

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews the theoretical perspectives and previous studies relevant to the implementation of Game-Based Learning (GBL) in EFL classrooms. It discusses the concept and principles of GBL, its stages of implementation, and its pedagogical relevance to EFL teaching, with particular attention to the roles and challenges faced by student teachers. In addition, this chapter examines prior research on the use of GBL in English language learning to position the present study and highlight the need to explore what student teachers actually do when implementing GBL during teaching practice.

A. Game-Based Learning (GBL)

Game-based learning (GBL) is widely known as an innovative approach that replaces traditional instructional tasks with interactive, engaging games. Plass et al. (2020) explain that Game-Based Learning (GBL) refers to the redesign of learning tasks into games that are not only rule-based, responsive, and challenging, but also engaging and motivating for learners. Unlike gamification, GBL integrates a full range of game elements including mechanics, incentive structures, aesthetics, and narrative into the learning process itself. This distinction shows that GBL is not just about surface-level motivation. Instead, it uses the deeper psychological effects of games, such as a sense of achievement, immersion, and the excitement of competition, to keep people engaged in learning.

The implementation of GBL can be understood in three stages: pre-game, game, and post-game activities (Bado, 2019). The pre-game stage includes gameplay training, lectures, and handouts to build the foundation for meaningful participation. The game stage are things teachers do during gameplay, such as scaffolding, classroom management, and technical support to ensure smooth gameplay and learning. Finally, the post-game activities occur after gameplay, mainly through debriefing, discussion, and reflection, allowing students to consolidate their learning experiences and connect them

to broader educational objectives. These stages illustrate that GBL is not simply about playing games, but rather, it is about incorporating games into a well-designed instructional framework.

To provide a clearer overview of how these stages are implemented in practice, the following table 1 presents a visual representation of these three stages of GBL pedagogy adapted from Bado (2019), highlighting the key instructional practices carried out in each phase.

Table 1. Summary of Instructional activities implemented at each stage of the GBL process (Bado, 2019)

Game-based learning stage	Instructional activities
Pre-Game	Gameplay training: Gameplay demonstrations, practice Lecture: Curriculum content, game content Handouts: Guides, questions, problems to be solved
Game	Scaffolding: Scaffolding content and problem-solving Classroom management: Giving instructions, timekeeping, seating arrangements, keeping students on task Technical support: Hardware, software, Internet
Post-Game	Debriefing: Discussion and reflection

As illustrated in Table 1, the three stages of GBL are interconnected and function as a structured pedagogical sequence. It is clear that the three phases do not act independently but rather build on each other to make the overall learning process effective. Preparation, games and debriefing are all part of the pedagogic learning process which clearly shows that for successful GBL, it is important not just to have an interesting game but also appropriate preparation and post-game reflection.

GBL has been highly embraced as effective in language learning, particularly in enhancing engagement, motivation, and retention. Nadeem et al. (2023) show how digital games enhance active participation through competition and repetition, increasing vocabulary and form of language. Similarly, Purba and Katemba (2022) show that teachers view GBL as effective

in vocabulary enrichment, lowering anxiety, and fostering collaboration in class. Supported by this, Nur Jihan (2024) identifies that secondary students find GBL to make learning more fun and engaging, and improve reading, pronunciation, and flexibility through feedback and incremental difficulty. Together, these findings emphasize that GBL is not just an addition but an important pedagogical approach to active, collaborative, and productive language acquisition.

B. Principles of Game-Based Learning

Game-Based Learning (GBL) is effectively defined by a set of essential principles, proposed by Plass et al. (2015) that distinguish it from mere playful classroom activities.

1. Challenge-Response-Feedback Loop

GBL utilizes a continuous challenge, response, feedback loop, promoting learning through trial, error, and reflection, which helps learners grasp cause-and-effect relationships.

2. Multidimensional Engagement

GBL fosters cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and social, ensuring active participation and intrinsic motivation.

3. Adaptivity and Scaffolding

GBL allows games to adjust their level of difficulty according to learners' abilities, while scaffolding is gradually reduced to support independence and mastery.

4. Productive Failure (Safe Failure)

GBL provides a safe space for learners to experiment and make mistakes without fear of punishment, encouraging persistence and learning from failure.

5. Alignment between Game Mechanics and Learning Goals

Effective GBL requires alignment between game mechanics (rules, tasks, and rewards) and instructional objectives, ensuring that narrative, visuals, incentives, and challenges collectively create a meaningful, structured, interactive, and reflective educational experience.

While Plass et al. (2015) primarily emphasize the design and psychological principles of games for learning, subsequent studies highlight that the effectiveness of GBL also depends on how games are pedagogically facilitated in classroom contexts. In the context of teacher education, Foster and Shah (2020) highlight that GBL should be mediated by teachers in a strategic way through facilitation, reflection, and integration of the learning objectives of the curriculum. They highlight that the role of the teacher is important in linking the gameplay to the learning objectives and the process of meaning-making of the students. In addition, the process of reflection, particularly in the post-game phase, is highly regarded to ensure that the learning translates to the gameplay and applies to the conceptual level of learning. These perspectives suggest that GBL is not only defined by its game design principles but also by the instructional actions taken by teachers when implementing games in real classroom settings.

