

## EXPLORING TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF GAME-BASED LEARNING IN ENGLISH CLASSROOMS: A CASE STUDY AT A PRIVATE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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**Abstract:** Game-Based Learning (GBL) has increasingly been used in English language classrooms to promote motivation, participation, and meaningful language practice among young learners. However, the successful implementation of GBL depends not only on students' responses but also on teachers' perceptions, readiness, and classroom decision-making. Previous studies have shown that teachers generally perceive games as useful for increasing engagement, motivation, and learning interaction, yet they also report challenges related to classroom management, time allocation, technological access, and instructional alignment. This study aimed to explore teachers' perceptions of Game-Based Learning in English classrooms at a private elementary school. A qualitative case study design was employed involving eight English teachers and classroom teachers who had experience using games in English lessons. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and teaching reflection notes. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed five major themes: GBL as a motivating instructional strategy, GBL as support for vocabulary and language practice, GBL as a tool for active participation, challenges in classroom implementation, and the need for teacher readiness and pedagogical planning. The study concludes that teachers perceived GBL positively when it was aligned with learning objectives, student characteristics, and classroom routines. However, effective implementation required clear rules, appropriate game selection, time management, and teacher facilitation. The findings suggest that teacher training and practical guidance are necessary to support meaningful integration of Game-Based Learning in elementary English classrooms.

**Keywords:** English classroom, game-based learning, private elementary school, teacher perception, young learners.

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## INTRODUCTION

Game-Based Learning has become increasingly relevant in English language teaching because it offers interactive learning experiences that can support motivation, participation, and language practice. In elementary school contexts, English teachers often face the challenge of maintaining young learners' attention while helping them acquire vocabulary, pronunciation, and simple communicative expressions. Game-based activities provide opportunities for learners to engage with English through rules, challenges, feedback, collaboration, and enjoyment. Plass, Homer, and Kinzer (2015) explain that effective game-based learning should be understood from cognitive, motivational, affective, and sociocultural perspectives, indicating that games are not merely entertainment but can function as structured learning environments when designed pedagogically.

Previous research has shown that games and gamification can positively influence learning motivation and engagement. Hamari, Koivisto, and Sarsa (2014), in their review of empirical studies, found that gamification generally produced positive effects, although outcomes depended on the learning context and implementation design. Similarly, Sailer and Homner's (2020) meta-analysis reported significant effects of gamification on cognitive, motivational, and behavioral learning outcomes. These findings suggest that game-based approaches may support English learning when teachers use them intentionally rather than as unrelated classroom entertainment.

In English language classrooms, GBL is particularly useful because it creates opportunities for repeated language exposure and low-pressure practice. Reinders and Wattana (2015) found that digital game-based language learning could support willingness to communicate in English by creating a less threatening environment for interaction. For young learners, this is important because fear of making mistakes can prevent them from speaking or participating actively. Games may reduce anxiety by shifting attention from formal correctness to meaningful participation.

However, the implementation of Game-Based Learning depends strongly on teachers. Teachers decide which games are appropriate, how games are connected to learning objectives, how rules are explained, how students are grouped, and how learning outcomes are evaluated. Huizenga et al. (2017) found that teachers who used digital games perceived them as valuable for learning and motivation, but their perceptions were shaped by classroom realities and practical constraints. Watson and Yang (2016) also reported that teachers perceived barriers to game-based learning, including lack of time, limited resources, and difficulty integrating games into formal curricula.

In the Indonesian EFL context, research on Game-Based Learning (GBL) and Digital Game-Based Learning (DGBL) has received increasing attention over the last decade. This growing interest is largely driven by the need to create more engaging and learner-centered English

classrooms, particularly for young learners who often require interactive and motivating learning environments. Several studies have investigated how games can support language acquisition, enhance classroom participation, and foster positive attitudes toward English learning. For example, Purba (2021) examined English teachers' perceptions of using game-based learning to improve vocabulary instruction and found that teachers generally viewed games as effective tools for increasing students' motivation, participation, and vocabulary retention. The participants in the study believed that game-based activities helped students learn English in a more enjoyable manner while reducing boredom commonly associated with traditional teaching approaches.

