



International Conference on Islam, Law, and Society (INCOILS)  
Conference Proceedings 2025

**Students' Autonomous Learning Strategies in Improving Writing Skills through  
Global Chat Rooms in Black Desert Mobile**

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**ABSTRACT:**

This study investigates how Indonesian EFL students employ autonomous learning strategies to improve their writing skills through participation in global chat rooms of the MMORPG Black Desert Mobile. Using a qualitative descriptive design with a phenomenological approach, the research explored students' lived experiences of writing in an informal digital environment. Seven seventh-semester students from an English Education program were selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and documentation of students' chat interactions, and were analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed four interrelated autonomous learning strategies: self-correction triggered by informal peer feedback, repetition and daily use of English, vocabulary enrichment through authentic exposure, and experimentation with new expressions in a low-pressure communicative setting. These strategies contributed to improvements in writing accuracy, fluency, lexical range, and learner confidence. The study concludes that MMORPG global chat rooms function as informal digital learning spaces that foster learner autonomy and provide authentic opportunities for writing practice, thereby complementing formal classroom instruction.

**Keywords:** *Learner Autonomy; Writing Strategies; Informal Digital Learning; MMORPG; Chat Room;*

## INTRODUCTION

Writing is widely acknowledged as the most cognitively demanding skill in second language acquisition, involving simultaneous management of linguistic accuracy, lexical selection, idea development, and rhetorical organization<sup>1</sup>. Recent empirical studies across Asian EFL contexts

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<sup>1</sup> Khartite, M., L. Youssef, and A. Benhima. 2021. "Lexical and Syntactic Issues in EFL Writing." *International Journal of Applied Linguistics* 31, no. 1: 78–95.

have consistently reported persistent challenges among learners, particularly relating to limited lexical resources, syntactic complexity, and coherence in extended written tasks<sup>2</sup>. These difficulties are magnified for Indonesian EFL learners, who frequently encounter writing as an assessment-oriented rather than communication-oriented skill<sup>3</sup>.

In the Indonesian EFL context, writing instruction is often characterized by teacher-centered approaches, controlled tasks, and limited opportunities for authentic, communicative writing practice<sup>4</sup>. Learners typically rely on teacher feedback and classroom exercises, which may not fully support the development of fluency, risk-taking, or real-time meaning negotiation<sup>5</sup>. As a result, students rarely engage in spontaneous written communication in English, and their exposure to authentic written input remains limited.<sup>6</sup>

The rapid shift toward digital communication environments has reshaped the ways in which EFL learners use English beyond the classroom. Students increasingly engage with English through social media, online forums, games, and messaging platforms<sup>7</sup>. Synchronous digital communication, such as real-time chat, provides a unique environment where learners can use English for immediate, communicative purposes rather than solely academic tasks<sup>8</sup>. Within this landscape, Informal Digital Learning of English (IDLE) has emerged as a significant phenomenon<sup>9</sup>. IDLE encompasses self-initiated, self-regulated English learning through digital tools outside structured instruction<sup>10</sup>. Research in recent years highlights that meaning-focused digital engagement fosters authentic language use, reduces anxiety, and facilitates the development

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<sup>2</sup> Bai, B., Shen, B., and Mei, H. 2020. "Hong Kong Primary Students' Self-Regulated Writing Strategy Use: Influences of Gender, Writing Proficiency, and Grade Level." *Studies in Educational Evaluation* 65: 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.stueduc.2020.100839>

<sup>3</sup> Khartite, M., L. Youssef, and A. Benhima. 2021. "Lexical and Syntactic Issues in EFL Writing." *International Journal of Applied Linguistics* 31, no. 1: 78–95.

<sup>4</sup> Armanda, Livia. 2022. "Teacher-Centered Approaches in Indonesian EFL Writing Classrooms." *Indonesian EFL Journal* 8, no. 1: 33–47.

<sup>5</sup> Azizah, N., and Warni, L. 2024. "Formal and Informal Digital Writing in EFL Contexts." *Journal of English and Education* 13, no. 2: 120–135.

<sup>6</sup> Hashim, H., Harun, and Rahmat. 2024. "ICT Integration and Writing Achievement." *Journal of Educational Technology* 15, no. 1: 44–58.