Based on these principles, game-based learning in this study is understood as a structured learning approach rather than merely playing games in the classroom. These principles serve as a framework to identify and describe the game-based learning activities carried out by student teachers in the EFL classroom. Therefore, this study focuses on examining what student teachers do when implementing GBL, particularly in relation to how the principles of GBL are reflected during pre-game, game, and post-game activities.

C. English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and the Pedagogical Justification of GBL

As a foreign language, the primary goal of EFL teaching is to equip students with the necessary language skills to communicate in various global contexts, whether for academic, professional, or social purposes. Effective EFL teaching is a significant topic in the area of educational research, and its nature and goals are perceived differently across cultures. According to Al-Mahrooqi et al. (2015) in Oman, teachers' effectiveness depends not only on personal qualities but also on the implementation of appreciated teacher practices by the host community. The study found that both instructors and students highly prize a

high level of English proficiency and fairness towards students in a teacher. Similarly, Dombaycı and Öztürk (2023) conducted a study in Turkey and concluded that pre-service teachers of EFL recognize an effective teacher to be creative, communicative, fluent, content-knowledgeable, and classroom management-skilled. Overall, successful EFL instruction is focused on creating a supportive and nurturing classroom learning environment and using teaching practices that are aligned to the needs of the learners.

In line with the goals of EFL instruction, the communicative approach has been firmly established as the cornerstone of effective language instruction, as it sets the focus on authentic application of language through meaningful interaction and not mere memorization of vocabulary or grammar (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Similarly, McKay and Brown (2000) highlight that meaningful interaction is the cornerstone of effective language instruction and acquisition. This guiding principle is particularly relevant to Game-Based Learning (GBL), since certain games are indeed designed to promote teamwork, problem-solving, and active use and production of the target language in a simulated real-world context. Studies have shown that GBL effectively enhances communication, collaboration, and inclusiveness by engaging students and enhancing their motivation (Al-Harbi & Madini, 2024). Similarly, Fithriani (2018) emphasizes communicative game-based activities that provide students with more opportunities to practice English in a less stressful, more meaningful way without focus on message only. This implies that GBL not only encourages lively communication but also operates to enable the communicative foundation necessary for effective EFL instruction on both message and language use.

D. The Roles and Challenges of Student Teachers in Implementing GBL

Student teachers have a basic role as agents of change that bridge the gap between educational theory and classroom practice. Practice-based learning enables them to integrate pedagogical and content knowledge into real teaching contexts so they can continue to develop their instructional competence and professional identity (Mwamakula, 2024). Within the 21st-century context, they are also required to be agents of research and innovation, transforming traditional classrooms into sites of active learning environments through creative and technology-driven pedagogies (H. Zhou et al., 2022). In addition, student teachers have the ability to exert professional agency by creating learning experiences for themselves and their mentors, facilitating whole-school improvement in teaching practices (Carmi & Tamir, 2021).

Despite their importance, student teachers encounter various challenges while undertaking teaching practice. Their limited classroom experience tends to deny them the ability to use the theoretical knowledge they acquired practically and maintain control of students in the application of interactive methods like GBL. Aldabbus (2020) notes that teachers are mostly unwilling or unprepared to teach in real classrooms, hence experiencing classroom management issues and lack of control. In addition, a lack of adequate school support such as lack of instructional resources or materials, also restrict their effort of innovative methodologies. Even some schoolteachers or mentors prefer syllabus completion over innovation, thereby discouraging student teachers from seeking innovative and modern pedagogies. Thus, they feel challenged to keep the balance between innovation and organizational requirements along with handling limited guidance and professional support.

Based on the discussion above, student teachers play an important role in bringing innovative teaching approaches, such GBL, into real classroom practice. However, their role is not without challenges. Limited teaching experience, classroom management issues, and insufficient support from schools often make it difficult for student teachers to implement GBL effectively. These conditions show that although student teachers are expected

to act as agents of change, they still need guidance, preparation, and practical understanding to manage game-based activities in the classroom. Therefore, it is important to closely examine what student teachers actually do when implementing GBL during their teaching practice.

E. Study of Relevant Research

Previous studies have examined the application of game-based learning (GBL) to language learning and provided useful findings on which the present study draws. Hidayah et al. (2023) explain the application of GBL for vocabulary mastery among EFL students in three phases: pre-teaching, during teaching, and post-teaching. This format is similar to this study's pre-game, game, and post-game implemented by student teachers. This research proves the need to address GBL as a well-structured process rather than a separated activity. Belda-Medina and Calvo-Ferrer (2022) also found that, although future teachers have a positive attitude toward digital game-based language learning, they also have inadequate practical knowledge to implement it appropriately in the classroom. These findings highlight the need for practice-based training that integrates theory and practical application, supporting the rationale for examining student teachers' real practices. Finally, Cabrera-Solano (2022) showed that using digital games like Genially in EFL teaching really improves students' grammar and vocabulary knowledge, as well as their motivation and engagement. This study also highlights the vital role of teachers in running games and giving feedback, which backs up this study's focus on the specific actions and strategies used by student teachers when they use GBL in the classroom.