Similarly, Umamah (2022) explored the perspectives of both teachers and students regarding Digital Game-Based Learning in EFL settings. The findings revealed that participants perceived digital games positively because they encouraged active engagement, facilitated collaboration, and created meaningful learning experiences. However, the study also identified several challenges, including technological limitations, unequal access to digital devices, and difficulties in selecting appropriate educational games. These findings suggest that while digital games offer significant pedagogical potential, their successful implementation depends on contextual factors and instructional planning. In addition, other Indonesian studies have reported that game-based activities contribute to increased learner motivation, improved classroom interaction, and more positive attitudes toward English learning. Teachers frequently describe games as effective tools for capturing students' attention and maintaining engagement throughout the learning process.

Beyond Indonesia, international research has consistently highlighted the educational value of Game-Based Learning. Studies conducted in various educational contexts have shown that games can promote motivation, facilitate language practice, and encourage collaborative learning. Reinders and Wattana (2015), for instance, found that digital game-based environments increased learners' willingness to communicate in English by creating less threatening learning situations. Likewise, Plass et al. (2015) argued that effective game-based learning integrates cognitive, motivational, affective, and social dimensions, enabling learners to engage deeply with educational content. Meta-analytic studies by Hamari et al. (2014) and Sailer and Homner (2020) further demonstrated that game-based approaches generally produce positive effects on learner engagement, motivation, and academic performance when implemented appropriately. Collectively, these studies provide substantial evidence supporting the educational potential of Game-Based Learning across different learning environments.

Despite the growing body of literature, existing research has primarily focused on measuring learning outcomes, academic achievement, vocabulary gains, or student engagement resulting from game-based interventions. Many studies have employed quantitative approaches to determine

whether games improve learning performance, while relatively fewer investigations have explored the perceptions and experiences of teachers who are responsible for implementing these instructional approaches. Since teachers play a central role in selecting games, designing learning activities, managing classroom interactions, and evaluating learning outcomes, their perceptions can significantly influence the effectiveness and sustainability of Game-Based Learning practices. Understanding teachers' perspectives is therefore essential for gaining a more comprehensive understanding of how game-based instruction operates in authentic educational settings.

Furthermore, much of the existing literature has concentrated on secondary schools, higher education institutions, or digital game-based learning environments. Comparatively little attention has been given to elementary school contexts, particularly private elementary schools where educational conditions may differ substantially from those of public institutions. Private schools often operate within unique educational environments characterized by different curriculum expectations, classroom cultures, parental involvement, technological resources, and institutional policies. These contextual differences may influence how teachers perceive, adopt, and implement Game-Based Learning in English classrooms. Consequently, findings from previous studies conducted in other educational settings cannot necessarily be generalized to private elementary school contexts.

Another important limitation in the existing literature concerns the lack of in-depth qualitative investigations into teachers' lived experiences with Game-Based Learning. While previous studies have established that games can positively affect student learning, less is known about how teachers interpret the relevance of games, what pedagogical benefits they perceive, what challenges they encounter during implementation, and how they balance educational objectives with the playful nature of game-based activities. Exploring these issues is particularly important because successful implementation depends not only on the availability of games but also on teachers' beliefs, pedagogical knowledge, and instructional decision-making processes.

Considering these gaps, further research is needed to explore teachers' perspectives on Game-Based Learning within specific educational contexts. Such exploration can provide valuable insights into how teachers understand the role of games in English language teaching, how they integrate game-based activities into classroom practice, and what support they require to implement these approaches effectively. A deeper understanding of teachers' perceptions may also contribute to the development of more contextually relevant professional development programs and instructional guidelines for English language educators.

Based on the gaps identified in previous studies, this study aims to explore teachers' perceptions of Game-Based Learning in English classrooms at a private elementary school.

