

EFL Students' Perceptions of English Vocabulary and Reading Exposure through Role-Playing Games (RPGs)

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ABSTRACT

Video games offer substantial potential for incidental language learning, yet research has paid less attention to learners' subjective experiences of encountering English texts during gameplay. This qualitative study explores EFL students' perceptions of vocabulary and reading exposure through extramural English role-playing games (RPGs). Data were collected through in-depth interviews with five experienced EFL gamers. The findings indicate that participants perceived vocabulary learning as an incidental outcome of gameplay, particularly when they needed to understand unfamiliar words to follow instructions, complete quests, and progress through the game. This process reflects the Involvement Load Hypothesis, as vocabulary encounters were perceived to require attention, engagement, and a need to understand meaning for immediate gameplay purposes. Participants also reported that audio, visual representations, and contextual clues helped them infer the meanings of unfamiliar words and reduced the difficulty of processing English texts. Although complex texts initially created a cognitive burden, narrative engagement and identification with the gamer role appeared to reduce anxiety and encourage continued interaction with English. Participants described reading as a form of action-oriented activity that required them to process texts voluntarily and continuously, which they perceived as strengthening their reading stamina. Overall, RPGs were perceived as an engaging and relatively low-anxiety environment that supported students' confidence and sustained exposure to English literacy, although the findings reflect learners' perceptions rather than direct evidence of actual vocabulary acquisition.

Keywords: *Extramural English, Perceptions, Reading Exposure, Role-Playing Games, Vocabulary*

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INTRODUCTION

In the current era of digital globalization, English proficiency, particularly vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension, is increasingly important for students' academic and professional development (Alsahafi, 2023). However, EFL students in Indonesia often encounter limited opportunities to use English beyond the classroom. Formal instruction may not provide sufficient exposure to the volume, variety, and meaningful contexts of language input required for continued development (Ferdinandus & Simantuak, 2024; Phan Kim et al., 2023). In this context, Extramural English (EE) refers to learners' voluntary engagement with English outside formal educational settings, including activities such as watching films, listening to music, using digital media, and playing video games (Sundqvist & Wikström, 2015; Zhang et al., 2021). Unlike classroom-based learning, EE generally occurs through self-selected activities and is not necessarily organized around explicit language-learning objectives. Nevertheless, these activities can provide frequent and meaningful exposure to English in contexts that are personally relevant to learners.

Among various forms of EE, digital games offer a distinctive environment for language exposure because players interact with language while pursuing specific goals. Music and films can expose learners to authentic English, but learners may sometimes process the content without needing to understand every linguistic element. In contrast, many digital games require players to interpret language in order to complete tasks, make decisions, solve problems, and progress through the game. Role-playing games (RPGs) are particularly

relevant because they commonly contain dialogue, quests, instructions, menus, item descriptions, character interactions, and narrative texts. These features provide repeated exposure to vocabulary and written language in meaningful and goal-oriented contexts (Ansari et al., 2022; Zhu & Zhang, 2023). Therefore, RPGs offer a more specific and linguistically rich context for examining language exposure than video games in general.

RPG gameplay also creates conditions that may support incidental vocabulary learning. Incidental vocabulary learning occurs when learners acquire or develop knowledge of words as a by-product of engaging in another activity, rather than through explicit vocabulary instruction (Nation, 2001). In RPGs, players may encounter unfamiliar words while attempting to understand a quest, follow an instruction, identify an item, or interpret a character's dialogue. Their immediate need to understand the language may encourage them to infer meaning from context, consult other resources, or repeatedly encounter the same words during gameplay. However, because the present study focuses on students' perceptions, incidental vocabulary learning is understood as a process that participants report experiencing, rather than as objectively measured vocabulary acquisition.

