PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS EXPERIENCES IN DEVELOPING STUDENTS SPEAKING SKILLS USING GAME-BASED LEARNING IN THAILAND

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ABSTRACT

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi pengalaman guru prajabatan dalam menggunakan pembelajaran berbasis permainan (game-based learning) untuk mengembangkan keterampilan berbicara siswa selama masa praktik mengajar mereka di Thailand. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan naratif, lima guru prajabatan yang mengikuti program pengabdian masyarakat dan pengajaran internasional (KKN) membagikan cerita pribadi dan refleksi mereka. Data dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner tertutup dan wawancara semi-terstruktur, sehingga peneliti dapat memperoleh jawaban yang terstruktur sekaligus narasi pribadi yang kaya. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa para guru prajabatan umumnya memiliki pengalaman positif dengan GBL, terutama dalam menggunakan permainan digital dan non-digital serta strategi kerja kelompok yang mendorong kolaborasi dan komunikasi. Namun, mereka juga merefleksikan tantangan dalam menerapkan permainan di konteks pengajaran asing, seperti keterbatasan waktu dan masalah pengelolaan kelas. Narasi-narasi ini menegaskan potensi transformatif pembelajaran berbasis permainan, tidak hanya dalam meningkatkan kemampuan berbicara siswa, tetapi juga dalam mendukung pertumbuhan profesional guru prajabatan.

Kata kunci: Pembelajaran Berbasis Game, Kemampuan Berbicara, Guru-Pra Jabatan

ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the experiences of pre-service teachers in using game-based learning to develop students' speaking skills during their practicum in Thailand. Using a narrative inquiry approach, five pre-service teachers who took part in an international community service and teaching program (KKN) shared their personal stories and reflections. Data were collected through close-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, enabling the researchers to gather both structured responses and rich, personal narratives. The findings revealed that the pre-service teachers generally had positive experiences with GBL, especially in using both digital and non-digital games, as well as group-based strategies that encouraged collaboration and communication. However, they also reflected on the challenges of implementing games in a foreign teaching context, such as time constraints and classroom management issues. These narratives underscore the transformative potential of game-based learning, not only in enhancing students' speaking abilities but also in supporting the professional growth of pre-service teachers.

Keywords: Game-Based Learning, Speaking Skills, Pre-Service Teachers

INTRODUCTION

Language learning is a complex process, regardless of the age, level of education, or native language ability of the learner. The concept of language learning, whether in English-speaking countries or not, is often difficult to grasp (Povenmire, 2022). This is also the case in education, where some students have difficulty in developing their speaking skills because in their daily lives, they often use their mother tongue, not English. In fact,

English is not a second language for them, but a foreign language that is only used in the classroom environment. Some of the factors that cause students to have difficulty speaking in English include lack of vocabulary, improper pronunciation, low motivation, fear of making mistakes, nervousness, shyness, lack of confidence, and lack of knowledge and fear of criticism (Leonita et al., 2023). If not addressed, then the development of speaking skills will not occur. This

cannot be denied because English is a universal language, so speaking skills are needed both actively and passively.

Speaking ability is one of the most important communication skills, especially in education and training environments (Dermikol & Aytas, 2023, in Uğur Göçmez & Ünal, 2024). Mastering speaking skills is essential for learners to effectively express their thoughts, engage in meaningful interactions, and participate actively in academic or professional settings. According to Katemba & Grace (2023), speaking is an important aspect of international language learning and instruction because it is an action used to communicate with others. They also stated that practically every school needs a goal of teaching speaking, namely improving students' communicative abilities, because students must be able to apply speaking skills in everyday life. However, as Adhelia & Triastuti (2023) emphasized, students often do not use English for asking, responding, or discussing in the classroom because teachers do not provide them with appropriate strategies and media that can facilitate their speaking practice.

Vocabulary mastery plays a significant role in supporting students' speaking skills. Students with better vocabulary tend to have stronger speaking abilities. Djamdjuri et al. (2023) emphasized that students who are just beginning to learn English require good and sufficient vocabulary to help them understand and communicate meaningfully. In line with this, Fisnanta et al. (2022) stated that learning English is necessary to interact with the world and access information, and this must begin with vocabulary. Therefore, vocabulary is a key foundation in mastering English, including speaking.

To help students develop speaking skills, teachers are expected to find and apply effective strategies. This also applies to pre-service teachers, who are at the beginning of their teaching careers and must begin exploring suitable methods and pedagogies (Simmers & Davidesco, 2024). According to Ulla (2016, as cited in Mufidah, 2019) , pre-service teachers must be equipped with essential skills such as classroom management, lesson planning, and understanding student behavior, which also includes choosing the right learning strategies for teaching language.

One strategy that has received increasing attention is game-based learning (GBL), an active learning approach that incorporates game elements into the learning environment. It uses typical game techniques to enhance the learning process and encourage student participation (Batsaikhan, 2021). GBL is widely applied to improve speaking skills. As Pittayanantakul & Phusawisot (2024) note, game-based learning is one of the teaching methods that has been used extensively by researchers to enhance students' speaking ability. It provides a constructivist environment where students use existing skills to solve problems related to the subject matter Adipat et al. (2021).

