertheless, as the research demonstrated, this instrument brought sound results in many cases of its application in teaching English, and it definitely should not be ignored, being an 'organic' part of life practices and communication platform of Generation Z, today's prevalent category of HE students studying English.

CONCLUSIONS

By providing chances to develop critical thinking, problem-solving skills, teamwork, and profound knowledge retention, MMORPGs provide new life to traditional educational techniques. This change strives to make learning a more learner-centered, immersive, holistic, pleasurable, and flexible, empowering learners as active participants in the learning process. The intriguing relationship between language learning and MMORPGs provides a complex picture of modern teaching methods. Theoretical research on MMORPGs' impact on language learning appears to support the idea that MMORPGs can be incredibly helpful when teaching a language. Most scholars believe that MMORPGs provide a fairly thorough set of additional stimuli that assist players engage in the language they are exposed to through games. Visual signals, voice acting, language, storylines, and context are all elements of games that, when combined with linguistic resources, improve the learning experience. These games also promote incidental learning, in which the previously described context allows the player to make educated assumptions about what an unknown word might mean, allowing gaps in player understanding of the language to be easily filled without the need for a dictionary.

At the same time, while MMORPGs clearly provide vast language environments for learners to explore and immerse themselves in, they also present obstacles. From the risk of cognitive overload to navigating the complexities of informal language and ensuring meaningful, pleasant connections, learners and educators must approach these environments in a balanced manner.

Supplementary Materials

N/A

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, O.K.; methodology, O.K.; software, O.K.; validation, O.K.; formal analysis, O.K.; investigation, O.K.; resources, O.K.; data curation, O.K.; writing—original draft preparation, O.K.; writing—review and editing, O.K.; visualization, O.K.; supervision, O.K.; project administration, O.K.

The author has read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.” Authorship must be limited to those who have contributed substantially to the work reported.

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