The learning potential of RPGs can also be interpreted through the Involvement Load Hypothesis proposed by Laufer & Hulstijn, (2001). This hypothesis suggests that vocabulary learning is influenced by the degree of involvement required when learners encounter unfamiliar words. Involvement consists of three components: need, search, and evaluation. In RPGs, need may emerge when players must understand a word to complete a quest or continue the narrative. Search may occur when players infer meanings from context or look up unfamiliar terms. Evaluation may take place when players determine whether a particular meaning fits the task, dialogue, or game situation. These processes may create a relatively high involvement load because vocabulary processing is connected to an immediate and meaningful gameplay objective. Nevertheless, the present study does not measure involvement load experimentally; rather, it explores how participants perceive these processes during their gaming experiences.

In addition to vocabulary exposure, RPGs provide opportunities for reading development through what may be described as reading for action. Reading for action refers to reading that is performed to accomplish a particular task or achieve an immediate goal, rather than solely to understand a text for academic assessment (Grabe, 2009). In RPGs, players read because they need to act. They may read instructions to complete a mission, dialogue to decide how to respond, descriptions to select an item, or narrative texts to understand the development of the game. Reading is therefore closely connected to decision-making, problem-solving, and participation in the game world. This goal-oriented reading may encourage learners to continue processing texts even when the language is challenging because understanding the text has an immediate practical value.

The linguistic information presented in RPGs is also supported by multimodal resources. Words and sentences are often accompanied by character actions, images, animations, sounds, spatial arrangements, and contextual events. From the perspective of situated learning, language is more meaningful when it is encountered within a social, cultural, and activity-based context rather than presented as isolated information (Gee, 2003). Audio, visual representations, and contextual clues may therefore help players infer the meanings of unfamiliar words and understand written texts. At the same time, the presence of complex texts may initially create a cognitive burden, particularly when learners encounter unfamiliar vocabulary or lengthy narrative passages. The extent to which players continue engaging with these texts may depend on their motivation, familiarity with game conventions, and emotional response to the gaming environment.

Affective factors are also important in understanding language exposure through RPGs. Krashen, (1981) affective filter hypothesis suggests that anxiety, low motivation, and negative emotional experiences may restrict the extent to which learners are able to benefit from language input. In contrast, an engaging and personally meaningful activity may reduce anxiety and encourage sustained participation. RPGs may create such conditions because players are immersed in narratives, assume fictional roles, and pursue goals that are

meaningful within the game world. The adoption of a gamer identity may also encourage learners to view English not primarily as an academic subject but as a resource needed to participate successfully in the game. This distinction may influence how learners interpret difficult texts and whether they continue interacting with English despite initial comprehension problems.

Previous studies have reported several linguistic and motivational benefits associated with digital game use. [Rahman & Angraeni, \(2020\)](#) demonstrated the potential of RPGs for vocabulary learning in a formal experimental context, while [Erya & Taloko \(2024\)](#) found that narrative engagement may encourage intrinsic motivation for incidental learning. Other studies have indicated that RPGs can promote strategic reading when players need to solve in-game problems ([Ulhaq & Noviantoro, 2023](#)) and that multimodal support may assist vocabulary comprehension and retention ([Nuriyah et al., 2024](#)). ([Reed, 2022](#)) also reported that the amount of text encountered in RPGs can be comparable to that found in full-length novels, suggesting that RPGs may provide substantial opportunities for reading exposure. In addition, extramural gaming has been associated with the development of pragmatic competence because players encounter language in interactional and socially situated contexts ([Dirwan et al., 2025](#); [Ng et al., 2025](#)).

Despite these findings, several gaps remain in the existing literature. First, previous studies have often focused on measurable learning outcomes, such as vocabulary gains, retention, motivation, or pragmatic competence. Although these outcomes are important, they do not fully explain how learners themselves interpret the language exposure that occurs during gameplay. Second, vocabulary and reading exposure are frequently examined as separate areas, even though they may operate together in RPGs. Players often need to understand vocabulary in order to interpret instructions and narrative texts, while repeated reading may provide additional opportunities to encounter and process unfamiliar words. Third, less attention has been given to the subjective cognitive burden experienced by learners when they encounter complex texts and the affective conditions that encourage them to continue reading.

