

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the study. It comprises the background, the formulation of the problem, operational definitions, the aim of the study, and the significance of the study.

A. Background of the Study

The teaching journey of a teacher named Caca (pseudonym), who has been teaching for eighteen years, shows how her classroom teaching practices have evolved through experience, reflection, and changes in the educational context. Her teaching career began with teaching ICT (Information and Communication Technology) at an Islamic junior high school for two years. In her third year, she passed the civil servant examination for the position of an English teacher, which marked the beginning of her journey in teaching English. Her early experience as an English teacher began when she was assigned to a junior high school in a rural area. Most students in that area had limited English proficiency, as well as low motivation to learn English. In addition, Akbari (2015) states that teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is a challenging task, especially at the junior high school level, where students often struggle to communicate in English in real-life contexts despite having learned the language. As experienced by Caca, an unsupportive environment and teaching methods based on traditional approaches, such as memorizing vocabulary and grammar, often made the learning process passive and failed to actively engage students, leading to low motivation and enthusiasm. Therefore, Lin (2022) argues that one of the main causes of decreased motivation among EFL students is non-interactive teaching styles or monotonous teaching routines that focus heavily on grammar and vocabulary memorization.

Accordingly, the monotonous teaching routines that Caca often practiced frequently led to students having low motivation. This occurred because classroom activities tended to make students less interested and less engaged in learning. Additionally, Aksoy and Tulgar (2024) explain that EFL classes emphasizing mechanical memorization rather than meaningful communication often result in passive learning, which may reduce students' motivation. Furthermore, low

enthusiasm became apparent when students remained passive and inactive during lessons, particularly when classroom activities lacked interaction or meaningful participation. In line with this, Wafubwa (2022) explains that student inactivity often occurs when learning is disconnected from real-life contexts or does not include activities that stimulate curiosity and enjoyment. Therefore, when teaching strategies lack variation and rely too heavily on exam-oriented grammar exercises, students' motivation and enthusiasm for learning English tend to decline.

After years of relying on traditional teaching methods, Caca began to reflect on the effectiveness of her classroom practices, particularly after attending a workshop on interactive learning that highlighted the importance of increasing students' interest and enthusiasm in English learning. From this experience, she became more committed to finding teaching approaches and learning media that were suitable for her students' environment and abilities. This reflection gradually became the starting point of change in Caca's teaching journey, leading her to explore more interactive methods, particularly through the implementation of GBL. However, shifting from traditional learning to more interactive approaches was not an immediate success. In the early stages of implementation, when Caca attempted to introduce the games in teaching practices, some students did not immediately respond positively. Instead, several students appeared confused and disconnected from the learning process because the game instructions and mechanics felt unfamiliar to them. This situation became more challenging as many students had long been accustomed to conventional teaching routines that focused heavily on memorization and teacher-centered instruction. Realizing this, Caca began to adopt a more gradual approach by first integrating simple and familiar games adapted to the available classroom resources, such as singing activities to memorize vocabulary and improve fluency, picture-matching games, and movement-based activities to help students understand vocabulary and language structures more comfortably.

Although Caca later moved to teach at a school in the city center, challenges related to students' learning motivation remained, particularly among those who still perceived English as a difficult subject. This situation encouraged her to

reintegrate and further develop GBL practices that were more suitable for students' needs and classroom conditions. Curriculum changes also influenced her pedagogical decisions, particularly with the implementation of the emancipated curriculum, which encourages teachers to integrate creative and innovative learning activities. In line with this, Monalisa (2023) explains that educators are encouraged to continuously innovate and be creative in developing learning styles. Therefore, Caca continued exploring newer forms of GBL and gradually combined them with digital media to improve classroom engagement. After several trial-and-error attempts, she began implementing games such as *Snakes and Ladders* for grammar and vocabulary practice, *Storytelling activities* for descriptive and narrative texts, *Quizizz* for timed grammar and reading exercises, and the *Interacty* application for vocabulary, listening, and speaking activities. However, Adipati et al. (2021) emphasize that the use of games in GBL must align with learning materials and students' ability levels. Moreover, Ghazy et al. (2021) highlight that GBL can intentionally be used to improve motivation because the element of enjoyment encourages students to participate actively. Despite these potential benefits, the implementation of GBL often needs careful adaptation to students' characteristics, learning needs, and the classroom learning context.

