

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the present study by providing the background, research problem, objectives, and significance of the research. It begins by discussing the growing use of Game-Based Learning (GBL) in EFL classrooms and the challenges faced by student teachers during its implementation in teaching practice. The chapter also presents the formulation of the problem, operational definitions, research aims, and the significance of the study as the foundation for the subsequent chapters.

A. Background of the Study

Game-Based Learning (GBL) has increasingly gained attention in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom because of its potential to create engaging and interactive learning environments. GBL integrates games into the learning process and provides opportunities for learners to experience fun, motivating, and meaningful language learning (Ismail et al., 2025). By combining educational objectives with the dynamics of play, GBL encourages active participation, collaboration, and problem-solving skills that are essential in 21st-century learning contexts.

Based on a preliminary study conducted through discussion and reflection during the school-based internship program (FKIP EDU) in one of the junior high schools in Tasikmalaya, student teachers implemented GBL activities to make the classroom more engaging and interactive. Digital tools such as Quizizz and Wordwall were intentionally embedded within the learning process as game-based activities rather than used merely for assessment. These platforms were primarily utilized as interactive learning (Yulistiyani et al., 2025) media and formative assessment tools (Zhang & Crawford, 2024), allowing student teachers to introduce new vocabulary, reinforce previously learned materials, and check students' understanding in an engaging manner. In some cases, the games also functioned as brainstorming activities (Huemaera & Mukhtar, 2022) and ice-breakers (Wanting, 2025) to attract

students' attention at the beginning of the lesson and to create a more relaxed learning atmosphere. Meanwhile, non-digital games such as vocabulary guessing activities were used for vocabulary building and meaning negotiation, where students actively guessed English words through translation-based prompts. Role-play practices, on the other hand, served as a form of communicative practice (Marliana et al., 2025), enabling students to simulate real-life interactions (Setyawan, 2025) and develop their speaking skills (Ishak & Aziz, 2022) in a more contextualized way.

Furthermore, the use of GBL was perceived by student teachers as a strategy to create a more enjoyable and less monotonous learning experience compared to conventional textbook-based instruction (Yulistiyan et al., 2025; Zhou, 2024). The integration of visually engaging and interactive games helped increase students' enthusiasm and participation, while also supporting teachers in managing classroom activities more efficiently.

Supporting this view, Pesántez-Sigüenza et al. (2023) conceptualize Quizizz and Wordwall as digital educational games that are designed to innovate the learning process by fostering interaction, motivation, and meaningful engagement. In addition, non-digital games such as vocabulary guessing activities, the student teachers prompted students to guess English words or their meanings through translation-based questions, while in role-play practices, students performed short dialogues to simulate real-life communication. The activities not only increased students' enthusiasm but also fostered a more collaborative classroom atmosphere.

From the discussion, it was observed that these activities helped create a livelier classroom atmosphere and motivated students to learn English more actively. However, not all student teachers were confident in designing or managing GBL activities effectively. Some expressed challenges in planning the games, managing time, and aligning the games with lesson objectives. This situation inspired the researcher to further explore what student teachers actually do when implementing GBL in the EFL classroom.

Previous studies have confirmed the positive impact of GBL on motivation, engagement, and language learning. A study by Ghazy et al. (2021) explored incorporating websites such as Kahoot! Quizizz, ESL Games Plus, and Duolingo highly increased learner motivation towards language acquisition through a planned sequence of instruction, presentation, and reflection. On the other hand, Johnson and Kim (2021) experimented with integrating GBL in pre-service teacher education to help them to explore new teaching practices and reflect on their pedagogical decisions. Similarly, Hu and Sperling (2022) investigated that even though pre-service teachers are aware of the motivational benefits of GBL, many of them still feel uncertain about how to implement it effectively in classroom settings.

However, despite the growing body of research on GBL, limited attention has been given to what student teachers actually do when implementing GBL in real EFL classroom settings during their teaching practicum. Previous studies have primarily focused on learning outcomes, teachers' perceptions, or controlled instructional contexts, rather than examining the concrete pedagogical actions undertaken by student teachers when designing, managing, and reflecting on GBL activities. In particular, there is a lack of descriptive studies that capture how GBL is enacted across different instructional stages, including pre-game, game, and post-game activities. Therefore, this study aims to describe what student teachers do when implementing GBL in the EFL classroom, during their school-based internship program.

B. Formulation of the Problem

The problem formulated in this study is: What do the student teachers do when implementing game-based learning (GBL) in the EFL classroom?

C. Operational Definitions

To avoid misunderstanding about the terms set out in this study, the researcher provides some definitions related to this study as follows:

- 1) Game-Based Learning (GBL)

GBL in this study refers to the integration of both digital and non-digital games into classroom instruction to facilitate English language learning conducted by student teachers during their school-based internship (FKIP EDU) in an EFL classroom at the junior high school level in Tasikmalaya. The games are intentionally used as part of practice in the classroom to enhance learning outcomes. The implementation of GBL in this context involves: pre-game, game, and post-game activities conducted by the student teachers during their teaching practice.

2) Student Teachers

College students enrolled in the English Education Department who served as the main participants of this study. They completed a one-semester school-based internship (FKIP EDU) at a junior high school in Tasikmalaya, where they were responsible for planning and conducting English lessons and have applied GBL as part of their teaching practice.

3) EFL Classroom

Refers to the teaching and learning setting where student teachers teach and junior high school students learn English as Foreign Language (EFL). This classroom context served as the environment where the implementation of GBL occurred and where the data of this study were collected.

D. Aim of the Study

According to the research question, this research aims to comprehensively describe what student teachers do when implementing Game-Based Learning (GBL) in the EFL classroom.

E. Significances of the Study

1. Practical Significance

Practically, this study can be used as a reference to help student teachers understand what kinds of activities when implementing GBL, so they can make more interactive and engaging learning in the EFL classroom.

2. Empirical Significance

This study will provide insight into what student teachers do when implementing GBL during teaching practice. The findings can help readers who want to explore classroom activities and GBL in the EFL classroom.