The present study addresses these gaps by focusing on EFL university students' perceptions of vocabulary and reading exposure through extramural English RPGs. It examines how participants perceive incidental vocabulary learning, the involvement required to understand unfamiliar language, the role of audio-visual and contextual support, and the experience of reading for action. The study also considers how narrative engagement and gamer identity may influence students' willingness to continue interacting with English texts. Because the study is qualitative and based on participants' accounts, it does not aim to objectively measure vocabulary acquisition, reading proficiency, or language improvement. Instead, it seeks to understand how students interpret their own language-learning experiences through RPG gameplay. Therefore, this study aims to explore EFL university students' perceptions of vocabulary and reading exposure encountered through extramural English RPGs and to explain how these experiences are perceived to support their engagement with English literacy.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative design to explore EFL university students' experiences and subjective perceptions of English language exposure through role-playing games (RPGs). A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study focused on how participants interpreted their experiences of encountering vocabulary and reading texts during gameplay rather than objectively measuring changes in their English proficiency ([Creswell, 2014](#)). The study specifically examined participants' perceptions of incidental vocabulary learning, reading exposure, cognitive demands, and the ways in which contextual and multimodal features of RPGs supported their engagement with English.

Participants

The participants were five EFL university students selected through purposive sampling based on predetermined eligibility criteria. Participants were required to be active undergraduate students who had studied English as a foreign language and had at least five years of experience playing English-language RPGs. English proficiency was determined based on [the participants' existing institutional proficiency records/self-reported proficiency/placement test, specify the actual procedure]. The inclusion of RPG titles was intended to provide contextual information because different RPGs may vary in the amount, complexity, and type of English input presented to players. The participants' identities were anonymized as Player 1 to Player 5 to protect confidentiality.

Instruments

The researcher served as the primary instrument for data collection and interpretation, supported by a screening questionnaire and a semi-structured interview guide (Creswell, 2014). The preliminary questionnaire was administered to identify participants who met the inclusion criteria and to obtain background information regarding their English learning experience and RPG gameplay. The questionnaire collected information about participants' gaming experience, frequency of gameplay, preferred RPGs, and patterns of English-language exposure during gaming.

The primary instrument was a semi-structured interview guide consisting of 14 core questions. The questions were developed based on previous research concerning learners' perceptions, reading strategies, incidental vocabulary learning, and extramural English, and were theoretically informed by the Involvement Load Hypothesis (Laufer & Hulstijn, 2001). The interview questions explored participants' experiences of encountering unfamiliar vocabulary, interpreting in-game texts, using contextual and multimodal clues, responding to cognitively demanding texts, and reading for gameplay purposes. The semi-structured format allowed the researcher to maintain consistency across interviews while providing opportunities for participants to elaborate on experiences that emerged during the discussion.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection was conducted online from January to March 2026. First, the researcher distributed a screening questionnaire through Google Forms to identify students who met the predetermined eligibility criteria. Participants were also asked to provide supporting information concerning their RPG experience, including [screenshots of game profiles/total playtime, if actually collected]. Based on the screening results, five participants who fulfilled all criteria were selected for the interview stage.

Second, individual semi-structured interviews were conducted through Discord. Each interview lasted approximately [XX-XX minutes] and was conducted in [English/Indonesian/a combination of English and Indonesian, specify the actual language]. The interviews were conducted individually to allow participants to describe their experiences in detail and to minimize influence from other participants. With participants' consent, each interview was audio-recorded using [name of recording method/bot or Discord recording function]. The recordings were subsequently transcribed verbatim for analysis.

The interview procedure followed the same general sequence for all participants. The researcher first introduced the purpose of the interview and reminded participants that their responses would be kept confidential. Participants were then asked about their RPG experience and patterns of English exposure before discussing their experiences with vocabulary, reading, contextual clues, audio-visual support, difficult texts, and reading for action during gameplay. Follow-up questions were used when clarification or elaboration was required.

