

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Study

The rapid development of digital platforms has transformed the way people interact with language and communication. Studies confirm that online platforms provide authentic contexts in which learners can collaborate, interact, and develop linguistic skills while remaining motivated and engaged (Hernández et al., 2022). In the Indonesian context, where English exposure outside the classroom is limited, digital technology has been shown to contribute significantly to English vocabulary acquisition through digital game-based learning approaches (Prastiwi & Lestari, 2025). This growing trend reflects how digital environments can bridge the gap between formal and informal learning, offering students an engaging, interactive medium for natural language use.

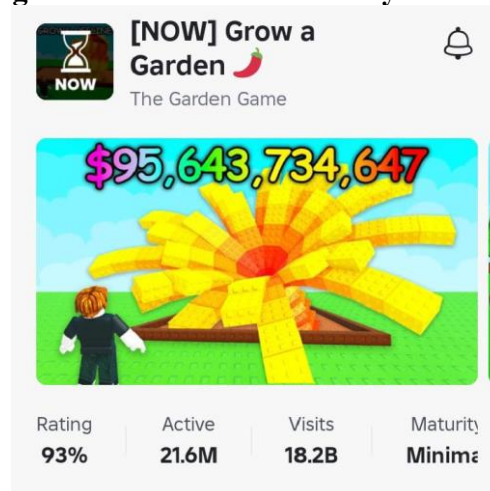
In this setting, online games have gained recognition not merely as entertainment but also as meaningful environments for learners to practice English incidentally. In line with this, Sundqvist and Sylvén (2019) highlighted that extramural English input (outside the curriculum), such as online games, can significantly increase opportunities for authentic, meaning-focused interaction. Since English is commonly used as the primary language of instruction in many games, they provide opportunities for learners to practice and expand their vocabulary in meaningful contexts (Asari, 2023). For non-English major students, such environments often represent one of the few consistent opportunities to encounter and practice English vocabulary outside formal instruction.

Among the many platforms available, commercial games like Roblox are a notable example of this phenomenon. As the world's largest multiplayer game community, Roblox enables players to create and explore countless user-generated virtual worlds (Han et al., 2023). Roblox is also known as a platform that provides an immersive space for learners to collaborate, interact, and practice English outside the classroom. As Zahara et al. (2025) have pointed out, individuals who do not

understand English at all will gradually become accustomed to encountering English vocabulary while playing online games.

Within Roblox, Grow a Garden (GAG), a farming simulator, has emerged as one of the platform's most popular games. At its peak, it reached approximately 21.6 million concurrent players, surpassing Fortnite's previous record of 15.2 million (Ortutay, 2025), as shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1. Grow a Garden Players Count



Unlike many other Roblox games, which often mix English with local slang, abbreviations, or multiple languages, GAG is offered only in English, and its developers regularly interact with players in English. This creates an entirely authentic environment where players can acquire vocabulary, phrases, and communication nuances through play, while continuing to learn and retain new vocabulary by revisiting and reinforcing it. According to Putra's (2023) findings, video games provide subconscious learning experiences in specific contexts, allowing non-ELT students to acquire new vocabulary unintentionally while playing for pleasure. In addition, video games offer a variety of strategies that facilitate vocabulary learning and motivate students to continue acquiring new L2 words as they strive to complete missions and achieve their goals. This shows that non-English-major students can acquire new English vocabulary subconsciously through gameplay, motivated by enjoyment and contextual learning rather than formal instruction.

Conrad (pseudonym), a non-English major student, experiences this phenomenon firsthand. Initially, he played *Grow a Garden* merely as a pastime to relax or to escape the academic pressure in his major, Computer Science. However, as he progressed in the game, he began to notice recurring English words related to gardening, trading, and social interaction, such as corrupt, ascended, tranquil, sprout, drenched, trowel, shard, and radiant. Without formal instruction, he started associating these words with the corresponding in-game actions, gradually developing a natural understanding of their meanings. His experience reflects incidental vocabulary acquisition, in which learning occurs unconsciously through interaction with meaningful content. When he encounters unfamiliar words, he tends to infer meaning from context, visual cues, or repeated exposure, which aligns with what Calafato and Clausen (2024) identified as effective self-initiated strategies in extramural English learning. Occasionally, curiosity or confusion motivates him to consult dictionary apps or online translation tools, reinforcing word retention through personal discovery.