<sup>7</sup> Jeon, Y. K., Soo-Min Kim, and Hyuna Park. 2021. "Synchronous Chat as a Tool for EFL Writing." *TESOL Quarterly* 55, no. 3: 811–839.

<sup>8</sup> Boutabi, A., L. Renard, and P. Dubois. 2023. "Digital Messaging Platforms in Language Learning." *ReCALL* 35, no. 2: 233–251.

<sup>9</sup> De Wilde, Vanessa, Philippe Sarrazin, and Jonas Debeer. 2022. "Meaning-Focused IDLE Activities and L2 Performance." *Language Learning & Technology* 26, no. 2: 63–85.

<sup>10</sup> Liu, Hui, Qian Wang, and Ying Zhou. 2023. "Digital Autonomy and EFL Learner Engagement in Informal Learning Environments." *Computers & Education* 195: 104713.

of communicative competence<sup>11</sup>. These characteristics align well with the type of writing practice necessary for achieving fluency and building confidence.

Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games (MMORPGs) offer highly interactive, persistent digital worlds where learners communicate with diverse international players<sup>12</sup>. The global chat room feature in MMORPGs enables real-time written interaction, exposing learners to authentic language input and encouraging active participation<sup>13</sup>. This environment supports the negotiation of meaning, pragmatic adaptation, and immediate feedback, conditions that are rarely present in traditional classrooms.

Previous research on game-based learning has primarily focused on motivational outcomes, vocabulary acquisition, or speaking skills.<sup>14</sup> While these studies underscore the potential benefits of game-mediated communication, limited attention has been given to writing skill development, especially in relation to autonomous learning strategies enacted within MMORPG chat environments<sup>15</sup>. Furthermore, empirical work exploring this phenomenon in the Indonesian EFL context remains scarce<sup>16</sup>.

This study addresses those gaps by investigating the specific autonomous strategies that Indonesian EFL students enact when writing in the global chat room of Black Desert Mobile, and by examining how those strategies contribute to observable improvements in writing. By focusing on real chat logs and participants' descriptions of their own practice. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the autonomous learning strategies employed by Indonesian EFL learners when engaging in global chat interactions within Black Desert Mobile and to examine how these strategies contribute to the enhancement of their writing skills.

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<sup>11</sup> Zou, Bin, Jun Liu, and Terry Norell. 2025. "Digital Informal Learning of English and Learner Self-Regulation." *Language Learning & Technology* 29, no. 1: 23–41.

<sup>12</sup> Ahmed, Rafiq, Benjamin Stein, and Rose MacLaren. 2022. "MMORPGs as Tools for Language Learning: A Qualitative Synthesis." *International Journal of Applied Linguistics* 33, no. 4: 455–479.

<sup>13</sup> Barrun, Elvira, and Nathan Gilbas. 2024. "A Meta-Analysis of Game-Based Learning in EFL Contexts." *Education and Information Technologies* 29: 3323–3348.

<sup>14</sup> Kalogiannakis, Michail, Panagiotis Zervas, and Alexandra Parmakli. 2021. "Gamification and Motivation in Language Learning." *Education and Information Technologies* 26: 3245–3270.

<sup>15</sup> Mursidin, Efi, and Nur Maemunah. 2022. "Digital Games for EFL Vocabulary Development." *Journal of Educational Media* 18, no. 2: 203–218.

<sup>16</sup> Azizah, N. 2023. "Speaking Interaction in Online Games." *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics* 13, no. 3: 540–556.

## **METHODS**

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design with a phenomenological approach. The reason for selecting this approach was to understand the students' real experiences, thoughts, and actions when interacting in the global chat room of Black Desert Mobile. Rather than focusing on numerical patterns, the study aimed to capture how students independently used strategies while writing in an authentic digital environment.

The data used in this study consisted of two types: interview data and documentation data. The interview data contained students' explanations regarding their writing habits, difficulties, and strategies during global chat interactions. The documentation data consisted of screenshots of chat logs that were actually written by the participants inside the global chat room. These two types of data were chosen to ensure that the students' statements in the interviews were supported by real evidence from their writing activities.

The data sources consisted of seven seventh-semester English Education students from UIN Salatiga. These participants were selected purposively based on specific criteria: they actively played Black Desert Mobile, regularly used the global chat feature, and were willing to share their chat documentation. The number of participants was adjusted to the depth of qualitative analysis required, allowing detailed interpretation of individual experiences.

