

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 Learning Vocabulary through *Stronghold: Crusader* Game

The role of digital games in education has become increasingly significant in recent years, especially in the context of language learning. Games, especially those with rich interactive and narrative components, offer valuable opportunities for vocabulary acquisition. According to Gee (2003), digital games provide an immersive environment that fosters language learning through active participation, enabling learners to acquire vocabulary in context. This is especially effective for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, as the language used in the game is linked to actions and decisions within the game world. Studies have shown that game-based learning (GBL) can improve vocabulary retention by providing contextual clues, which aid in comprehension and recall (Plass et al., 2015; Wu et al., 2020).

Stronghold: Crusader, a strategy game that places players in a medieval setting where they must manage resources, construct fortifications, and engage in military strategy, offers such a context. The game's design naturally integrates language learning as players encounter terms related to warfare, diplomacy, and construction (Rahman & Anggraeni, 2020). This immersive experience allows players to interact with language within a meaningful context, which can significantly enhance vocabulary learning (Elmahdi & Hezam, 2020). Furthermore, the narrative-driven gameplay in *Stronghold: Crusader* helps learners engage with

the language in a manner that is both motivating and educational, making learning vocabulary more effective than traditional methods (Tebeweka, 2021).

2.2 Game-Based Learning and Vocabulary Acquisition

Game-based learning (GBL) refers to using games as tools for educational purposes, offering interactive and engaging experiences that facilitate learning in various domains, including language acquisition. Researchers have increasingly acknowledged that games provide more than mere entertainment, especially for vocabulary acquisition. Games like *Stronghold: Crusader*, which present complex environments that require players to solve problems, manage resources, and make strategic decisions, integrate language learning in an organic and interactive manner. Vocabulary encountered in the context of the game, such as terms related to warfare, building, and diplomacy, helps learners acquire new words naturally through use and repetition (Plass et al., 2015; Cornillie et al., 2011). The interactive and immersive nature of games makes them ideal for learning new vocabulary because they engage multiple cognitive processes, facilitating retention and practical application (Wu et al., 2020).

In their study, Wu et al. (2020) demonstrate that games with an immersive environment like *Stronghold: Crusader* allow learners to encounter new vocabulary in realistic contexts. This approach leads to what is known as "incidental vocabulary acquisition," where learners pick up new words not through direct teaching, but as a byproduct of interacting with the game. According to Tebeweka (2021), when learners are immersed in a game, they are likely to encounter words repeatedly in

different contexts, making it easier to retain these words over time. Similarly, Rahman & Anggraeni (2020) highlight that game-based learning motivates learners, encouraging continued interaction with new language material in a way that traditional textbook methods often fail to achieve.

2.3 *Stronghold: Crusader* and Its Educational Value

While *Stronghold: Crusader* is primarily an entertainment tool, its game design makes it a powerful resource for learning English vocabulary. The game, which places players in a medieval setting, requires them to manage resources, construct buildings, and lead military campaigns, all of which involve a range of specific vocabulary. The immersive narrative and strategic decision-making require players to use and understand English terms related to various game mechanics, such as “siege,” “fortification,” and “resources,” within relevant contexts. This setting creates a learning experience that goes beyond simple memorization of words, as players learn vocabulary through interaction with the game's world and by completing tasks (Charsky, 2010; Hung et al., 2018).

Paivio's dual coding theory (1990) supports this approach, suggesting that learners are more likely to remember information when it is presented both verbally and visually. In *Stronghold: Crusader*, learners hear, see, and interact with new vocabulary, which reinforces learning. The visual representation of terms such as “castle” or “army” in the context of the game strengthens the association between the word and its meaning, improving retention. According to Charsky (2010), games like *Stronghold: Crusader*, which combine narrative and interactive play, are particularly effective in keeping players engaged while also promoting language

learning. Through these repeated exposures to vocabulary in context, learners are not only able to acquire new words but also deepen their understanding of their meanings and uses.

2.4 Vocabulary Learning Strategies Employed in Digital Games

In addition to providing an immersive environment for learning vocabulary, games like *Stronghold: Crusader* also foster the use of various vocabulary learning strategies. Schmitt (2000) identifies several strategies, such as guessing meanings from context, using repetition, and reviewing vocabulary. In the case of *Stronghold: Crusader*, players frequently encounter new words in game scenarios that encourage them to infer meanings based on their contextual usage. For example, if a player encounters the word “siege,” they may infer its meaning based on its use in the context of attacking enemy castles, even if they have never seen the word before.

Elmahdi & Hezam (2020) suggest that learners often employ metacognitive strategies in game-based learning, such as self-monitoring and self-correction, which are essential for language retention. These strategies are particularly effective in games where players can replay levels or revisit in-game challenges, thus reinforcing vocabulary through practice. Rahman and Anggraeni (2020) also highlight that many EFL learners use external resources, like dictionaries or online guides, to reinforce their understanding of words they encounter during gameplay. This use of external resources complements the contextual learning within the game, enhancing vocabulary retention and understanding.

In the context of *Stronghold: Crusader*, these strategies can be observed as players pause to look up unfamiliar words or attempt to remember terms they have encountered earlier in the game. This process of actively seeking to understand and apply new vocabulary helps learners internalize words, moving them from short-term memory to long-term retention. These strategies, combined with the game's narrative-driven gameplay, provide an engaging and effective approach to vocabulary learning (Rahman & Anggraeni, 2020).

2.5 The Role of Motivation and Engagement in Vocabulary Learning

One of the primary advantages of using games like *Stronghold: Crusader* for vocabulary learning is their ability to motivate learners and keep them engaged. Motivation plays a crucial role in vocabulary acquisition, as learners who are engaged in the process are more likely to continue learning and retain new knowledge (Qasim, 2021). *Stronghold: Crusader* is designed to be both challenging and rewarding, with players facing obstacles that require them to use new vocabulary in order to progress. According to Bakhsh (2016), this constant exposure to new words in a meaningful context can significantly improve the retention of vocabulary.

The game's interactive nature, combined with the reward system that recognizes strategic decision-making, ensures that learners are motivated to continue engaging with the game, which in turn increases their exposure to language. This motivation and engagement foster a more effective learning environment than traditional methods, where passive learning often leads to boredom and disengagement. Studies by Smith et al. (2013) also confirm that

learners who are motivated by game-based learning are more likely to make sustained progress in acquiring new vocabulary, as they see direct benefits to mastering the language in the context of the game.

While substantial research has focused on game-based learning and vocabulary acquisition (Wu et al., 2020; Rahman & Anggraeni, 2020), there remains a gap in the literature concerning the use of commercially available games like *Stronghold: Crusader* for educational purposes. Most studies have concentrated on custom-built educational games or games designed specifically for language learning (Cornillie et al., 2011). However, the potential of commercially successful games, such as *Stronghold: Crusader*, which was not initially designed for educational purposes, has been largely underexplored. This study aims to fill this gap by investigating how such games can contribute to vocabulary acquisition and what learning strategies are employed by EFL learners during gameplay.

Furthermore, research has yet to comprehensively examine the long-term effects of learning vocabulary through games on overall language proficiency. While immediate vocabulary acquisition may be apparent, understanding whether this leads to improvements in other language skills, such as reading or writing, remains an area for further investigation. Future research should explore how long-term exposure to games like *Stronghold: Crusader* can affect learners' broader language competencies and the effectiveness of combining game-based learning with traditional teaching methods.