GBL can take the form of digital or non-digital games. Digital game is a pattern that utilizes the game as a medium for conveying the learning contents, leveraging the power of computer games to captivate and engage users for the purpose, such as to develop new knowledge and skills (Kavak, 2022). Digital games often include graphics, animations, sounds, and other interactive elements that enhance the gaming and learning experience. Players can interact with a virtual world, participate in simulations, or compete with others online. Digital games also typically have levels, missions, or achievements that track progress and allow players to advance through different challenges (Sari et al., 2024).

Kahoot, Bamboozle, Quizzes, and Nearpod are example of digital game (Aeni et al., 2024; Eviota & Liangco, 2020). These games, especially Nearpod, is a digital tool that enables teachers to create engaging and interactive presentations using multimedia, video, audio, sketches, virtual reality tours, games, and quizzes directly on the Nearpod website. The platform provides real-time formative assessment with feedback, allowing students to immediately reflect on their learning (Eviota & Liangco, 2020).

On the other hand, non-digital game does not employ a digital device or tool to support the playing of the game (Russo et al., 2024). Non-digital games tend to be simpler and don't require electronic devices, but they focus on direct interaction between players, which can help develop social and collaboration skills. In education, non-digital games are often used to teach specific concepts, develop cognitive skills, and help students better understand material through hands-on experiences. Board game, dice, card and role play games are examples of non-digital games (Russo et al., 2024; Simbolon, 2025).

Non-digital game in language learning also offers significant advantages, particularly in fostering interpersonal communication and

collaborative skills. These games encourage students to interact directly with their peers, promoting authentic conversations and teamwork. These face-to-face interactions help learners develop their speaking and listening skills while building confidence in using the language in real-world scenarios (Simbolon, 2025).

Despite their advantages, GBL does come with challenges. Karadag (2015) notes that many pre-service teachers feel anxious about failing to design authentic games. The preparation of GBL activities can be time-consuming, and pre-service teachers often lack the time and experience to create engaging games.

Previous research has primarily discussed pre-service teachers' experiences using GBL to improve student engagement or reading and writing skills (Karadag, 2015; Vicka Prasasti Hasibuan, 2023). However, there is limited research focusing on how pre-service teachers use GBL specifically to teach **speaking skills**, especially in international contexts. Therefore, this study presents a novelty by exploring pre-service teachers' experiences in implementing game-based learning to teach speaking skills based on their teaching practices during the International KKN program in Islamic schools in Thailand from November 2023 to 2024, where problems were still found in students' English-speaking proficiency.

Based on the background and focus of the research, the research problem can be formulated as follows: *What are the experiences of pre-service teachers in using game-based learning to teach English speaking skills?* Therefore, the purpose of this research is to explore pre-service teachers' experiences in developing students' speaking skills using game-based learning.

METHODOLOGY
The methodology for this research employs a qualitative approach using a narrative inquiry design. This research will be conducted at one of the universities located in Bogor. The participants will consist of five pre-service teachers who previously took part in the International KKN program in Thailand. Their involvement is expected to provide rich and varied insights into the use of game-based learning within different cultural and educational settings. To collect data, the researcher will employ two methods: questionnaires and audio-recorded interviews. These tools aim to capture both broad and detailed narratives from participants regarding their teaching practices and experiences with game-based learning.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
This section explores and discusses the experiences of pre-service teachers in using Game-Based Learning (GBL) to enhance students' English speaking skills. The analysis is structured around three key areas: the types of games used, instructional strategies employed, and challenges encountered during GBL implementation.

1. Type of Game-Based Leaning Used
The information was sourced from Tables 4.1 and 4.2, along with participant feedback on their experiences using both digital and non-digital game-based learning methods

Table 4. 1 Digital GBL Usage

Statements	Yes	No
1. I use digital game-based learning to enhance students' speaking skills through interactive online platforms.	30%	70%

Table 4. 2 Non-Digital GBL Usage

Statements	Yes	No
2. I use non-digital game-based learning to improve students' speaking skills through face-to-face interaction and physical activities.	100%	0%

The findings from the tables reveal a strong preference for non-digital games, with all pre-service teachers (100%) reporting their use. In contrast, only 30% indicated they had employed digital games, highlighting limited usage likely due to various contextual challenges. This trend was further corroborated by interview data.

One respondent mentioned incorporating Nearpod, a digital platform that supports interactive quizzes and speaking functions.

