Exploring Vocabulary Development in Online Gaming Interaction: Evidence from Gamers in Northeast India

Bipanchi Bhattacharyya

Abstract

This study explores English vocabulary in the context of online gaming, focusing on the nature and use of lexical items and multi-word expressions. While existing research has highlighted the potential of online gaming in language learning and development, the nature of vocabulary used in the gameplay remains understudied. Addressing this gap, the present study adopts a qualitative method to analyse vocabulary as reported by the online gamers of Northeast India.

The data for the study were collected from the participants, who identified words and expressions they acquired in the gaming context. The reported vocabulary, including the words and the expressions, was analysed according to different categories, including thematic domain, contextual use, and Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) alignment. Drawing on the descriptors of online interactions laid down by the CEFR, developed by the Council of Europe, the findings indicate that the vocabulary reported by the participants is largely contextual and function-driven, with multi-level expressions primarily being used for limited tasks such as instruction, coordination, and social interaction.

Keywords

Online gaming, English vocabulary, CEFR, contextual vocabulary

Introduction

Technology for language learning has increasingly become a focus of academic inquiry. There is growing interest in exploring how it can be effectively integrated into the teaching and learning of English. As the demand for meaningful and engaging language instruction continues to rise, it becomes essential to explore alternative, informal, technology-mediated spaces. Among these, gaming has emerged as a particularly dynamic and interactive context, offering learners opportunities for authentic language use, collaboration, and engagement.

Gamification has been widely discussed as a tool for making learning more interactive and learner-centred. The use of game-related elements in language classrooms encourages learners to move beyond passive reception and engage actively in meaning-making (Liontas, 2022). Extending this idea beyond the classroom, online gaming environments offer spaces where gamers interact, collaborate, and develop strategies in real time. These environments are often characterised by task-oriented communication, where language is used contextually and functionally.

In such contexts, English frequently serves as a common medium of communication among gamers. This creates opportunities for English users to engage with the language in ways that differ from formal educational settings. Rather than focusing on textbook-based input and responses, gamers have the opportunity to participate in dynamic interactions where communication is shaped by immediacy, coordination, and shared objectives. This makes online gaming a potentially relevant context for examining how vocabulary is used in real-time discourse and whether it contributes to vocabulary enrichment.

India recorded approximately 421 million online gamers in 2022 (Statista, 2024), highlighting the growing participation in online interactions. Within this, the experiences of gamers from Northeast India offer particularly relevant insights into the use of English vocabulary in online gaming. While English is widely used in this region, many learners encounter and practise the language primarily through formal education. As a result, opportunities to engage with English spontaneously and in real-time remain limited.

Cummins' (1979) concept of Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) refers to the skills involved in the ability to participate in informal conversations and manage routine communicative exchanges.

However, classroom environments may not always provide sufficient opportunities for such interaction (Kongmee et al., 2012). In this context, online gaming may function as an alternative space where users engage in real-time communication to perform tasks such as giving instructions, coordinating actions, and responding to others.

The present study focuses specifically on vocabulary used in these interactions within the gaming context. In particular, it examines the types of lexical items and multi-word expressions used and acquired by gamers, and how these function within the discourse of gameplay. By analysing the vocabulary used by gamers, the study seeks to understand how online gaming may contribute to vocabulary enrichment.

Online Gaming: Research Review

The scope of online gaming has been examined as a meaningful context for language use and development, particularly in interaction, engagement, and motivation. Studies such as Achol and Akter (2022) suggest that the gaming context is characterised by lower anxiety levels and higher interactivity, which may lead to increased language use compared to a traditional classroom setting. These studies highlight the importance of affective factors, such as familiarity and engagement, in promoting language use.

Studies also recognise motivation as an underlying factor in higher levels of engagement in online games. Drawing on Garzotto (2007), Hapsari et al. (2018) argue that enjoyment and emotional involvement foster intrinsic motivation, thereby increasing exposure to the target language. While motivation may lead to increased engagement, it does not necessarily lead to systematic development of language. The present study highlights that participants demonstrate a wide range of vocabulary, including higher-level lexical items, yet their use remains primarily contextual. Liontas (2022) also argues that digital environments such as online gaming offer immersive and dynamic contexts that support language learning through increased learner autonomy, participation, and meaningful interaction. While these studies reflect on how gaming can be a conducive environment for language use and development, they offer limited insights into the type of vocabulary employed in these contexts.