To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, the researcher used methodological triangulation by comparing information obtained from the interviews with questionnaire responses and supporting documentation, where available. The interview transcripts were

also subjected to member checking, in which participants were given an opportunity to review the transcripts and clarify or confirm the accuracy of their statements (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Data Analysis

The qualitative data were analyzed using the Interactive Model proposed by Miles et al., (2014), which consists of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. First, the interview recordings were transcribed into written data using TurboScribe.ai and manually checked against the original recordings to correct transcription errors. The transcripts were then returned to participants for member checking.

Second, the verified transcripts were imported into NVivo 12 for systematic coding. The researcher initially identified statements related to participants' experiences of English exposure during RPG gameplay. The codes were subsequently grouped into broader categories concerning incidental vocabulary learning, involvement in processing unfamiliar words, reading exposure, reading for action, multimodal and contextual support, cognitive burden, and affective engagement. Irrelevant technical information about gameplay was excluded when it did not contribute to the research questions.

Finally, related categories were compared and organized into overarching themes that represented recurring patterns across participants. The themes were interpreted in relation to the theoretical perspectives guiding the study, particularly Extramural English, incidental vocabulary learning, the Involvement Load Hypothesis, reading for action, and affective engagement. Conclusions were then drawn by comparing patterns across participants and verifying interpretations against the interview data, questionnaire information, and member-checked transcripts.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings derived from the thematic analysis of the interview transcripts and interprets them in relation to relevant theoretical perspectives. The discussion is organized according to the two research questions concerning students' perceptions of vocabulary and reading exposure through extramural English role-playing games (RPGs). Because the study focused on participants' subjective experiences, the findings are presented as perceived learning and perceived changes in reading engagement rather than as direct evidence of objectively measured vocabulary acquisition or reading proficiency.

EFL Students' Perceptions of Vocabulary Exposure through RPGs

The manuscript 1:

Researcher: What happens when you encounter an English word that you do not understand while playing an RPG?

Player 1: Usually, I try to understand it first from the situation. Sometimes I don't know the word, but I can guess what it means because I can see what is happening in the game. If it is related to a quest, I really need to understand it because otherwise I don't know what I should do.

Researcher: So, does not knowing the word affect your gameplay?

Player 1: Yes. Sometimes I cannot continue the quest because I don't understand the instruction. So I have to find out what the word means.

Researcher: How do you usually find the meaning of an unfamiliar word?

Player 2: First, I look at the context. I don't immediately open a dictionary. I see what the character is talking about, what is happening around them, and what I am supposed to do. Sometimes the meaning becomes clear from the situation.

Researcher: What do you do if the context is not enough?

Player 2: If I still don't understand, I search for it on Google or use a dictionary. Usually, I only search for important words, especially when the word is stopping me from completing the quest.

The findings indicate that participants frequently encountered unfamiliar English vocabulary while playing RPGs and perceived these encounters as challenging but meaningful. Participants described feeling “burdened” or finding unfamiliar words “troublesome,” particularly when the words appeared in quest instructions, dialogue, item descriptions, menus, or puzzle-related information. Unlike language encountered in passive media, unfamiliar vocabulary in RPGs could not always be ignored because understanding the text was often necessary to determine what to do next. Thus, the difficulty experienced by participants was closely connected to the functional role of English in gameplay.

This experience can be understood through the Involvement Load Hypothesis proposed by Laufer & Hulstijn, (2001), particularly through its three dimensions of need, search, and evaluation. First, need emerged when participants perceived that understanding an unfamiliar word was necessary to complete a quest, interpret an instruction, identify an item, or continue the game. The need was therefore externally imposed by the gameplay situation rather than by a formal language-learning task. Second, search occurred when participants attempted to determine the meaning of an unfamiliar word. Participants reported using contextual information, observing what was happening on screen, recalling previously encountered words, and, when necessary, consulting external resources such as dictionaries or online searches. Third, evaluation occurred when participants judged whether an inferred or searched meaning was appropriate for the particular game situation. For example, understanding a word was not sufficient unless the interpretation helped participants determine an appropriate action within the quest or narrative. These three processes indicate that participants' vocabulary encounters involved active semantic processing rather than simple exposure to isolated words.

