

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Research Background

In the 21st century, the integration of technology into education has revolutionized traditional teaching methods. One significant innovation is the use of digital games as tools for language acquisition. Digital games create immersive and engaging environments that encourage vocabulary retention and acquisition through interactive, context-rich scenarios (Wu et al., 2020; Tebeweka, 2021). Specifically, strategy-based games such as *Stronghold: Crusader* offer players opportunities to engage with language in meaningful ways while navigating problem-solving and resource management challenges.

Vocabulary is a cornerstone of language proficiency, acting as a bridge to effective communication and comprehension (Bakhsh, 2016). However, traditional vocabulary teaching methods, such as rote memorization and textbook exercises, often fail to maintain student interest or facilitate long-term retention (Yunus et al., 2020). Studies by Elmahdi and Hezam (2020) have shown that learners struggle with retaining vocabulary taught through conventional methods, emphasizing the need for innovative approaches.

Digital games provide a pressure-free, engaging learning environment that supports incidental and self-directed vocabulary acquisition (Qasim, 2021). Rahman and Anggraeni (2020) found that gamified learning environments significantly enhance learner motivation, leading to better retention. Research by

Hung et al. (2018) highlights the use of narrative elements in games to contextualize vocabulary, making the learning process meaningful and enjoyable.

Previous studies highlight the promising role of game-based learning in vocabulary acquisition. Hung et al. (2018) conducted a meta-analysis on the effectiveness of digital games in language learning, emphasizing that contextualized vocabulary exposure in games fosters deeper cognitive processing. Charsky (2010) explored the balance between entertainment and educational value in games, concluding that commercial games often outperform educational games in maintaining learner engagement due to their high-quality design and interactive features. Similarly, Comillie et al. (2011) examined the integration of games into formal education and found that commercial games provide untapped potential for vocabulary acquisition, especially when structured to align with learning objectives.

Rahman and Anggraeni (2020) investigated the use of narrative-driven games for language learning, reporting significant improvements in vocabulary retention and learner motivation, particularly through the integration of storytelling elements. Elmahdi and Hezam (2020) explored the limitations of traditional rote-learning methods, emphasizing that digital games offer a more engaging and effective alternative to overcome challenges in vocabulary retention. Wu et al. (2020) highlighted the positive impact of strategy and role-playing games on language skills, attributing their success to the simulation of real-world communication scenarios that enable contextual learning. These studies collectively underline the potential of leveraging commercial digital games like *Stronghold: Crusader* as innovative tools for vocabulary acquisition.

Despite the proven benefits of game-based learning, there is a lack of studies specifically targeting commercial games like *Stronghold: Crusader*. Most research has focused on custom-built educational games, which often lack the engagement levels of commercial games due to resource constraints (Charsky, 2010; Hung et al., 2018). Furthermore, the potential of *Stronghold: Crusader* to provide a structured, contextualized vocabulary learning experience remains unexplored.

The rapid adoption of digital technology in education underscores the need to evaluate the efficacy of commercial games in teaching core skills such as vocabulary. Addressing this gap is essential to providing educators with evidence-based tools for improving language instruction, particularly in contexts where traditional methods fall short (Echeverría et al., 2011; Cornillie et al., 2011). Given the increasing availability of gaming platforms and their widespread use among learners, exploring their educational potential has never been more relevant.

This study aims to investigate the use of *Stronghold: Crusader* as a medium for vocabulary acquisition, bridging the gap between commercial gaming and educational applications. By analyzing how this game supports vocabulary learning in both incidental and intentional contexts, the study contributes to the broader discourse on integrating commercially successful games into formal learning environments.

## 1.2 Research Problems

- 1 How does playing *Stronghold: Crusader* game influence English vocabulary acquisition among English learners?
- 2 What are the challenges faced by English learners while playing *Stronghold: Crusader* game?

## 1.3 Research Objectives

- 1 To investigate the impact of playing *Stronghold: Crusader* game on English vocabulary acquisition by English learners.
- 2 To identify the challenges faced by English learners while playing *Stronghold: Crusader* game.

## 1.4 Research Significance

### 1. Theoretical Significance

This research adds to the growing conversation about how games can support language learning, especially vocabulary development for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. It supports the idea that people learn language better when they're actively engaged and exposed to words in context, rather than just memorizing from a list. By focusing on *Stronghold: Crusader*, a commercial strategy game, this study shows that learning doesn't always have to come from formal educational tools—entertainment-based platforms can be just as powerful when used with purpose. The findings highlight how games can naturally create immersive environments where learners absorb new vocabulary through repetition, visuals, and storytelling. This study also helps

fill a gap in current research, which often overlooks the educational potential of commercial games.

## 2. Practical Significance

On a practical level, this study offers something valuable for students, teachers, and future researchers. For students, it shows that learning vocabulary doesn't always have to feel like a chore—through games like *Stronghold: Crusader*, they can pick up new words just by playing and enjoying the experience. It also helps them become more independent learners by encouraging strategies like using context clues or looking up unfamiliar words. For teachers, this research introduces a fresh way to make vocabulary lessons more engaging. By bringing games into the classroom, teachers can boost student motivation and make learning more meaningful. And for future researchers, the study opens up new possibilities to explore how other types of games might help with language learning, or how long the vocabulary learned through games actually sticks. It's a step toward blending fun with education in a way that really works.

### 1.5 Scope and Limitation

This study focuses on how playing *Stronghold: Crusader* helps EFL learners improve their English vocabulary. It explores the game's ability to provide a rich, engaging environment for learning and examines the vocabulary strategies players use during gameplay. The research is limited to learners with basic English skills and familiarity with the game. It only covers vocabulary learning, not other language aspects like grammar or pronunciation. Factors such as individual gaming

experience, learning styles, and access to technology are beyond the study's scope, so the findings may not apply to all learners.

## **1.6 Definition of Key Terms**

### **1. Vocabulary Acquisition:**

The process of learning and remembering new words and their meanings, either incidentally through exposure or intentionally through focused study (Nation, 2013). This study looks at how vocabulary is acquired through *Stronghold: Crusader*.

### **2. Stronghold: Crusader Game**

A strategy game set in medieval times where players build and manage kingdoms. The game uses English terms related to resources, combat, and strategy, creating opportunities for learning language through gameplay (Charsky, 2010; Hung et al., 2018).

### **3. Game-Based Learning:**

An educational method that uses games to teach skills like problem-solving and language acquisition. Games make learning interactive and engaging (Plass et al., 2015; Cornillie et al., 2011). This research examines *Stronghold: Crusader* as a tool for learning vocabulary.