Specifically, the study seeks to understand how teachers perceive the relevance of Game-Based Learning in supporting English language instruction, identify the benefits they associate with game-based activities, examine the challenges they encounter during implementation, and investigate how teacher readiness and pedagogical considerations influence the effective integration of games in young learners' English classrooms. By focusing on teachers' experiences and perspectives, the study is expected to contribute to the growing body of knowledge on Game-Based Learning and provide practical implications for English language teaching in elementary education.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

### **Research Design**

This study employed a qualitative case study design. A case study was appropriate because the research focused on understanding teachers' perceptions of Game-Based Learning within a specific educational setting. Rather than measuring the effectiveness of games statistically, the study explored teachers' experiences, beliefs, and classroom practices in depth.

### **Participants of the Study**

The participants were eight teachers from a private elementary school in Indonesia. They consisted of English teachers and classroom teachers who had experience using games in English lessons. The participants were selected through purposive sampling because they were directly involved in planning or implementing English classroom activities for young learners.

### **Research Setting**

The study was conducted at a private elementary school where English was taught as a school subject. The school used various instructional activities, including songs, flashcards, board games, digital quizzes, vocabulary games, and group competitions. This setting was relevant because teachers had practical experience using both traditional and digital game-based activities in English lessons.

### **Research Instruments**

Data were collected using semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and teacher reflection notes. The interview questions explored teachers' understanding of GBL, perceived benefits, challenges, classroom strategies, and professional needs. Classroom observations were used to examine how teachers implemented games during English lessons. Teacher reflection notes provided additional data about teachers' thoughts after conducting game-based activities.

## **Data Collection**

The data collection process was conducted in three stages. First, classroom observations were carried out during English lessons involving game-based activities. Second, semi-structured interviews were conducted with each teacher. Third, teachers were asked to write short reflection notes about their experiences using games in English classrooms. All participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and confidentiality was maintained.

## **Data Analysis**

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis based on Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework. The process included familiarizing with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing the report. To improve trustworthiness, the study used triangulation by comparing interview data, observation notes, and teacher reflections.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Results**

#### **Game-Based Learning as a Motivating Instructional Strategy**

Teachers perceived Game-Based Learning as an effective way to increase students' motivation in English lessons. Most participants stated that students became more enthusiastic when games were used compared with conventional explanation-based instruction. Games helped students feel that English learning was enjoyable and less intimidating.

One teacher explained:

“When I use games, the students become excited. They want to answer, they want to join, and they are not afraid to try.”

This finding supports Plass et al. (2015), who argue that games can promote affective and motivational engagement when learning tasks are designed with clear goals, feedback, and challenge. It also aligns with Sailer and Homner (2020), who found that gamification has positive effects on motivational learning outcomes.

#### **Game-Based Learning Supports Vocabulary and Language Practice**

Teachers reported that games were especially useful for teaching vocabulary, pronunciation, and simple English expressions. Vocabulary games, matching games, guessing games, and digital

quizzes helped students repeat words without feeling bored. Teachers believed that repetition through games made vocabulary learning more meaningful.

One participant stated:

“For vocabulary, games are very helpful because students repeat the words many times. They remember better because they learn while playing.”

This finding is consistent with previous EFL studies showing that game-based activities can support vocabulary learning and classroom engagement. Purba (2021) reported that English teachers perceived games as useful for vocabulary learning because they made students more interested and active.

### **Game-Based Learning Promotes Active Participation**

Teachers perceived games as useful for encouraging students to participate actively. During observations, students were more willing to raise their hands, answer questions, and work in groups when games were included. Teachers explained that games created a more relaxed classroom atmosphere and encouraged students who were usually quiet to participate.

This finding supports Reinders and Wattana (2015), who found that game-based language learning could increase willingness to communicate by reducing the pressure often associated with formal language use. In elementary English classrooms, this is particularly relevant because young learners often need emotional safety before they are willing to speak.