Similarly, research on massively multiplayer online role-playing games,

popularly known as MMORPGs, suggests that these environments enable sustained, real-time communication. Peterson (2012) highlights that the players in MMORPG engage in real-time, text-based interaction to coordinate actions, build strategies, or ask for assistance. This, in turn, leads to purposeful communication in the target language within the game. Furthermore, studies such as Peake and Reynolds (2020) highlight that online spaces, like gaming, function as global English environments, where players engage in authentic communication across cultural boundaries. This often facilitates communication with native speakers of the language. However, the focus of these studies remains primarily on the interactive function of online gaming, rather than the range and type of vocabulary that appears during gameplay.

Studies have also suggested that the impact of language use in online gaming can vary across language skills. For instance, Toufik and Hanane (2021) found that online gaming contributes more significantly to speaking and listening skills, while improvements in reading and writing can be comparatively limited. This insight aligns with the idea that the interactional nature of online gaming can enrich specific language skills, as real-time communication is prioritised in such contexts. Many of these studies focus on evaluating the effectiveness of gaming for language skill development, rather than on how vocabulary is functionally used within these contexts. Engqvist (2018) demonstrates that gaming can support vocabulary acquisition through repeated exposure and contextualised input. Yet, the nature of such vocabulary and the extent to which it is retained and used functionally remain under-examined.

Furthermore, research has highlighted that the growing accessibility of digital technologies and environments has made online gaming more relevant in the educational context. Nur et al. (2020) note that the emergence of digital-native learners has encouraged the integration of games into pedagogical practices. Such discussions focus on the participation and engagement of the learners and do not emphasise the vocabulary used in the gaming discourse.

In addition to engagement and interaction, issues of confidence and identity have also been explored in gaming contexts. Kongmee et al. (2012) suggest that the use of alternative personas in online environments can reduce anxiety and encourage participation, while Dewi et al. (2017) highlight the role of gaming in lowering affective

barriers to communication. Although these studies indicate that gaming can enhance willingness to communicate, they provide limited insight into how vocabulary is utilised within these contexts. The present study addresses this gap by focusing on the linguistic profile of communication, specifically the use of vocabulary and expressions in real-time gaming discourse.

Finally, Achol and Akter (2022) illustrate that the players encounter and engage with language in games, both actively and passively. This occurs in situations such as navigating gameplay and interpreting instructions. Their study also identifies a list of lexical items acquired through gameplay, indicating the gamers' exposure to a diverse range of vocabulary. This analysis is primarily descriptive and does not offer a detailed categorisation of the items or their use in online games. The findings of the present study suggest that the vocabulary acquired and used in online games is both contextual and functional. It is determined by the interactional and communicative demands of the gameplay, rather than by systematic language development.

Research Objectives

1. To identify and analyse the types of vocabulary used by gamers in online gaming contexts.
2. To explore how the gaming context shapes the use of vocabulary in interaction.

Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative descriptive design to explore and examine the use of vocabulary in the online gaming context. This design is appropriate as the analysis focuses on the lexical items and multi-word expressions acquired and used while playing games online, rather than measuring changes in language proficiency.

Participants

The participants of the study consisted of online gamers from northeast India who use English as the medium of communication during gameplay. The study does not assume uniform linguistic backgrounds of the participants, and they are considered as users of English engaging in interaction in the gaming environment.

The participants in this study comprised 41 gamers from Northeast India. They included both adolescents and adults who engage in gaming on a regular basis, with ages ranging from 17 to 26 years. Of the total sample, 34 participants were students, while the remaining 7 were employed individuals. Participants were selected through convenience sampling based on accessibility and willingness to respond to the questionnaire.

Data Collection

The data of the study were collected using an online questionnaire. The questionnaire was distributed online in two weeks to around 70 gamers, and 41 responses were received. The questionnaire was constructed using Google Forms, and it allowed the participants to submit their responses at their convenience.

