

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

This introductory chapter covers six main sections: the background of the study, research questions, research objectives, significance of the study, scope and limitations, and the definition of key terms.

#### **A. Background of the Study**

The everyday experiences of EFL learners at the State Islamic University of Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung increasingly involve digital interaction outside the classroom, including recreational activities such as playing online games. Among these learners, many frequently engage with the Roblox chat-box while playing collaboratively with other users. During gameplay, they spontaneously type English phrases such as “*come help me,*” “*how to do this?*” or “*follow me*” to communicate with international players or to coordinate tasks. These authentic and voluntary uses of English illustrate a form of autonomous learning practice, where students independently choose to use English as a functional tool for real-time interaction rather than as part of formal instruction.

This phenomenon emerges specifically within the Roblox platform, a large user-generated virtual environment where players interact across diverse game worlds. Communication on Roblox relies heavily on its built-in text-based chat-box, which becomes a natural medium for collaboration, exchanging

information, and building social interaction among players.<sup>2</sup> Since many Roblox games involve international users, English frequently becomes the shared language for communication. In January 2026, Roblox introduced additional communication safety policies that categorize chat interaction based on users verified age groups, allowing communication access according to age verification and safety settings.<sup>3</sup> In this study, all participants were university students in the State Islamic University of Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung aged 18 years and above who had access to communication features within their corresponding age category.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, the participants were still able to communicate actively with other adult players through the Roblox chat-box during gameplay activities.

For EFL learners, this environment creates opportunities to use English naturally outside formal educational settings. English use in Roblox is not directly instructed by teachers or language learning materials, but instead emerges from the communicative demands of gameplay itself. Players use English to ask for help, coordinate missions, respond to other players, and maintain social interaction during collaborative activities. These interactions position the chat-box as a meaningful space where learners independently practice written English while participating in authentic online communication.

---

<sup>2</sup> Joseph Yaden, "What Is Roblox?," *Digital Trends*, June 16, 2020, <https://www.digitaltrends.com/gaming/what-is-roblox/>.

<sup>3</sup> Roblox Support, "Safety Features: Chat, Privacy & Filtering," *Roblox Help Center*. accessed May 20, 2026, <https://en.help.roblox.com/hc/en-us/articles/203313120-Safety-Features-Chat-Privacy-Filtering>.

<sup>4</sup> Roblox Support. "Understanding Age Checks on Roblox," *Roblox Help Center*. accessed May 20, 2026, <https://en.help.roblox.com/hc/en-us/articles/39143693116052-Understanding-Age-Checks-on-Roblox>.

Studies have shown that Roblox environments can effectively support communication and language learning in various ways. Han, Liu, and Gao identify Roblox as a platform that promotes engagement, social learning, and meaningful interaction.<sup>5</sup> Sinar et al. similarly reveal that Roblox fosters multimodal literacy practices in English, enabling learners to express ideas and coordinate activities across digital modes.<sup>6</sup> Further, Wicaksono notes that in cross-cultural Roblox interactions, learners often rely on English to bridge linguistic gaps, using chat-box communication to overcome language barriers.<sup>7</sup> These findings suggest that Roblox not only entertains but also affirm Roblox's significance for language development in diverse settings.

Beyond perception studies, broader investigations have highlight Roblox as a tool for educational innovation and collaborative learning. Alhasan et al. report that Roblox encourages multimedia-based collaboration in higher education and provides opportunities for creativity and knowledge construction.<sup>8</sup> Mustafa, Hussein, and Baba demonstrate that problem-based activities on Roblox lead learners to use English purposefully while completing tasks.<sup>9</sup> Likewise, Fauzan shows that frequent participation in Roblox gameplay correlates

---

<sup>5</sup> J. Han, G. Liu, & Y. Gao, "Learners in the Metaverse: A Systematic Review on the Use of Roblox in Learning," *Education Sciences* 13, no. 3 (2023): 296

<sup>6</sup> T. S. Sinar et al., "Students' Perceptions of Using Roblox in Multimodal Literacy Practices in Teaching and Learning English," *World Journal of English Language* 13, no. 7 (2023)

<sup>7</sup> R. D. Wicaksono, "Students' Perception of Roblox and Language Barrier In ESL," *Inatesol Journal* 1, no. 2 (2024).

