

THE INFLUENCE OF FREE FIRE ON STUDENTS' ENGLISH LANGUAGE SKILLS: A CASE STUDY AT SMK N 2 PEKALONGAN

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the influence of the online game *Free Fire* on the development of English language skills among students at SMK N 2 Pekalongan. The game was selected due to its use of English-language prompts and commands that provide natural exposure for language learning. Using a descriptive qualitative method and a case study approach, data were gathered through questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and Duolingo English Tests. The findings reveal that *Free Fire* significantly enhances students' receptive skills, particularly *listening* and *reading*. Students became familiar with common English phrases such as "safe zone shrinking," "revive your teammate," and "headshot," which improved their comprehension of functional language. Although *speaking* and *writing* were less developed due to limited verbal interaction within the game, preset text and voice commands still offered contextual vocabulary exposure. These results align with Krashen's Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theory and Game-Based Learning (GBL), highlighting the game's potential as an engaging and effective informal language learning tool. Overall, *Free Fire* can serve as a complementary medium to promote contextual and enjoyable English language acquisition.

Key Words: Free Fire, Online Games, English Language Skills, Informal Language Learning, Students' Perception

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi pengaruh permainan *Free Fire* terhadap peningkatan keterampilan bahasa Inggris siswa di SMK N 2 Pekalongan. Game ini dipilih karena menyajikan interaksi berbahasa Inggris secara langsung melalui instruksi audio dan teks dalam permainan. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif dengan pendekatan studi kasus. Data dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner, wawancara semi-terstruktur, dan tes kemampuan bahasa Inggris menggunakan Duolingo English Test. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa *Free Fire* memberikan dampak signifikan terhadap peningkatan keterampilan reseptif siswa, khususnya keterampilan *listening* dan *reading*. Siswa terbiasa dengan istilah seperti "safe zone shrinking", "revive your teammate", dan "headshot", yang meningkatkan pemahaman mereka terhadap instruksi dalam bahasa Inggris. Meskipun keterampilan *speaking* dan *writing* kurang berkembang karena keterbatasan interaksi verbal dalam game, penggunaan perintah suara dan teks preset tetap memberi eksposur terhadap kosakata fungsional. Temuan ini mendukung teori pemerolehan bahasa kedua (SLA) oleh Krashen dan teori *Game-Based Learning* sebagai pendekatan efektif dalam pembelajaran bahasa informal. Dengan demikian, *Free Fire* dapat berperan sebagai alat pembelajaran tambahan yang mendorong perolehan bahasa Inggris secara kontekstual dan menyenangkan.

Kata Kunci: Free Fire, Permainan Daring, Keterampilan Bahasa Inggris, Pembelajaran Bahasa Informal, Persepsi Siswa

INTRODUCTION

This research examines the influence of *Free Fire* on the development of English language skills among students, specifically at SMK N 2 Pekalongan. In the current digital era, online games like *Free Fire* have become immensely popular among students, serving not only as entertainment but also as interactive experiences involving communication, collaboration, and strategic thinking. Many students at SMK N 2 Pekalongan spend their leisure time playing these games, which inadvertently exposes them to English vocabulary, game instructions, and real-time interactions with other players.

The increasing accessibility of mobile devices and internet connections has driven the widespread integration of online games into students' daily lives. This has made gaming a prevalent activity that

influences students' cognitive and social skills. In Free Fire, players often need to understand and use English, whether in reading game instructions, communicating with teammates, or engaging with in-game narratives. This necessity of English comprehension creates an environment where students can develop their language skills organically while playing.

Research indicates that games serve as effective tools for language learning, particularly in vocabulary acquisition. Free Fire, although known as a game that focuses more on action and strategy, possesses educational elements that cannot be ignored, especially in the context of English language mastery. In this game, players frequently interact with other players using English, both in the form of instructions and direct communication. The interactive nature of this game fosters active participation, where students are not just passive recipients of information but are actively involved in learning through gameplay. Immersion in an English-speaking environment within this game allows for incidental language learning, making the acquisition process more natural and enjoyable.