### **Challenges in Implementing Game-Based Learning**

Although teachers perceived GBL positively, they also identified several challenges. The most common challenges were limited time, classroom noise, unequal participation, difficulty explaining rules, and the tendency for students to focus on winning rather than learning. Some teachers also stated that digital games required stable internet access and sufficient devices.

One teacher noted:

“Sometimes the students are too excited. The class becomes noisy, and I need extra time to control them.”

This finding is consistent with Watson and Yang (2016), who found that teachers often experience barriers such as time limitations, classroom management issues, and lack of resources when implementing game-based learning. Kaimara et al. (2021) also highlighted that teachers' perceptions and concerns can become obstacles to the broader adoption of educational games.

### **Teacher Readiness and Pedagogical Planning**

Teachers emphasized that games should be carefully planned and connected to lesson objectives. They believed that not every game was suitable for every lesson. Effective GBL required teachers to select appropriate games, prepare materials, explain rules clearly, manage groups, and evaluate learning outcomes.

This finding supports Huizenga et al. (2017), who showed that teachers' perceptions of game value are connected to how games support learning and motivation in actual classroom practice. It also reflects Bacsa-Károlyi et al. (2024), whose scoping review found that teachers' views strongly influence the implementation of gameful practices.

## **DISCUSSION**

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into how teachers perceive the relevance and implementation of Game-Based Learning (GBL) in English classrooms at a private elementary school. Overall, the participants expressed positive attitudes toward GBL and considered it an effective instructional approach for enhancing students' motivation, participation, and language learning experiences. At the same time, teachers acknowledged several practical challenges associated with implementing game-based activities in real classroom contexts. The discussion below interprets these findings in relation to existing theories and previous empirical studies.

One of the most significant findings of this study is that teachers perceived Game-Based Learning as a powerful motivational tool for young learners. Participants consistently reported that students showed greater enthusiasm, excitement, and willingness to participate when games were incorporated into English lessons. This finding is consistent with previous studies emphasizing the motivational potential of game-based instruction. According to Plass et al. (2015), games promote motivation because they combine challenge, curiosity, immediate feedback, and meaningful goals. These characteristics create learning environments that encourage students to remain actively engaged in learning tasks.

The findings also support Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2020), which argues that learners are more motivated when their needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are fulfilled. In the context of this study, game-based activities appeared to satisfy these psychological needs. Students were given opportunities to make decisions, participate in collaborative tasks, and experience success through achievable challenges. Teachers observed that students became more willing to answer questions, participate in classroom activities, and interact with peers during game sessions. This suggests that Game-Based Learning contributes to intrinsic motivation by transforming English learning from a passive academic task into an enjoyable and meaningful experience.

The motivational benefits identified in this study are particularly important for young learners because maintaining attention and engagement can be challenging in elementary classrooms. Young children often learn most effectively when educational activities are enjoyable, interactive, and developmentally appropriate. Educational games provide opportunities for students to learn through exploration, movement, competition, and collaboration, all of which align with children's natural learning preferences. Therefore, the positive perceptions reported by teachers indicate that Game-Based Learning is highly compatible with the developmental characteristics of elementary school learners.

Another important finding concerns the role of Game-Based Learning in supporting vocabulary acquisition and language practice. Teachers consistently reported that games facilitated repeated exposure to English vocabulary and encouraged students to use language in meaningful contexts. This finding aligns with language acquisition theories suggesting that repeated and contextualized exposure to language forms contributes to long-term retention and comprehension. Through vocabulary games, matching activities, guessing games, and digital quizzes, students were repeatedly exposed to target language items while simultaneously engaging in enjoyable learning experiences.

This finding is consistent with previous studies indicating that games support language development by creating opportunities for meaningful communication and repeated language use. Reinders and Wattana (2015) argued that game-based environments encourage authentic language interaction because learners focus on completing meaningful tasks rather than simply producing correct linguistic forms. Similarly, Purba (2021) found that teachers perceived game-based activities as effective tools for enhancing vocabulary learning and student engagement.