The perceived learning potential of these encounters was also strengthened by the multimodal nature of RPGs. Participants did not rely exclusively on written definitions to understand unfamiliar vocabulary. Instead, they interpreted words together with several sources of contextual information. Dialogue provided linguistic context through conversations between characters, while images and character actions helped participants connect words with visible events or objects. Animations and environmental settings provided additional information about what was happening in the game world. Subtitles allowed participants to connect spoken language with written forms, whereas menus and item descriptions provided repeated written exposure to vocabulary associated with particular actions or objects. Sound and voice intonation also contributed contextual information by signaling emotions, urgency, danger, or changes in the situation. These resources worked together to help participants construct meaning when individual words were unfamiliar.

This finding is consistent with the concept of comprehensible input proposed by Krashen, (1981), although the present study does not establish that the input actually resulted in measurable acquisition. From the participants' perspectives, multimodal information made unfamiliar English more interpretable because the meaning of a word could be inferred from the surrounding situation. For example, a player could combine a character's utterance, facial expression, movement, environmental setting, and the consequences of an action to infer what an unfamiliar expression meant. In this sense, the meaning of vocabulary was constructed through the relationship between language and the game context rather than through the written word alone.

The participants' accounts also suggest that the cognitive burden associated with unfamiliar vocabulary did not necessarily prevent continued engagement. Cognitive Load Theory explains that learning tasks can impose demands on working memory, particularly when learners must process unfamiliar information while simultaneously performing another task. RPGs may therefore create **intrinsic cognitive load** because players need to process unfamiliar English while understanding the game situation and deciding what action to take. The amount of information that players must coordinate may initially make the language feel difficult or “burdensome.” However, participants described several ways of managing this difficulty. They used visual and auditory cues, relied on surrounding context, connected unfamiliar words with previous encounters, and searched for meanings when contextual

interpretation was insufficient. These strategies reduced the need to process the written word in isolation and allowed players to distribute their attention across multiple sources of information.

Repeated exposure also appeared to help participants manage the initial difficulty. When the same vocabulary or game-related expressions appeared repeatedly, participants became increasingly familiar with their meanings and functions. Consequently, words that initially required considerable attention could later be processed more easily because players had developed knowledge of recurring vocabulary and game conventions. This process can be interpreted as the gradual development of contextual and linguistic schemas that helped reduce the processing demands associated with subsequent encounters. Thus, the participants' experiences suggest that the cognitive burden of RPG vocabulary was not simply an obstacle but part of a process in which players learned to manage unfamiliar language through contextual inference, multimodal support, repetition, and strategic searching.

The participants consequently perceived that their vocabulary knowledge expanded through gameplay. However, the perceived improvement should be interpreted cautiously because the study did not employ vocabulary tests or other measures of actual lexical gain. The participants' perceptions indicate that they became more familiar with particular English words and expressions through repeated and purposeful encounters. Some participants also recognized that certain vocabulary was highly specific to fantasy worlds, game mechanics, or fictional settings and might have limited relevance to everyday academic communication. Nevertheless, they perceived that the effort required to understand such vocabulary made the words more memorable because the words were associated with concrete actions, problems, and consequences within the game. This finding supports the view that vocabulary encountered incidentally can become meaningful when learners process it in relation to an immediate communicative or task-related purpose (Laufer & Hulstijn, 2001; Nation, 2001).