<sup>8</sup> S. Alhasan, K., Alhasan, K., Al Hashimi, "Roblox in Higher Education: Opportunities, Challenges, and Future Directions for Multimedia Learning," *International Journal of Emerging Technologies in Learning (IJET)* 18, no. 24 (2023): 133–48

<sup>9</sup> N. H. Mustafa, N. H. Hussein, & S. Baba, "English Language Problem-Based Learning via User-Generated 3D World Roblox Module: Need Analysis," *Kresna Social Science and Humanities Research* 1 (2020)

positively with vocabulary growth among EFL learners.<sup>10</sup> These studies together indicate that Roblox has significant potential to facilitate language-related practices within digital learning environments.

When viewed within the broader context of digital learning, the English use found in Roblox reflects how learners today can practice language through everyday online activities. Platforms such as online games and multiplayer communities provide opportunities for learners to use English independently while interacting with other people. In Roblox, learners use English not because they are required to by teachers, but because communication during gameplay encourages them to do so naturally. They use English to ask questions, coordinate tasks, respond to other players, and maintain conversations during the game. This reflects principles of autonomous learning, as learners take charge of their language growth by choosing when and how to use English.

However, despite the rich evidence supporting Roblox as a meaningful space for English communication, limited studies have specifically examined how autonomous learning practices emerge through the Roblox chat-box itself. Prior studies explore motivation, perception, and structured learning modules, but few have analysed the authentic text-based interactions that EFL learners produce freely during gameplay. Additionally, limited attention has been given to how university students, Particularly EFL learners at the State Islamic University of

---

<sup>10</sup> M. N. Fauzan, "The Correlation Between the Intensity of Playing Roblox on Vocabulary Size of EFL Secondary School Students," *Esteem Journal of English Education Study Programme* 9, no. 1 (2025): 24–35

Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung, use digital platforms like Roblox as part of their everyday informal learning experiences.

Addressing these gaps, this study investigates how EFL learners' autonomous learning practices manifest through the Roblox chat-box at the State Islamic University of Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung. By analysing the real communication behaviours that arise naturally in gameplay, this study seeks to understand how the chat-box feature encourages learners to use English independently and how such practices contribute to their broader language development.

## **B. Research Question**

Based on the background of the study and the identified research gap, this study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do EFL learners at the State Islamic University of Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung engage in autonomous learning practices through the Roblox chat-box feature?
2. To what extent does the use of the Roblox chat-box contribute to EFL learners perceived improvement in written communication during autonomous learning?

## **C. Research Objective**

To address the research questions, this study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To describe the forms and patterns of autonomous learning practices demonstrated by EFL learners through the Roblox chat-box at the State Islamic University of Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung.
2. To explore how the use of the Roblox chat-box contributes to EFL learners perceived improvement in written communication during autonomous learning.

#### **D. The Significance of Study**

This study is expected to provide several important contributions, both theoretically and practically, to the field of English language education and digital learning.

##### **1. Theoretical Significance**

This study offers theoretical insights into how autonomous learning practices can naturally emerge within digital gaming platforms, specifically through text-based interaction. While previous studies have emphasized motivation, perception, and game-based learning advantages, only a few have explored how EFL learners independently use English in authentic communication within online environment. By analyzing spontaneous chat-box interactions on the Roblox platform, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of autonomous learning theory in contemporary digital contexts. It also expands existing literature by demonstrating how game features can facilitate learner autonomy without formal guidance.