The questionnaire consisted of both closed-ended and open-ended questions, designed to capture the gamers' playing habits, interaction within the game, and their use of language. With the open-ended questions, the participants were asked to note the words and phrases they encountered and acquired while playing online games. The analysis of the study focuses on the questions that reflect on the lexical items and phrases acquired from and used in games. These responses form the primary dataset for the vocabulary analysis in the study.

Method of Data Analysis

The collected data were analysed qualitatively with a focus on identifying patterns in vocabulary use, type, and function in the gaming context.

Individual words/lexical items are examined and classified based on:

1. Part of speech (e.g., noun, verb, adjective, etc.)
2. Frequency Level, supported by open resources such as the British National Corpus, and are classified as low, mid, or high frequency.
3. CEFR Level, identified using resources such as the English Vocabulary Profile, where available, and supported by dictionaries where necessary
4. Thematic categories, such as emotion, action, evaluation, and so on.
5. Vocabulary usage type, particularly where general English words take contextual meanings within the online game.

Multi-word expressions are analysed based on:

1. Function in interaction (e.g., instruction, coordination, evaluation, social interaction)
2. CEFR level, estimated based on contextual use.
3. Contextual meaning within the gameplay
4. Thematic Domain

The study draws on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)(2001, 2020) to interpret and analyse the vocabulary the participants reported to have acquired from the gaming context. In particular, the CEFR descriptors for online interaction are used to explore the nature of the vocabulary.

Findings and Discussion

Among the 41 participants, 15 reported engaging with online games for more than 5 years, while 11 indicated gaming experience of one to three years. This distribution suggests that a considerable proportion of the participants have long-term exposure to online gaming, thereby facilitating repeated interaction in the English language. As shown in Fig. 1 a substantial number of participants also reported acquiring new English vocabulary through playing online games, indicating that such extended engagement may contribute to vocabulary enrichment.

Figure 1: *Percentage of Players Who Learned New Words/Phrases*



To examine this further, this study focuses on specific lexical items and expressions reported by the participants. Table 1 presents the lexical items reported by participants, categorised according to part of speech, vocabulary type, CEFR level, frequency level, thematic domain, and contextual usage examples. In addition, Table 2 presents the multi-word expressions and phrases reported by participants, categorised according to contextual meaning, vocabulary type, CEFR level, thematic domain, and function.

Table 1: *Words/Lexical Items Reported by the Participants*

Word	*Part of Speech*	*Vocabulary Type*	*Cefr Level*	*Frequency Level*	*Theme*	*Example*
Bamboozle	Verb	General	C1	Low	Emotion	The player bamboozled his opponent with a deceptive strategy.
Carnage	Noun	Contextual	C2	Low	Violence	The game was full of carnage and bloodshed after the final round.
Putrid	Adjective	General	C2	Low	Situational	The gameplay environment features dilapidated and putrid houses, contributing to the overall feel of decay.
Rendezvous	Noun/ Verb	General	C2	Low	Interactional	The team planned a rendezvous after the game.
Crouch	Verb/ Noun	Contextual	C2	Low	Action	"I avoided detection by crouching at the right time."
Revive	Verb	Contextual	C2	Low	Strategy	"We will have to revive our teammates to save the game."
Unabashed	Adjective	Contextual	C2	Low	Emotion	She texted me after winning the match with unabashed excitement.
Flaming	Noun	Contextual	C1	Low	Behavioural	Flaming in chat during the game can negatively impact players' morale.
Sprint	Verb/ Noun	Contextual	C1	Low	Action	"We will have to sprint to reach the safety zone quickly."
Claim	Verb/ Noun	Contextual	B2-C1	High	Action	"Let's claim this area before the other team arrives."
Lobby	Noun	Contextual	B2-C2	Mid	Environment	"Wait for me in the lobby before the match starts."
Spectacle	Noun	Contextual	B2	Mid	Evaluation	The final battle was quite a spectacle for the audience.