The teachers in the present study emphasized that students often remembered vocabulary more effectively when words were introduced through games rather than through traditional memorization techniques. This observation suggests that games may facilitate deeper cognitive processing because learners actively interact with language items while pursuing game objectives. From a cognitive perspective, information processed through active engagement and meaningful interaction is more likely to be retained than information acquired through passive instruction. Therefore, Game-Based Learning may enhance language acquisition not only by increasing motivation but also by improving the quality of learning experiences.

The findings further revealed that teachers perceived Game-Based Learning as a strategy for increasing classroom participation. Participants reported that students who were normally reluctant to participate became more active during game-based activities. Students were more willing to answer questions, contribute ideas, collaborate with peers, and use English during

classroom interactions. This finding supports previous research suggesting that games create low-anxiety learning environments that encourage participation and communication.

The relationship between Game-Based Learning and participation can be explained through affective theories of language learning. Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis suggests that emotional factors such as anxiety, confidence, and motivation significantly influence language acquisition. When students experience anxiety or fear of making mistakes, language learning may be hindered. However, when learning environments are supportive and enjoyable, learners become more receptive to language input and more willing to communicate. The teachers in this study observed that game-based activities reduced students' fear of failure because attention was directed toward achieving game objectives rather than producing perfect language forms.

This finding is particularly relevant in EFL contexts where opportunities for authentic English communication may be limited. Through games, students can engage in meaningful language use within a supportive environment. The increased participation observed by teachers suggests that Game-Based Learning may contribute to the development of communicative competence by encouraging learners to use English more actively and confidently.

Despite these positive perceptions, teachers also identified several challenges associated with implementing Game-Based Learning. One of the most frequently reported concerns involved classroom management. Participants explained that game-based activities often generated excitement, noise, and movement, making classroom control more difficult. Some teachers reported that students occasionally became overly competitive or focused primarily on winning rather than learning.

These findings are consistent with previous studies highlighting practical barriers to the implementation of educational games. Watson and Yang (2016) found that teachers often perceive classroom management, time constraints, and resource limitations as significant obstacles to Game-Based Learning. Similarly, Kaimara et al. (2021) reported that concerns regarding classroom control and implementation complexity may discourage teachers from adopting game-based approaches.

The classroom management challenges identified in this study highlight the importance of teacher facilitation. The effectiveness of Game-Based Learning does not depend solely on the game itself but also on how the activity is planned, introduced, and managed. Teachers must establish clear rules, explain procedures effectively, monitor student behavior, and maintain focus on learning objectives. Therefore, successful implementation requires pedagogical competence as well as instructional creativity.

Another challenge identified by participants involved time management. Teachers reported that preparing, explaining, and conducting games often required more instructional time than traditional activities. This finding reflects a common concern in educational settings where teachers must balance curriculum requirements with innovative instructional approaches. While Game-Based Learning may increase engagement, teachers must ensure that game activities remain aligned with learning objectives and do not consume excessive instructional time.

Interestingly, the findings indicate that teachers did not perceive these challenges as reasons to avoid Game-Based Learning. Instead, participants viewed them as practical issues that could be addressed through careful planning and experience. This perspective suggests that teachers generally recognized the value of GBL and were willing to invest additional effort to overcome implementation barriers. Such attitudes are encouraging because teacher beliefs play a crucial role in the adoption and sustainability of educational innovations.

A particularly important finding emerging from this study concerns teacher readiness and pedagogical planning. Participants emphasized that games should not be used merely for entertainment but should be integrated purposefully into instructional processes. Teachers consistently stated that successful Game-Based Learning requires careful selection of games, alignment with curriculum objectives, and adaptation to students' developmental characteristics.

This finding reinforces Plass et al.'s (2015) argument that effective Game-Based Learning depends on instructional design rather than the presence of game elements alone. Educational games are most effective when they support specific learning objectives and provide meaningful opportunities for cognitive engagement. Teachers in this study appeared to recognize this principle and viewed themselves as facilitators who guide students' learning experiences through well-designed activities.