Data collection was carried out using two techniques. First, semi-structured interviews were conducted individually with each participant. The interviews lasted approximately 30–45 minutes and were guided by an interview protocol that had been prepared in advance. This format was chosen to allow for flexibility in follow-up questions while ensuring that all research focus areas were covered. Second, documentation of chat logs was collected by asking each participant to provide screenshots of their recent interactions. These screenshots were reviewed to identify actual writing behaviors, including how students corrected mistakes, repeated structures, used vocabulary, or experimented with expressions.

The data analysis technique used in this study was thematic analysis. The researcher began by reading all interview transcripts and chat logs several times to understand the overall pattern. After that, initial coding was performed by marking important phrases or sentences that indicated writing strategies. These codes were then grouped into categories representing similar actions or behaviors. From these categories, the researcher developed broader themes that described the autonomous strategies used by the participants. This process was carried out manually, step by step, to maintain accuracy in relation to the actual data.

The operational choice of thematic analysis was based on the need to identify clear patterns from rich qualitative data. Since the focus of the study was on how students applied strategies in

real writing situations, thematic analysis allowed the researcher to describe these patterns accurately and systematically.

To ensure the accuracy of the findings, triangulation was conducted by comparing interview data and chat documentation. Member checking was also conducted by asking participants to confirm whether the researcher's interpretations matched their actual experiences. Ethical considerations were applied throughout the process by anonymizing participants' identities and ensuring that all chat documentation did not reveal personal or sensitive information.

## **RESULTS**

The analysis of interview transcripts and chat documentation revealed four central themes representing the autonomous learning strategies employed by students while interacting in the global chat rooms of Black Desert Mobile. These strategies emerged organically in response to the communicative demands of the environment and reflected the students' self-regulated approaches to developing their writing competence.

### **A. Self-Correction Triggered by Peer Feedback**

Participants frequently engaged in self-correction following informal peer feedback from international players. Feedback was typically spontaneous, context-driven, and delivered in short corrective prompts such as reformulated sentences or explicit corrections of grammatical forms. Students described experiencing "noticing moments" when peers pointed out mistakes in verb tense, prepositions, or idiomatic expressions.

They responded to these corrective cues by editing and rewriting their messages, adjusting sentence structure, and internalizing the corrected form through repeated use. Chat documentation displayed clear patterns of instant revision when learners received feedback. One student observed: "When other players corrected my sentence, I immediately rewrote it. It felt like being guided, but in an informal way." (P4) This process facilitated autonomous monitoring of language accuracy and encouraged learners to regulate their own writing development.

### **B. Repetition and Consistent Daily Writing Practice**

All participants reported using English daily in the global chat room, which functioned as a low-anxiety writing space. They deliberately repeated specific sentence structures, lexical items, and communicative functions to strengthen their fluency and confidence. Two forms of repetition were identified: form repetition, which involves

repeating sentence patterns with slight modifications, and function repetition, which involves using similar structures repeatedly for the same communicative purpose (e.g., asking for help, offering support, or giving information).

Students noted that regular daily interaction accelerated their ability to think in English: “Because I type in English every day, the words come more automatically now.” (P2)

Chat logs confirmed the presence of fast-paced exchanges, frequent phatic expressions, routine greetings, and function-oriented messages. Daily exposure and repetition contributed significantly to improved writing fluency.

### **C. Vocabulary Enrichment Through Authentic Exposure**

Authentic interactions in the chat room facilitated substantial vocabulary expansion. Students encountered: new gaming-related terms, idiomatic expressions, colloquial or slang language, and context-specific collocations.

This exposure differed sharply from their formal classroom learning, which tended to be more controlled and textbook-based. Learners described that they “picked up” vocabulary naturally through immersion. “I learn vocabulary I never find in textbooks, sometimes slang, sometimes idioms.” (P7) Several participants intentionally recorded new expressions in digital notes or attempted to reuse them in subsequent conversations. Chat documentation indicated clear lexical progression: students moved from basic phrases (“I help you”) to more natural expressions (“I can back you up, don’t worry”), showing increased lexical range and pragmatic awareness.