Thrifty	Adjective	Contextual	C2	Low	Personality	"Be thrifty with your resources in this round."
Enormity	Noun	General	C1	Low	Evaluation	The enormity of the challenge became clear as the players progressed in the game.
Flank	Verb/ Noun	Contextual	C1-C2	Low	Strategy	The players decided to flank the enemies from the left side.
Prone	Verb/ Adjective	Contextual	C2	Low	Strategy	"You will be prone to attack if you stay in this area."
Elbow	Noun	General	B1	Mid	Spatial/ Physical	"My character got shot in the elbow before I could reach the safety point."
Overpowered	Adjective	General	B2	Mid	Evaluation	The weapon was considered overpowered by most players.
Astonished	Adjective	General	B2	Mid	Emotion	"I was astonished by the unexpected turn the match took."
Short	Adjective	Contextual	A1	High	Spatial	"We are rather short on ammo."

As Table 1 illustrates, the participants report specific types of vocabulary they acquired through the gaming context. The collection of vocabulary can be broadly categorised into general English vocabulary and contextually relevant vocabulary. The lexical items reported by the participants, such as *rendezvous, putrid*, and *bamboozle*, fall under the domain of general English vocabulary, which are independent of the gaming context. The inclusion of these reflects that the exposure to a range of vocabulary extends beyond the basic level of communicative needs in online games.

Table 1 also highlights the presence of low-frequency, higher-level lexical items like *unabashed, astonished, and enormity*, many of which are categorised at higher CEFR (C1-C2) levels. These items demonstrate more formal and advanced vocabulary that is not exclusive to online gaming interactions. This suggests that participants may encounter and acquire advanced vocabulary passively through exposure to game narratives, external media, or group chat, and may transfer this beyond

the gaming context. For instance, one of the participants reported,

"My friend's car was smelly recently, I told him, your car is putrid."

On the other hand, a more consistent pattern emerges in the contextual specialisation of vocabulary, as reflected in Table 1. Several lexical items that exist in general English acquire specific meanings within gaming discourse. Words like *carnage, prone,* and *crouch* reflect the acquisition of contextually specific lexical items. This demonstrates how online games facilitate the enrichment of situationally meaningful vocabulary that may also be transferable to real-world contexts.

In addition, words like *"flank" and "revive"* function as strategic terms, while *"lobby"* refers to a virtual pre-game environment. These items are functionally integrated into gameplay and are used to facilitate action, strategy, evaluation, and spatial awareness. Unlike higher-level and general English lexical items, these words are significant to the communication within the game and are likely reinforced through repeated use. This suggests that online gaming contexts may promote context-bound vocabulary use, where situational demands and communicative purpose shape meaning.

Table 2, on the other hand, provides evidence of multi-word expressions used in online gaming. The table categorises the phrases reported by the participants according to their contextual use, function in the game, thematic domain, vocabulary type, and CEFR alignment.

As Table 2 illustrates, expressions such as "*Good game"* and "*Good Luck, Have Fun (GLHF)"* are used to interact in gameplay. These expressions can change meaning and function depending on the situation and are also transferable to real-world contexts. The inclusion of idiomatic expressions such as "*old is gold"* suggests that the participants are exposed to forms of language that are not restricted to in-game conversation and are transferable to wider contexts.

In contrast, expressions like *Experience points*, *Invincibility points,* and *points of interest* are specific directives used for coordination among the players. These expressions suggest that vocabulary used in online gaming can be strongly functional at times, with language serving purposes such as giving instructions, coordinating actions, maintaining interaction, and evaluating the outcome.

Tables 1 and 2 can be interpreted in relation to CEFR descriptors (Council

Table 2: *Expressions Reported by the Participants*

Expressions	*Meaning (Contextual)*	*Function*	*Vocabulary Type*	*Theme*	*CEFR Theme*
Good Game (GG)	Congratulatory statement	Social interaction / Evaluation	General (contextual use)	Social	B1
Good Game, Easy	Bragging after win	Evaluation / Expression	General (contextual)	Evaluation	B1
Old is gold	Dialogue	Expression	General	Evaluation	B2
Those who are in favour will say aye	Dialogue/ Command	Expression	General	Stylistic	B2
Kill them all!	Command	Instruction	Gaming	Action	B1
The man who can beat me is not born yet	Boastful statement	Expression	General	Evaluation	B2
Good Luck, Have Fun (GLHF)	Greeting before the game	Social interaction	General	Interaction	B1
Backseat gaming	Interfering while watching	Expression	Gaming-specific	Evaluation	B2
Experience Points (XP)	Points for progress	Referential/Explanation	Gaming-specific	Evaluation	B1
Invincibility frames (iframes)	Temporary immunity	Strategy / Explanation	Gaming-specific	Strategy	B2–C1
Point of Interest (POI)	Important location	Coordination	Gaming-specific	Spatial	B1–B2
Equipment Inventory	Item storage system	Referential	Gaming-specific	Resources	B1