"For digital games, I use Nearpod, which allows for the creation of quizzes and games, including for speaking skills. – **P1**

However, several others identified barriers that made the integration of digital tools difficult in their teaching environments.
"Students are not allowed to use their phones during class sessions."
– **P2**

"Projectors only in the meeting room; no connectors for classroom TVs." **– P4**

These findings align with Eviota & Liangco (2020) and Batsaikhan (2021), who assert that tools like Nearpod enhance engagement through interactive multimedia and real-time feedback, aligning well with GBL's goal of intentional, outcome-driven learning. Similarly, Kavak (2022) and Sari et al. (2024) support the potential of digital GBL in fostering language acquisition through immersive and interactive tasks.

All participants, on the other hand, discussed the types of non-digital games they utilized, noting that these were more practical and easily adaptable to classroom settings. The games mentioned were diverse and seen as more manageable to implement.

"I use images or flashcards, and students have to guess the meaning of the image in English. This game is flexible and easy to create, tailored to the learning objectives."
– P3
"Sometimes I made my own materials, like showing a picture, for example, a banana, and then I would write the English word, followed by the Thai word." **– P5**

This preference reflects findings from Russo et al. (2024), Sari et al. (2024), Simbolon, (2025), who highlight that non-digital games foster interpersonal communication, creativity, and collaboration, making them ideal for classrooms with limited technological resources.

2. Strategies employed

To examine the teaching strategies used by pre-service teachers when incorporating game-based learning (GBL) into speaking activities, the researcher reviewed responses concerning classroom practices, with particular attention to whether group or individual approaches were favored. The findings are summarized in Table 4.3.

Table 4. 3 Group Work Usage in GBL

Statements	Yes	No
3. When implementing game-based learning, I use group work methods.	70%	30%

Most pre-service teachers (70%) employed group-based strategies when using GBL, with only 30% opting for individual activities. Group work

was seen as effective for encouraging interaction, communication, and teamwork, providing students with authentic contexts to practice speaking. Examples from interviews reinforce this preference:

Use of Group Work

"Students work together to answer questions and discuss within their groups... This encourages students to work together, communicate, and solve problems effectively." **– P1**
"The students are then divided into 10 groups and must guess the target words. **– P4**

These findings are supported by Adipat et al. (2021), who emphasize that group-based GBL promotes collaboration and problem-solving aligned with the constructivist view of learning. However, individual approaches were also adopted in certain contexts due to classroom dynamics or institutional restrictions.

Use of Individual Participation

"Although I don't use group work due to limitations in mixing male and female students, I make sure every individual participates in the game. This keeps them more active and engaged." **– P2**

This adaptability highlights the importance of flexibility in instructional strategies, as noted by Ghazy et al. (2021), who state that GBL can be effectively conducted either individually or in groups depending on context and learning objectives.

3. The Challenges Faced

To identify the main challenges faced during the use of game-based learning (GBL), the researcher analyzed participants' responses regarding the difficulties they encountered. The findings are outlined in Table 4.4.

Table 4. 4 Challenges Faced by Pre-Service Teachers in Implementing Game-Based Learning

Statements	Yes	No
4. I have faced challenges when implementing game-based learning.	100%	0%

Despite the overall positive reception of GBL, all participants (100%) acknowledged facing challenges in its implementation. The most

commonly cited issues included anxiety over designing effective and engaging games and the time required for preparation. Participants expressed concerns about the creative demands involved:

Anxiety about designing authentic and effective games

"Designing engaging games is a challenge because I need to be creative to make the students interested. Therefore, I have to search for games that are appropriate and appealing to the students." – **P1**

"I also need to be creative in choosing types of games that match the students' abilities and characteristics, as well as in finding supporting materials for the games." – **P4**

"I also felt anxious and worried about designing games that were interesting. I would sometimes feel confused about what to do next." – **P5**

Time-consuming nature of preparation

"Although I feel that the game is easy to understand, it is not always the case for students. I also have to spend time thinking (concerned) of alternatives if the game I choose will not be enjoyable for them, as it might be unfamiliar to them, considering cultural differences" – **P3**

These findings echo Karadag (2015), who points out that GBL requires substantial preparation and innovation, often causing stress among educators, particularly pre-service teachers still building their instructional confidence.

CONCLUSION

The experiences of pre-service teachers in using Game-Based Learning (GBL) to develop students' speaking skills were generally positive. GBL provided engaging and interactive ways for students to practice English, especially through activities that encouraged verbal communication. Most teachers favored non-digital games due to their simplicity, practicality, and suitability for classrooms with limited technological access.

Group-based strategies were commonly employed to promote interaction and collaborative speaking opportunities, allowing students to express ideas and negotiate meaning with peers. Meanwhile, individual tasks were applied when group work was not feasible, demonstrating the flexibility of GBL in various classroom contexts.

However, while GBL was seen as effective in enhancing speaking practice, all participants faced challenges, mainly in designing interesting games and managing the time needed for preparation. These challenges highlight the need for creative planning and adaptation to learners' needs.

In conclusion, GBL is a valuable strategy for improving students' speaking skills, but its effective use depends on teacher readiness, creativity, and supportive school environments. These findings emphasize the importance of institutional support and training to ensure the effective application of GBL in future teaching practices.

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