### **D. Experimenting with New Expressions in a Low-Pressure Environment**

Participants leveraged the global chat room as a safe environment for experimenting with structures they were unfamiliar with. The anonymity and informal tone of the platform lowered their anxiety and encouraged risk-taking in language production. Students reported feeling comfortable trying out new grammatical patterns, rhetorical structures, and even casual or playful language forms, knowing that mistakes were socially acceptable: “I feel free to try new sentences. Even if I make mistakes, people don’t criticize, it’s just part of the game.” (P6) This freedom to experiment fostered linguistic creativity and encouraged learners to test pragmatic choices, refine their sentence-building skills, and practice cohesive devices such as connectors and conjunctions. The “trial-and-error” nature of digital communication contributed directly to their writing development.

## DISCUSSION

The present study examined how Indonesian EFL learners engage in autonomous learning strategies through written interactions in the global chat room of Black Desert Mobile. The findings provide evidence that informal digital environments, particularly MMORPG chat rooms, offer fertile ground for authentic, strategy-driven writing development. This section discusses the findings in relation to existing literature and highlights their pedagogical implications.

### A. Autonomous Regulation in Digital Writing Environments

The emergence of self-correction triggered by peer feedback confirms the central role of learner autonomy in digital spaces. Autonomy-supportive environments enable students to take responsibility for monitoring and evaluating their language output<sup>17</sup>. Consistent with autonomy-supportive models of language learning, the learners in this study actively regulated their writing accuracy without teacher intervention<sup>18</sup>. Their willingness to respond to peer input illustrates that autonomy is not merely an internal disposition, but a socially mediated process shaped by interactional dynamics in the digital environment.

This result aligns with the claim that autonomy flourishes when learners experience agency, competence, and relatedness. The informal nature of the chat room allowed participants to navigate linguistic challenges at their own pace, highlighting the importance of community-driven interaction in sustaining autonomous behavior.

### B. Strategic Writing Behavior Through Repetition and Daily Engagement

The findings also demonstrate that repetition and daily writing practice facilitated the development of writing fluency. Students who repeatedly used similar structures in real-time communication reported increased automaticity and confidence. This is consistent with research identifying metacognitive strategies, such as planning, monitoring, and self-evaluation, as dominant mechanisms among proficient EFL writers.

The global chat room supported these strategies by offering an uninterrupted stream of communicative opportunities. Unlike controlled classroom tasks, the informal digital environment encouraged spontaneous production of English, which in turn

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<sup>17</sup> Ghasemi, Marjan, and Maryam Noughabi. 2024. "Learner Autonomy Development in Technology-Mediated EFL Contexts." *Journal of Applied Linguistics* 15, no. 1: 45–62

<sup>18</sup> Liu, Hui, Qian Wang, and Ying Zhou. 2024. "Digital Autonomy in Informal Learning Environments." *ReCALL* 36, no. 1: 124–142.

enhanced speed, flexibility, and ease of expression. This supports prior work suggesting that sustained engagement in writing tasks helps consolidate linguistic knowledge and promotes fluency.

### **C. Vocabulary Development Through Meaning-Focused Interaction**

The role of authentic exposure in enriching participants' vocabulary echoes theories of meaning-focused learning in informal digital contexts. Students reported encountering new lexical items, idioms, collocations, and slang while interacting with international players<sup>19</sup>. Their attempts to internalize and reuse these items suggest active lexical noticing and intentional vocabulary learning<sup>20</sup>.

This finding reinforces the notion that meaning-focused activities in digital environments have a positive impact on linguistic competence. Exposure to varied input, combined with opportunities to test new vocabulary in authentic interaction, creates a rich lexical learning environment. The progressive shift from basic to more natural expressions seen in chat documentation further demonstrates that MMORPGs can serve as effective platforms for vocabulary development.

### **D. Experimentation and Risk-Taking in a Low-Pressure Space**

The study's findings show that students experimented with unfamiliar structures and expressions due to the low-pressure nature of the chat room. Anonymity and the absence of formal assessment encouraged risk-taking, a fundamental aspect of linguistic creativity and growth. This aligns with research indicating that students are more willing to experiment linguistically when the threat of negative evaluation is minimized.

The global chat room allowed learners to explore a range of pragmatic choices, cohesive devices, and stylistic variations. Such experimentation is often difficult to achieve in traditional classrooms where accuracy is prioritized over communicative effectiveness. The digital environment thus served as an incubator for developing linguistic flexibility and exploratory writing.