ISSN: 2277-307X Language and Language Teaching, Issue No. 30, July 2026

of Europe, 2020) of spoken and online interaction, developed by the Council of Europe. These descriptors suggest the ability to participate in real-time communication, coordinate with others, and respond appropriately in dynamic contexts like online games.

Table 1 includes lexical items categorised at higher CEFR levels (C1/C2), indicating the potential for vocabulary enrichment through consistent exposure to online gaming. While the findings from Table 1 demonstrate advanced vocabulary, the functions identified in Table 2, particularly instruction, coordination, and social interaction, align more closely with B1–B2 levels. Here, the users are able to engage in real-time interaction, contribute to discussions, and express opinions on familiar topics. This reveals the gap between the acquisition of higher-level lexical items and their use in real-time interaction.

As reflected in Table 2, participants engage in forms of interaction that involve both social and task-oriented communication. Formulaic expressions such as *GG* and *GLHF* align with lower to intermediate levels (A2–B1), where players may rely on limited use of language to maintain interaction. Meanwhile, directive and coordination-based expressions such as *"kill them all", "Those who are in favour will say aye"* correspond to B1–B2 levels, where users participate actively in real-time exchanges involving multiple interlocutors.

However, the data does not provide evidence of higher-level interactional features associated with C1–C2 levels, such as managing misunderstandings, adapting register, or engaging in extended argumentation. This suggests that the interaction in the gaming context may be limited to some extent due to conventionalised game dialogues. As shown in Table 2, players rely on short and functional expressions to perform communicative tasks efficiently, and the gaming environment creates situations that shape vocabulary use through immediacy, task-orientation, and interactional demands.

As seen in Table 1, the range of vocabulary acquired through online gaming may be constrained. They fall into certain themes that are closely connected to the gaming experience. The need for rapid communication limits elaboration, resulting in a reliance on a relatively small set of high-utility lexical items and formulaic expressions.

The data from Tables 1 and 2 suggest that while online gaming can contribute to vocabulary enrichment, such vocabulary largely remains

context-bound, functionally relevant, and tied to interactional needs in the gaming context. In this case, communicative efficiency takes centre stage.

Limitations

This study has certain limitations that need to be acknowledged:

The data consist of self-reported responses from the participants, which may not fully capture the use of English vocabulary in real-time interactions in online gaming.

Secondly, the study is not based on an experimental design and does not measure the language proficiency and vocabulary development of the participants using a pre-test and post-test methodology. Therefore, the findings do not reflect changes in proficiency over time. Rather, they provide insights into the nature and use of English vocabulary.

Conclusion

The study examined vocabulary in the online gaming context, focusing on the nature of the lexical items and expressions. The findings of the study indicate that while the participants are exposed to a range of vocabulary, their use is largely shaped by the demands of the gameplay. Vocabulary in this context is primarily context-bound and function-driven, serving various purposes inside the game.

At the same time, the presence of higher-level lexical items suggests that online gaming may contribute to the enrichment of vocabulary, which is transferable to other contexts as well. Overall, the study highlights the potential of online gaming as an informal space for vocabulary development, which remains uneven and closely tied to situational use.

Future research may employ an experimental design to examine the measurable gains in vocabulary and improvement in proficiency over time. In addition, further research can look into live interaction in online games to provide insights on the actual use of vocabulary in discourse.