However, the implementation of GBL does not always result in immediate success, particularly in junior high school classrooms where students possess varying levels of readiness, motivation, and English proficiency. When teachers introduce traditional or digital games too quickly, students may initially experience confusion or disconnection because the game instructions, mechanics, or learning platforms feel unfamiliar. This challenge was also evident in Caca's early experience in implementing GBL, where some students struggled to adapt to interactive learning after being accustomed to traditional, teacher-centered classroom routines. These challenges suggest that Caca needs to carefully consider students' readiness and familiarity with game-based activities when introducing GBL in the classroom. Moreover, another challenge frequently encountered in junior high school classrooms is the disparity in students' English proficiency levels. In a classroom with a variety of ability levels, some students may respond

better and demonstrate a deeper understanding, while others may struggle to follow instructions or participate in class activities with confidence.

Therefore, the successful implementation of GBL also requires appropriate classroom management strategies, such as heterogeneous grouping, where more active or proficient students can support peers with lower language proficiency, creating a more inclusive and collaborative learning environment. Teachers' efforts to gradually implement and adapt GBL are closely related to the concept of Teacher Professional Development (TPD). Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) explain that effective professional development improves teaching quality and student learning outcomes, meaning that teachers need to continuously develop pedagogical skills to fulfill students' needs. However, professional development alone is insufficient without teacher agency. According to Priestley et al. (2015), teacher agency is not something teachers simply possess, but something they enact through making decisions, taking initiative, and deliberately adjusting teaching practices according to classroom realities. Priestley et al. (2015) further emphasize that teacher agency emerges when teachers reflect on their experiences, consider available options, and adapt their actions to contextual classroom needs. This perspective is reinforced by Hoskin (2025), who argues that professional development becomes more meaningful when grounded in teachers' real experiences and supported by autonomy, which is a central component of teacher agency. In this regard, teachers' adaptive decisions, such as gradually introducing GBL, selecting contextually appropriate games, and managing mixed-ability classrooms, can be understood as forms of agency developed through continuous professional learning.

There are previous studies conducted regarding the teacher perspective toward the implementation of game-based learning. First, Dwirahmita (2020) found that junior high school teachers considered GBL to be effective in enriching students' vocabulary and making classes more lively. Second, Pratiwi et al. (2022) also claim that GBL successfully increases student motivation, engagement, and understanding. Last, Sarias et al. (2025) also reveals that the implementation of GBL provides significant benefits for students' language proficiency, especially in maintaining their interest and participation.

Existing studies have primarily examined GBL from the perspective of its effectiveness in improving students' vocabulary, motivation, engagement, and language achievement (Dwirahmita, 2020; Pratiwi et al., 2022; Sarias et al., 2025). Which studies from (Dwirahmita, 2020; Pratiwi et al., 2022; Sarias et al., 2025) have also explored teachers' perceptions of GBL implementation; however, these studies largely describe teachers' opinions regarding the benefits of GBL rather than the process through which teachers experience, interpret, and continuously adapt their instructional practices. Consequently, still little exploration about teacher classroom challenges, constructing pedagogical understanding through experience, and making instructional decisions throughout the implementation of GBL. Such experiences are important because they reveal the dynamic process of professional learning, which cannot be fully captured through research that focuses only on learning outcomes or teachers' perceptions. To better understand this professional learning process, this study draws on Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (1984), which conceptualizes learning as a cyclical process of concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. Within this study, Kolb's framework serves as an interpretive lens for understanding how teachers construct pedagogical knowledge through their classroom experiences.

B. Formulation of the Problem

Based on the background above, the writer conclude the formulation of the problem with the research question, "What are teacher experiences of implementing Game-Based Learning (GBL) in junior high school?"