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<sup>19</sup> Kalogiannakis, Michail, Panagiotis Zervas, and Alexandra Parmakli. 2021. "Gamification and Motivation in Language Learning." *Education and Information Technologies* 26: 3245–3270.

<sup>20</sup> Azizah, N., and Warni, L. 2024. "Formal and Informal Digital Writing in EFL Contexts." *Journal of English and Education* 13, no. 2: 120–135.

## **E. Integration of Strategies: A Holistic Pathway to Writing Development**

A critical contribution of this study is the demonstration of how autonomous strategies interact to support writing development. The four strategies identified: self-correction, repetition, vocabulary enrichment, and experimentation. Formed an integrated pathway that contributed to both accuracy and fluency. Self-correction improved grammatical precision, Repetition built fluency and speed, Vocabulary enrichment expanded lexical resources, and experimentation enhanced pragmatic and stylistic range.

This integration aligns with models of self-regulated learning, where learners orchestrate cognitive and metacognitive strategies to achieve long-term writing goals. The findings, therefore, emphasize the importance of employing multiple, overlapping strategies to sustain writing improvement.

## **F. The Role of MMORPG Chat Rooms as Informal Writing Platforms**

The results affirm the pedagogical value of MMORPG chat rooms as informal digital learning environments. These spaces: promote real-time communication, offer authentic audiences, support peer interaction, and encourage self-directed practice. Unlike structured learning environments, MMORPG chat rooms offer a continuous flow of authentic input and output, facilitating sustained writing engagement<sup>21</sup>. This supports the perspective that digital informal learning environments can complement formal instruction rather than replace it<sup>22</sup>.

The study contributes to the growing body of literature demonstrating that game-based environments are not merely motivational but linguistically productive<sup>23</sup>. They offer affordances for the negotiation of meaning, pragmatic adaptation, and social scaffolding, all of which are crucial for writing development.

## **Implications for Teaching and Learning**

The findings yield several pedagogical implications: Integrating autonomy-supportive practices. Teachers should encourage students to take responsibility for monitoring their own

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<sup>21</sup> Ahmed, Rafiq, Benjamin Stein, and Rose MacLaren. 2022. "MMORPGs as Tools for Language Learning: A Qualitative Synthesis." *International Journal of Applied Linguistics* 33, no. 4: 455–479.

<sup>22</sup> Barrun, Elvira, and Nathan Gilbas. 2024. "A Meta-Analysis of Game-Based Learning in EFL Contexts." *Education and Information Technologies* 29: 3323–3348.

<sup>23</sup> Yoohyun, Brandon. 2024. "Sociolinguistic Dynamics in Online Global Chatrooms." *Journal of Interactive Communication* 17, no. 2: 144–165.

writing and to seek feedback beyond the classroom. Leveraging digital writing platforms, Educators can guide students to use synchronous chat platforms as supplementary spaces for writing practice. Promoting strategy awareness. Raising awareness of writing strategies helps students transfer skills from digital environments to academic writing tasks. Recognizing informal learning Institutions should acknowledge informal digital learning as a legitimate contributor to language development.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study concludes that Indonesian EFL learners employed four interconnected autonomous learning strategies, self-correction triggered by peer feedback, repetition and daily use of English, vocabulary enrichment through authentic exposure, and experimentation with new expressions, that collectively supported the development of their writing competence during interactions in the global chat room of Black Desert Mobile. These strategies enabled learners to monitor and refine linguistic accuracy, enhance fluency, expand lexical resources, and build confidence in real-time communication. The findings confirm that MMORPG chat rooms serve as informal digital learning spaces that promote learner autonomy and offer meaningful, authentic opportunities for writing practice. As such, they complement formal instruction by offering continuous, interest-driven engagement with language use that is difficult to achieve in traditional classroom settings.

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## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

The authors would like to acknowledge the valuable support provided by the Master's English Education Department of UIN Salatiga throughout the completion of this research. Sincere appreciation is extended to the lecturers and academic staff whose guidance and feedback contributed significantly to the development of this study. The authors also thank the participating students for their willingness to share their experiences and provide essential data for this project. Their contributions were vital in ensuring the success of this research.