Overall, the findings suggest that participants perceived RPG vocabulary exposure as an active process involving need, search, and evaluation, supported by multimodal contextual information and repeated encounters. The combination of functional necessity and contextual support distinguished RPG-based exposure from vocabulary encountered without an immediate purpose. Although the study cannot demonstrate actual vocabulary acquisition, participants' accounts indicate that RPGs were perceived as providing conditions that encouraged sustained attention to unfamiliar English and meaningful engagement with lexical items.

EFL Students' Perceptions of Reading Exposure through RPGs

Researcher: How do you feel about reading English texts while playing RPGs?

Player 1: I read quite a lot because I need to understand the quests, dialogue, and instructions. Sometimes there are many texts and I feel tired, but I keep reading because I want to know what happens in the story.

Researcher: Does reading in RPGs feel different from academic reading?

Player 2: Yes. Academic texts are more difficult and formal. In RPGs, I can use the pictures, characters, and situation to understand the text, so it feels easier.

Researcher: Do you think RPGs help you become more comfortable with reading English?

Player 3: Yes. I read English regularly when I play, so I become more familiar with English sentences. I don't always understand every word, but I can continue reading and understand the main idea.

Researcher: Why do you continue reading when the text is difficult?

Player 4: Because I need the information to continue the game. I read the quest to know what to do, and I read the dialogue because I want to understand the story.

Regarding reading exposure, participants perceived RPGs as providing substantial opportunities to read English because progression through the game frequently required interaction with written texts. Participants encountered dialogue, quest instructions, item descriptions, menus, character information, subtitles, and narrative passages. However, they did not always experience this reading as formal learning. Instead, reading was embedded within gameplay and was performed because participants needed information to make decisions, solve problems, or understand the story.

The result shows the participants perceived RPGs as providing frequent and purposeful reading exposure. Although lengthy texts sometimes caused fatigue, narrative interest and immediate gameplay goals encouraged them to continue reading. Their responses also indicate reading for action, as reading was performed to complete quests, understand dialogue, and make decisions. Participants further perceived that repeated exposure increased their familiarity and confidence with English texts, although this does not constitute direct evidence of improved reading proficiency.

The findings show that participants sometimes experienced reading fatigue when RPGs presented large amounts of English text. They described feeling “tired and dizzy” when confronted with lengthy dialogue or dense narrative passages. This experience can be explained through Cognitive Load Theory because reading unfamiliar or complex English requires working-memory resources, particularly when players simultaneously attempt to understand the narrative and determine what action to take (Sweller, 1988). The cognitive demand may become greater when texts contain unfamiliar vocabulary, lengthy sentences, unfamiliar narrative conventions, or information that must be integrated with visual and gameplay information.

However, participants did not simply abandon the texts when they became difficult. Their responses indicate that they developed ways to manage the difficulty. Narrative curiosity encouraged them to continue reading because they wanted to understand what would happen next. Gameplay goals also provided an immediate reason to process the text, while contextual information from characters, environments, animations, and previous events helped them interpret difficult passages. Familiarity with recurring game terminology and conventions further reduced the processing demands over time. In this respect, the participants appeared to move from initially effortful processing toward more efficient interpretation as they became familiar with the game and its linguistic patterns.

This finding is closely related to the concept of reading for action. In RPGs, participants read not primarily to answer comprehension questions or demonstrate academic achievement but to perform an action. They read instructions to complete missions, dialogue to understand characters and make decisions, item descriptions to determine how an object could be used, and narrative texts to understand the consequences of their actions. Reading was therefore immediately connected to decision-making and problem-solving. This functional purpose gave participants a reason to continue processing English even when the text was difficult. The participants' accounts consequently suggest that reading became an instrumental activity embedded within gameplay rather than a separate academic task.

The voluntary nature of this reading exposure is also important from the perspective of Extramural English. Unlike formal classroom reading, where texts are generally selected by teachers and accompanied by explicit learning objectives, participants selected and continued reading RPG texts because they were personally invested in the game. Their motivation was primarily related to completing the game, understanding the narrative, or maintaining their identity as gamers. Thus, English reading occurred as part of a self-selected leisure activity while simultaneously serving a functional purpose.