C. Operational Definitions

1. Teacher's Experiences

In this study, the teacher's experience refers to the lived and narrated experience of a junior high school English teacher in implementing and gradually adapting GBL in response to classroom challenges, students' motivation, and varying levels of English proficiency. This experience involves the teacher's pedagogical journey, including reflection on traditional teaching practices, decision-making processes, trial-and-error experiences, and the

gradual transformation from conventional learning approaches to the use of traditional and digital games to create a more engaging, interactive, and supportive English-language learning environment.

2. Game-Based Learning

In this study, GBL refers to the instructional approach utilized by the teacher that combines Traditional Games (e.g., throwing a ball, puzzles, singing activities, and physical matching games) and Digital Games (e.g., Quizizz and other interactive learning platforms) applied progressively based on students' adaptation levels, classroom readiness, and learning needs. This approach is implemented gradually to support students' engagement, motivation, and understanding of English materials in a more interactive and supportive English-language learning environment.

3. Junior High School Teacher

In this study, a junior high school English teacher refers to an English teacher who implements GBL in English language teaching at the junior high school level. The participant in this study is an English teacher with approximately eighteen years of teaching experience across various grade levels in junior high school. She continuously develops her professional competence by attending seminars, exploring learning strategies, and adapting her teaching practices in response to curriculum changes. Over the past five years, she has gradually implemented GBL as part of her pedagogical efforts to increase students' motivation, engagement, and understanding in English learning.

4. Experiential Learning

In the context of this study, Experiential Learning refers to the process through which the teacher experiences, reflects on, interprets, and gradually develops GBL practices in English language teaching through direct classroom experiences. Grounded in Kolb's (1984) theory, this concept is used to understand how the teacher continuously transforms classroom experiences into pedagogical knowledge, decision-making, and instructional improvement.

5. Narrative Inquiry

In this study, Narrative Inquiry refers to a qualitative approach used to

explore in depth the lived experiences and professional journey of a teacher in implementing GBL. This approach focuses on understanding how the teacher narrates, reflects on, and makes meaning of the implementation process, including the challenges encountered, pedagogical decisions made, perceived benefits, and lessons learned throughout classroom experiences.

D. Aim of the Study

This study aims to narrate the experiences of an English teacher in implementing GBL in a junior high school. It seeks to describe the teacher's journey by exploring the process, challenges, benefits, and lessons learned throughout the implementation of game-based learning.

E. Significances of the Study

1. Theoretical Significance

Theoretically, this study enriches the literature on Experiential Learning Theory by Kolb (1984) by providing concrete empirical insights into how a teacher navigates the four stages of the learning cycle (concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation) when transitioning from traditional teaching methods to Game-Based Learning (GBL). Through the lens of Experience-Based Learning Theory, this study explores how teachers develop new understandings of the learning process while responding to the challenges, student diversity, and constantly changing classroom contexts encountered during the implementation of Game-Based Learning.

2. Practical Significance

Practically, for teachers, this research provides actionable pedagogical insights and strategic templates on how to implement GBL gradually, moving from low-risk traditional games to digital platforms (e.g., Quizizz) while maintaining a high level of student engagement. For students, indirectly, the implementation of these refined GBL strategies creates a more inclusive, communicative, and enjoyable classroom environment. This approach bridges their cognitive gaps, making complex English materials easier to grasp, while bolstering their motivation to express opinions and engage in collaborative

dialogues.

3. Empirical Significance

Empirically, this study addresses a crucial research gap by shifting the focus from common quantitative measures of student outcomes to an in-depth, qualitative narrative inquiry of a teacher's lived experiences. It offers a rare empirical account of the actual classroom dynamics, pedagogical adjustments, and the potential development of a hybrid GBL model (combining traditional and digital formats simultaneously). By narrating the journey of an English teacher, this study serves as a rich empirical reference for future researchers aiming to explore or experimentally validate the integration of hybrid game-based frameworks in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context.