References

Achol, A., & Akter, S. (2022). Influence of popular online games on English language skills development of children in Dhaka City. *International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences*, *7*(6), 271–281. https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels

British National Corpus Consortium. (2007). *The British National Corpus, version 3 (BNC XML Edition)*. Oxford University Computing Services. http://www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk/

Council of Europe. (2020). *Common European framework of reference for languages: Learning, teaching, assessment—Companion volume*. Council of Europe Publishing. https://rm.coe.int/common-european-framework-of-reference-for-languages-learning-teaching/16809ea0d4

Dewi, R. S., Kultsum, U., & Armadi, A. (2017). Using communicative games in improving students' speaking skills. *English Language Teaching*, *10*(1), 63–71. https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v10n1p63

English Profile Programme. (n.d.). *English vocabulary profile*. Cambridge University Press. https://www.englishprofile.org

Engqvist, P. (2018). Does playing video games have an effect on English vocabulary acquisition? [Bachelor's thesis, Linnaeus University]. DiVA Portal. https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1346173/FULLTEXT01.pdf

Hapsari, S., Sari, R., & Rais, A. (2018). Gamer's experience in using defense of the ancients 2 to learn language. *Indonesian Journal of Informatics Education*, *2*(2), 91–96. https://doi.org/10.20961/ijie.v2i2.24156

Kongmee, I., Strachan, R., Pickard, A., & Montgomery, C. (2012). A case study of using online communities and virtual environments in massively multiplayer role-playing games (MMORPGs) as a learning and teaching tool for second language learners. *International Journal of Virtual and Personal Learning Environments*, *3*(4), 1–15. https://doi.org/10.4018/jvple.2012100101

Liontas, J. I. (2022). Let the games begin! Harnessing the power of gaming in language education. *Iranian Journal of Language Teaching Research*, *10*(2), 1–16. https://doi.org/10.30466/IJLTR.2022.121180

Nur, A., Ardita, S., & Oliviera, R. (2020). Digital native students' perspectives of online games use for learning grammar in English class at Avizena. Edu private course. *Jurnal Studi Guru dan Pembelajaran, 3*(1). https://doi.org/10.30605/jsgp.3.1.2020.236

Peake, T., & Reynolds, D. (2020). "There's a sniper on that hill!": Gaming in English as a global language environment. *Angles: New Perspectives on the Anglophone World*. https://doi.org/10.4000/angles.3237

Peterson, M. (2012). Learner interaction in a massively multiplayer online role playing game (MMORPG): A sociocultural discourse analysis. *ReCALL*, *24*(3), 361–380. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0958344012000195

Statista. (2024, April 5). *Number of online gamers in India 2017-2024.* https://www.statista.com/statistics/1064010/number-of-online-gamers-india/

Toufik, A., & Hanane, B. (2021). Investigating the potential of online video games in enhancing EFL learners' communicative skills. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, *9*(2), 292–298. https://doi.org/10.13189/ujer.2021.090205

Bipanchi Bhattacharyya *is a research scholar in the Department of English Language Teaching at Gauhati University, Assam. Her research focuses on multilingual education and language practices in Assam.*

bipanchibhatta@gmail.com

Appendix A: Questionnaire on learner demographics and online gaming habits

Age

Gender

- Male
- Female
- Other
- Prefer not to say

Are you a student?

- Yes
- No

How long have you been playing games?

- 0–1 year
- 1–3 years
- 3–5 years
- More than 5 years
- Other: _____

How often do you play games?

- Sometimes
- Regularly
- Rarely
- How many hours a day do you play online games?
- Less than 2 hours
- 2–5 hours
- More than 5 hours
- Other: _____

Do you play multiplayer games?

- Yes
- No

How often do you interact with other players?

- Often
- Not so often
- Never

How do you interact with other players?

- By texting
- By talking
- Other: _____

What language do you use in the game?

- English
- Hindi
- Other: _____

What language is the game's instruction manual in?

- English
- Other: _____

Do you understand the instructions of the game properly?

- Yes
- No
- Other: _____

Have you learned any new English words or phrases from games?

- Yes
- No

Can you give specific examples of words or phrases you learned from games?

Do you use these words/phrases outside the game?

- Yes
- No

How often do you use these words/phrases outside the game?

- Very often
- Often
- Sometimes
- Never

If yes, can you give an example?

Are you confident in using English inside the game?

- Yes
- No

Do you communicate with other players outside the game (e.g., social media, chat rooms)?

- Yes
- No
- Other: _____

If yes, what language do you use to communicate?

Do you think your English communication has improved after playing games?

- Yes
- No

If yes, can you give an example?

Do you think you can learn English better through gaming?

- Yes
- No
- Other: _____