The affective dimension of this experience can be interpreted through Krashen, (1981) Affective Filter Hypothesis. Participants reported that they could tolerate linguistic difficulty because they were interested in the narrative and emotionally engaged with the game. Their identification as gamers also appeared to influence how they interpreted difficulty. A difficult English passage was not necessarily perceived as an academic failure; instead, it was treated as a problem that needed to be solved to continue the game. This distinction may have reduced

the negative emotional consequences of making mistakes or not understanding every word. The gaming environment therefore appeared to create a relatively low-anxiety context in which participants were willing to continue reading despite incomplete comprehension.

Participants also perceived a clear difference between RPG texts and formal academic texts. Academic reading was described as more complex, rigid, and intimidating, whereas RPG texts were perceived as more accessible because they were often conversational and accompanied by visual, auditory, and situational information. This difference can be understood through Situated Learning (Gee, 2003), in which language becomes meaningful when it is embedded in an activity and context. RPG players encounter written English together with characters, objects, actions, locations, goals, and consequences. Meaning is therefore supported by the situation in which the language is used.

The participants' perceptions further suggest that repeated exposure to RPG texts gradually increased their familiarity with English paragraphs and reduced their initial intimidation toward longer texts. They perceived that frequent reading during gameplay helped them become more accustomed to processing English continuously. This perceived development is better understood as increased reading familiarity, stamina, and confidence rather than objectively demonstrated improvement in reading proficiency. Nevertheless, the finding indicates that sustained voluntary reading may provide an accessible pathway for learners to increase their tolerance for extended English texts.

Taken together, the findings show that RPG reading exposure involved a dynamic interaction between cognitive demands, contextual support, motivation, and purposeful action. Participants sometimes experienced substantial cognitive burden when processing lengthy or unfamiliar English texts, but they managed this burden through contextual interpretation, multimodal cues, repetition, familiarity with game conventions, and the immediate goals provided by gameplay. At the same time, narrative engagement and gamer identity appeared to encourage them to continue reading despite difficulty. Therefore, RPGs were perceived not simply as sources of English text but as environments in which reading was integrated with action, decision-making, and problem-solving.

Overall, the findings suggest that extramural RPG gameplay provided participants with a form of voluntary and goal-oriented English literacy exposure. Vocabulary and reading did not operate as completely separate learning experiences. Unfamiliar vocabulary often became relevant because participants needed to understand written texts, while repeated reading created additional opportunities to encounter and process vocabulary in meaningful contexts. Although the study does not establish objective gains in vocabulary or reading proficiency, participants' accounts indicate that RPGs were perceived as an engaging environment that supported continued interaction with English, helped them manage linguistic difficulty, and increased their confidence and familiarity with English literacy.

CONCLUSIONS

This qualitative study explored EFL university students' perceptions of vocabulary and reading exposure through extramural English Role-Playing Games (RPGs). The findings indicate that participants perceived RPGs as a meaningful environment for sustained English exposure outside formal classroom settings. For vocabulary, participants perceived unfamiliar words as challenging but functionally important because understanding them was often necessary to complete quests, interpret instructions, and progress through the game. Their experiences reflected the dimensions of need, search, and evaluation described in the Involvement Load Hypothesis. Participants also perceived dialogue, subtitles, images, character actions, animations, environmental settings, and sound as contextual and multimodal resources that helped them interpret unfamiliar vocabulary. For reading, participants perceived RPGs as providing frequent and purposeful exposure through dialogue, quests, item descriptions, menus, and narrative texts. Although lengthy and complex texts sometimes created cognitive burden and reading fatigue, participants reported managing these difficulties through contextual clues, rereading, selective searching, repetition,

and familiarity with game conventions. Narrative engagement and the immediate goals of gameplay also encouraged them to continue reading, resulting in what this study describes as reading for action.

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