Several studies support the notion that mobile games enhance English language learning. Ratnalestari (2023) indicated that students engaging in Mobile Legends improved their English vocabulary acquisition through interactive gameplay. Nevertheless, studies examining the impact of mobile games on English language development among vocational high school student perceptions remain limited. Therefore, further exploration is necessary to determine how Free Fire influences students' language skills and identifies which specific skills experience the most significant improvement.

This research aims to provide new perspectives on how digital media, often viewed merely as entertainment, can be effectively utilized to support language learning from student perception and in an immersive manner.

Based on the described background, this research focuses on the following questions:

1. How does Free Fire, in relation to the frequency of gameplay, contribute to the development of English language skills among students at SMK N 2 Pekalongan?
2. Which English language skill shows the most significant improvement through the use of Free Fire (is it listening, reading, writing, or speaking)?

The purpose of this study is to examine the effects of the game Free Fire on students' English language skills. With the increasing popularity of this online game among teenagers, it is important to understand how the interactions in this game can affect their English language skills. Through this research, it is hoped to gain new insights into how gaming activities can affect students' English communication and comprehension skills. This study also aims to identify the type of English language skills that are most affected by playing this game, be it listening, speaking, reading, or writing skills. It is hoped that the findings will provide valuable recommendations for educators and game developers to create effective, engaging learning experiences and to capitalize on the educational potential of the online gaming phenomenon.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a qualitative approach using a case study method, aiming to explore the impact of the game Free Fire on students' English language skills at SMK N 2 Pekalongan. The qualitative

approach was chosen because it allows researchers to gain a deeper understanding of students' experiences, perceptions, and meanings regarding the use of English in the context of gaming. By utilizing qualitative data, researchers are able to explore various aspects that cannot be explained solely through numbers or statistics. In this regard, data collection techniques such as in-depth interviews, direct observations, and descriptive analysis serve as the primary instruments for obtaining relevant information about students' experiences.

The case study method is particularly suitable for this research as it focuses on a specific group, namely the students of SMK N 2 Pekalongan who are actively engaged in playing Free Fire. By employing a case study approach, researchers are able to delve deeper into their experiences and how they interact with and use English within this game. This enables a richer understanding of how digital gaming can contribute to the development of English language skills among adolescents.

This research was conducted at SMK N 2 Pekalongan, Pekalongan. The selection of this location is based on the high interest of students in the game Free Fire, as well as the relevance of this game in the context of English language usage. SMK N 2 Pekalongan is one of the vocational high schools with a student population that is actively engaged in various digital activities, including online gaming. With adequate internet access, students can easily play Free Fire without any obstacles. Therefore, this research is conducted within this school environment to obtain more representative and relevant data.

Additionally, the social interactions that occur within the school environment play a significant role in shaping students' experiences while gaming. Many students have peers who also participate in the same games, allowing them to exchange strategies and share experiences related to using English in the gaming context. This social environmental factor becomes a crucial element in the research analysis, as it can influence how students interact with the English language while playing. Thus, this study considers not only individual aspects but also social factors that contribute to the development of students' English language skills.

The data used in this research consists of one main source: qualitative data through interviews, online questionnaires, and student English score tests. An online questionnaire was distributed to students to collect data on their gaming habits, including the frequency of gameplay, their use of English during gaming, and the perceived effects of gaming on their language abilities. The questionnaire included both open-ended and closed-ended questions to gather comprehensive and structured information. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected students to gain deeper insight into their experiences with using English in gaming contexts and how these interactions contributed to their language development. To further support the findings, students were asked to complete a Duolingo English Test (practice version), which assessed the four key language skills: reading, listening, speaking, and writing. The results from this test provided measurable evidence of their current English proficiency levels. These scores also allowed for meaningful cross-analysis with the qualitative data obtained from the interviews and questionnaires. By combining qualitative insights with objective Duolingo test results, the research aimed to present a more holistic understanding of how gaming influenced students' English language learning. This multi-source approach was expected to reveal how interactive gaming environments contributed to tangible improvements in language skills.