The emphasis on teacher readiness also reflects broader discussions regarding professional competence in technology-enhanced and student-centered learning environments. As educational approaches continue to evolve, teachers are increasingly expected to possess the skills necessary to evaluate, adapt, and implement innovative instructional strategies. The findings suggest that professional development programs focusing on Game-Based Learning could support teachers in developing these competencies.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings contribute to the growing literature on Game-Based Learning by highlighting the central role of teachers in determining its effectiveness. While much previous research has focused on student outcomes, the present study demonstrates that teachers' perceptions significantly influence how Game-Based Learning is interpreted and implemented. Positive teacher perceptions may facilitate adoption and innovation, whereas

negative perceptions may limit the use of game-based approaches regardless of their potential benefits.

Furthermore, the findings contribute to understanding Game-Based Learning within elementary EFL contexts. Most participants viewed games not simply as motivational tools but as pedagogical resources capable of supporting language development, participation, and classroom interaction. This broader conceptualization aligns with contemporary perspectives that position games as legitimate instructional approaches rather than supplementary activities.

The study also offers practical implications for educational stakeholders. School administrators should recognize the value of Game-Based Learning and provide teachers with access to relevant resources, training opportunities, and instructional support. Curriculum developers should consider incorporating game-based activities into English language programs in ways that align with learning objectives and assessment requirements. Teacher education programs should prepare future educators to design and implement educational games effectively within diverse classroom contexts.

Overall, the findings indicate that teachers perceive Game-Based Learning as a relevant and valuable instructional approach for elementary English classrooms. While implementation challenges remain, the perceived benefits in terms of motivation, participation, language practice, and learning enjoyment outweigh the difficulties reported by participants. Consequently, Game-Based Learning has considerable potential to support effective English language teaching when accompanied by appropriate pedagogical planning, teacher readiness, and institutional support.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study explored teachers' perceptions of Game-Based Learning (GBL) in English classrooms at a private elementary school. The findings revealed that teachers generally viewed GBL as a valuable instructional approach that enhances students' motivation, engagement, and participation in learning activities. Teachers believed that game-based activities created a more enjoyable learning environment, encouraged students to interact actively, and supported the development of English language skills, particularly vocabulary acquisition and language practice.

The findings suggest that games can transform English learning into a more meaningful and student-centered experience for young learners.

The study also found that teachers perceived Game-Based Learning as an effective strategy for promoting active classroom participation and reducing students' anxiety when using English. Through games, students were more willing to communicate, collaborate with peers, and engage in classroom tasks. However, teachers identified several challenges in implementing GBL, including classroom management issues, time constraints, students' excessive focus on competition, and the need for adequate preparation. These challenges indicate that the success of Game-Based Learning depends not only on the games themselves but also on teachers' ability to plan, facilitate, and manage learning activities effectively.

The findings highlight the importance of teacher readiness and pedagogical competence in integrating Game-Based Learning into English instruction. Teachers need sufficient knowledge, training, and support to select appropriate games that align with curriculum objectives and students' developmental needs. Therefore, schools and educational stakeholders should provide professional development opportunities that help teachers design and implement meaningful game-based activities. Although this study was limited to a single private elementary school and a small number of participants, it contributes to the growing body of research on Game-Based Learning by providing insights into teachers' experiences and perceptions. Future studies may involve a larger number of schools and participants to further investigate the implementation of GBL across different educational contexts.

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## **Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest related to this study.

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## Author Contributions

**Conceptualization:** Muhammad Izzuddin Alwina and Erna Iswanti; **methodology:** Muhammad Izzuddin Alwina and Erna Iswanti; **investigation:** Muhammad Izzuddin Alwina; data collection: Muhammad Izzuddin Alwina; **writing—original draft preparation:** Muhammad Izzuddin Alwina; **writing—review and editing:** Erna Iswanti; visualization and data presentation: Muhammad Izzuddin Alwina. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

## Data Availability Statement

The datasets generated and analyzed during the current study are not publicly available due to ethical considerations and participant confidentiality. However, the data may be obtained from the corresponding author upon reasonable request and with appropriate permission.

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