## 2. Practical Significance

For EFL learners, this study highlights the potential of recreational digital platforms like Roblox as informal yet effective environments to practice English language skills naturally and confidently. It encourages learners to recognize and leverage such online spaces to enhance their language learning outside traditional classrooms. For educators, the findings provide insights into how commonly used digital platforms already familiar to students can foster autonomous language learning in informal settings. This may help teachers integrate technology and gaming into teaching practices to support learners' English communication skills authentically. Additionally, the research offers curriculum developers and institutional policymakers' valuable information about promoting autonomous learning strategies and digital literacy among students, responding to the evolving digital landscape of language education.

### **E. Scope and Limitations of the Study**

This study focuses specifically on EFL learners at the State Islamic University of Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung who use English through the Roblox chat-box feature during gameplay. The scope is limited to exploring autonomous Learning practices, particularly how learner independently use English without teacher guidance while interacting on the platform. The research examines text-based communication only, excluding voice chat or other forms of multimodal interaction available in Roblox.

The study does not aim to measure learners' linguistic proficiency, vocabulary growth, or grammatical accuracy. Instead, it seeks to understand the patterns, purposes, and motivations behind their autonomous English communication. Data is restricted to naturally occurring chat-box interactions and participant interviews, meaning the findings are descriptive rather than generalizable to all Roblox users or all EFL learners. Additionally, the study focuses on gameplay contexts relevant to the participants and does not evaluate the design, quality, or pedagogical structure of specific Roblox games.

#### **F. Definition of Key Term**

To ensure clarity and consistency throughout the study, the following terms are defined as they are used in this study:

1. EFL Learners (English as a Foreign Language Learners)

EFL learners are individuals who study English as a foreign language in a context where English is not the primary medium of communication in everyday life. According to Harmer, learners in EFL settings typically receive English instruction through formal schooling but have limited exposure to natural English use outside academic contexts.<sup>11</sup> This distinguishes them from ESL learners, who study English in environments where English is used more broadly in society. EFL learners usually study English in countries

---

<sup>11</sup> Harmer Jeremy, "The Practice of English Language Teaching" 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2003): 401–5.

where English is not the primary language, relying heavily on classroom instruction, textbooks, and structured activities.

## 2. Autonomous Learning Practices

Autonomous learning practices refer to the capacity of learners to take control over their own learning process, including the planning, monitoring, and evaluation of their learning actions. This concept was first formally articulated by Henri Holec, who defined autonomy as “the ability to take charge of one’s own learning,” emphasizing that learners must actively participate in decision-making regarding what, how, and when they learn.<sup>12</sup> Autonomous learning practices in digital settings include voluntary language use, self-initiated communication, and the ability to adapt strategies without explicit teacher guidance.

## 3. Roblox Platform

The Roblox platform is a large-scale, user-generated virtual ecosystem that hosts millions of interactive worlds created by its global community of users. Unlike conventional video games, Roblox functions not merely as a single game but as a digital platform that combines gaming, social interaction, creativity, and communication. Yaden describes Roblox as a “multiplayer online environment, where users design and experience virtual

---

<sup>12</sup> Henri. Holec, “Autonomy and Foreign Language Learning,,” 1979, 53.

worlds,” supported by real-time communication tools including its built-in chat-box.<sup>13</sup>

#### 4. Chat-Box Feature

The chat-box feature in Roblox is a built-in text communication tool that allows players to type and exchange messages instantly during gameplay. It serves as the primary medium through which users coordinate actions, negotiate meaning, ask questions, and establish social connections within the platform. According to Yaden, the chat-box is a central component of user interaction, enabling seamless communication in diverse game contexts.<sup>14</sup> Text-based chat systems are effective tools for fostering authentic communication, providing learners with real-time, meaningful language use opportunities. They also support various expressive modes, such as abbreviations and emoticons common in online talks.

---

<sup>13</sup> Joseph Yaden, “What Is Roblox?”, *Digital Trends*, May 3, 2020, <https://www.digitaltrends.com/gaming/what-is-roblox/>.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*