In line with this, Vnucko et al. (2024) discovered that digital games function as practical supplementary tools that can be conveniently integrated into foreign language learning across various educational settings. The findings indicated that engaging in digital gaming not only fosters learners' positive attitudes toward studying a foreign language but also broadens their vocabulary. The way learners acquire new vocabulary in such situations is considered a form of unconscious learning. As explained by Robert and Simons (2003) that unconscious learning processes often operate automatically, without intention or awareness, and can result in changes in knowledge and skills even when learners are unaware that learning is taking place.

Before conducting this research, the researcher reviewed previous studies on digital game-based learning, vocabulary acquisition, and the educational use of Roblox. Ramanujam and Ismail (2024) explored the role of metaverse technologies, including Roblox, in English language learning. Their study revealed that immersive environments provide authentic contexts for learners to practice English, increase motivation, and acquire new vocabulary through meaningful virtual

interactions. In addition, Hadi and Wijaya (2025) conducted research on the use of Roblox in multimodal literacy practices. Their study found that Roblox fosters creativity, collaboration, and engagement in English learning. Their findings show that learners develop vocabulary and literacy skills through multimodal activities that integrate text, visuals, and interaction. In line with this, a study by Sinar et al. (2023) discovered that learners considered Roblox an engaging platform that supports real-time communication and vocabulary practice in a natural, playful setting. Meanwhile, Wicaksono et al. (2024) investigated Indonesian students' perceptions of Roblox as an ESL learning medium. The results showed that Indonesian students experienced notable improvements in vocabulary acquisition through repeated exposure to new terms while playing Roblox, highlighting Roblox's role in facilitating incidental learning.

Although these studies collectively demonstrate Roblox's potential as an effective platform for vocabulary acquisition, they still leave a notable gap. Most existing research focuses on general perceptions of Roblox or broad aspects of English learning. However, it does not examine in detail how unconscious vocabulary acquisition occurs within a single English-only game environment. Therefore, this study aims to address gaps by investigating the experiences of a non-English major student who uses *Grow a Garden* on Roblox to expand his vocabulary.

B. Formulation of the Problems

Based on the phenomena discussed above, the research question addressed in this study is “What are the experiences of a non-English major student when using *Grow a Garden* on Roblox for vocabulary acquisition?”

C. Operational Definitions

1. Vocabulary Acquisition

Vocabulary acquisition in this study refers to the process by which a non-English major student, Conrad (pseudonym), learns and retains new English words unconsciously while playing *Grow a Garden* on Roblox. It occurs

incidentally, without deliberate memorization or formal instruction, as he encounters and understands new vocabulary through in-game activities, instructions, and interactions.

2. Game-Based Learning

In this study, game-based learning refers to the use of digital games as an educational medium to support vocabulary acquisition. It is operationalized as the learning experiences that arise from students' interactions with the game mechanics of Roblox's Grow a Garden, such as tasks, rewards, and exploration.

3. A Non-English Major Student

In this study, the term refers to a student enrolled in the Computer Science major who identifies as an English learner but does not receive specialized or advanced English-language instruction.

D. Aim of the Study

In response to the research question, this study aims to investigate the experiences of a non-English-major student who uses "Grow a Garden" on Roblox to expand their vocabulary.

E. Significance of the Study

1. Practical Significance

This study can provide valuable insights for language teachers, curriculum developers, and game designers on how immersive games, such as Grow a Garden, can serve as practical, supplementary tools for vocabulary acquisition. It may encourage teachers to integrate digital games into extracurricular or classroom activities.

2. Empirical Significance

This study contributes to the growing body of research on Game-Based Learning by providing empirical evidence from the Indonesian context, specifically focusing on a non-English major student who rarely encounters authentic English environments. The findings may fill gaps in current literature on the role of commercial games in unconscious vocabulary acquisition.