The theoretical frameworks guiding this research are Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theory and Game-Based Learning (GBL) theory. SLA theory, particularly Krashen's Input Hypothesis (Krashen, 1981), suggests that language acquisition occurs when learners are consistently exposed to meaningful and comprehensible input in the target language. The Affective Filter Hypothesis also plays a role, proposing that a low-anxiety environment, such as that found in gaming, can enhance language acquisition by reducing emotional barriers. GBL theory, rooted in experiential learning (Kolb, 1984) and constructivist theories, emphasizes active engagement, problem-solving, and real-world application in learning. Digital games, like Free Fire, serve as interactive learning environments where students can acquire new knowledge through exploration and experimentation, enhancing motivation and fostering critical thinking.

The data collection techniques in this research include:

1. **Online Questionnaire:** The online questionnaire included questions exploring information about gaming frequency, interactions in English, and the extent to which students recognized improvements in their language skills through gaming. Examples of questions used include how often students play Free Fire in a week, whether they often encounter new English words or phrases while playing, and whether they can understand English instructions in the game without translating them first. Additionally, questions about whether playing games motivates them to improve their English skills were also included.
2. **Semi-Structured Interviews:** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with students selected based on preliminary questionnaire results. This method allowed the researcher to adapt questions deeper according to each student's unique responses and experiences. The interviews covered topics such as how students understood in-game instructions, how they communicated with other players in English, and whether they perceived improvements in their English proficiency after extended gameplay. Examples of interview questions include how students understand in-game instructions in English, how often they use English to communicate with other players while playing, and whether they find it easier to understand English conversations after playing games frequently.
3. **Duolingo English Test Documentation:** Students' Duolingo English Test scores were collected to compare the English proficiency levels of Free Fire players. This documentation aimed to identify any differences in language skill development among the different player groups, providing quantitative insights that complemented the qualitative findings obtained from questionnaires and interviews.

The collected data was analyzed using descriptive analysis techniques. Data from the questionnaires and interviews were analyzed descriptively to understand the patterns of English usage within the games. This analysis aimed to identify specific patterns or trends in students' experiences using English while gaming. In this analysis, qualitative data from the interviews were presented in the form of direct quotes that clearly illustrated students' experiences.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings obtained from questionnaires, interviews, and English proficiency tests conducted among students at SMK N 2 Pekalongan, focusing on Free Fire players. The data is analyzed

and discussed based on the theoretical frameworks of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and Game-Based Learning (GBL) to provide a deeper understanding of how Free Fire contributes to students' English language development.

A. Questionnaire Data Analysis

The questionnaire was distributed to 25 students of SMK N 2 Pekalongan who are active or casual Free Fire players. This analysis is based on three main theoretical perspectives: Second Language Acquisition (SLA) by Krashen, Game-Based Learning (GBL), and qualitative descriptive methods. Each questionnaire item is interpreted based on students' responses and connected to the theories used in this research.

1. Frequency of Playing

Most respondents play Free Fire 1–2 times per week, indicating consistent exposure to English within the game environment. From the SLA perspective, this frequency supports the Input Hypothesis, as repeated exposure helps facilitate natural language acquisition. In GBL, such exposure contributes to experiential learning.

2. Exposure to New Vocabulary

88% of students reported encountering new vocabulary while playing. This indicates strong incidental learning, where players absorb vocabulary through game context. In SLA, this reflects natural acquisition through meaningful context, while GBL emphasizes the importance of rich and contextual learning environments.

3. Understanding English Instructions

The majority of students understood English instructions without translation. This suggests internalization of language structures through repetition and direct experience, supporting the Natural Order Hypothesis in SLA.

4. Confidence

Most students felt more confident using English during gameplay than in class. This supports Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, which asserts that low-anxiety environments facilitate language acquisition. In GBL, games provide a safe space to experiment with language without fear of mistakes.

5. Motivation

Most respondents were motivated to improve their English through gaming. This highlights the potential of Free Fire as an engaging and motivating learning medium, in line with GBL principles.

6. Communication in English

40% of students reported using English to communicate in-game, showing potential for authentic speaking practice. While more students preferred text over voice, these communication forms still support language learning processes.

7. Mode of Communication

56% used text, and only a small number used voice chat. This indicates that writing skills have more room to develop than speaking within the context of Free Fire.

8. Strategy and Problem Solving

40% of students used English to strategize or solve problems in the game. This is a direct example of contextual and experiential learning as described in GBL.

9. Most Improved Language Skills

Listening (40%) and reading (36%) were the most improved skills, reinforcing the SLA theory that receptive skills precede productive ones.

10. Understanding English Conversations

80% of students stated that their ability to understand English conversations improved, demonstrating the positive impact of repeated and meaningful language exposure in the game.

B. Interview Findings and Descriptive Analysis

Respondent P3, a Free Fire player, stated that although some terms were initially difficult, he eventually understood them through context and repetition. He felt more comfortable using text than voice and considered gaming a more engaging way to learn English compared to conventional methods. This experience supports incidental learning in SLA and experiential learning in GBL.

Respondent P2, who also plays Free Fire, mentioned frequently using terms like “cover me,” “rush,” and “retreat” during gameplay. P2 preferred text chat for safety but occasionally used voice chat for efficiency. He stated that through the game, he learned a lot of new vocabulary and believed that playing Free Fire was more effective than classroom English learning because it provided real-time communication experiences. P2’s experience demonstrates that active participation in the game environment supports the development of both receptive and productive skills, with increased motivation and confidence. This supports GBL theory as well as Krashen’s Affective Filter and Input Hypotheses in SLA.

C. Duolingo Scores of P2 and P3

Student Name	Duolingo Score	CEFR Level	Game
P2	130	C1	Free Fire
P3	115	B2	Free Fire

P2’s score of 130 places him at the C1 level (CEFR), indicating high proficiency in understanding complex texts, communicating spontaneously, and using English flexibly. This confirms that the experience of playing Free Fire can provide sufficient language exposure to support the attainment of advanced proficiency levels. Meanwhile, P3’s score of 115 indicates B2-level proficiency, reflecting strong comprehension of complex texts and effective communication in informal contexts. Both results show that active engagement in Free Fire gameplay, although not designed specifically for learning, still contributes significantly to English language acquisition.

D. Discussion

Free Fire provides exposure to English through voice instructions, mission texts, and player interactions. This creates an indirect learning environment consistent with SLA and GBL principles. The game functions as an informal learning space that strongly supports receptive skills and, to a lesser extent, productive skills.

Table: Improvement of English Language Skills (Free Fire)

Skill	Description of Improvement
Listening	Significantly improved due to continuous exposure to audio-based in-game instructions.
Reading	Improved through repeated and contextual short texts.
Writing	Limited due to reliance on preset messages, but still supports basic vocabulary development.
Speaking	Least improved due to rare use of verbal communication.

Overall, Free Fire can serve as an informal English language learning medium that strongly supports listening and reading skills, while also holding potential to improve students' confidence and motivation in using English.

CONCLUSION

This research concludes that the Free Fire game has a significant influence on enhancing the English language skills of students at SMK N 2 Pekalongan, especially in the domains of receptive skills, namely listening and reading. Through contextual exposure and repetitive instructions in English, students were able to internalize vocabulary and instructions commonly found in the game environment. These findings support the Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theory by Krashen, particularly the Input and Affective Filter Hypotheses, which emphasize the importance of comprehensible input and a low-anxiety environment for language learning. Furthermore, Game-Based Learning (GBL) theory strengthens the argument that engaging and immersive learning experiences, like those offered in Free Fire, contribute meaningfully to language acquisition.

Despite the fact that speaking and writing were less prominently developed due to limited opportunities for verbal expression and creative output within the game, students still benefitted from preset messages and structured commands that introduced them to functional vocabulary. The improvement in learners' confidence, motivation, and ability to understand English conversations indicates the potential of using digital games as complementary tools in language education.

For future research, it is recommended to:

1. Expand the participant sample to include students from multiple schools or regions for broader generalization.
2. Conduct a longitudinal study to explore the long-term impact of game-based language exposure.
3. Integrate Free Fire or similar games into structured English learning environments to test the effectiveness of blended learning approaches.
4. Compare Free Fire with other online games to assess differences in their educational value and impact on various language skills.

Overall, Free Fire presents itself not merely as a recreational tool, but also as a valuable educational medium that supports students' informal and contextual English language development.

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