



Teachers' Roles in Implementing Play-Based Learning for Teaching Vocabulary: Perspectives of Thai Primary School Teachers

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ABSTRACT

Teachers may have different perspectives about their roles in implementing teaching methods. One of the examples is using play-based learning. This study explores the teacher's implementation of play-based learning and the roles of Thai primary school teachers in teaching vocabulary using a play-based learning strategy. The data were collected through a qualitative case study design. Two instruments were applied in this research, online observations and interviews: 50 minutes of classroom observations held through Facebook's live streaming feature and 3 hours of individual interviews with three Thai teachers from different primary schools through the Zoom meeting platform and LINE. The finding of the observation shows that all teachers have been following aspects of the observation. Meanwhile, the finding from the interview shows that teachers' roles in play-based learning: teachers act as facilitators and leaders in the context of engagement with the students; teachers act as observers, planners, and reflectors in a reflective pedagogues context; and teachers act as communicators, advisors, and connectors for the context of partnership with student's parents. This study is expected to serve as a resource and source of information for English teachers who teach young learners so they can set some helpful strategies into practice in the classroom.

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INTRODUCTION

Play-Based Learning (PBL) essentially means learning while playing. It is a popular learning activity that utilizes games as a learning strategy. This strategy is often applied to young learners who like to play. In developed countries like England, the PBL approach has been around for a while (W, 2015). The Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage program, implemented in England in 2000,

was explicitly where PBL was first presented. In one of its paragraphs, the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage (QCA 2000) notes that “Young children develop effectively through well-planned play, which provides them with delight and challenge. They act differently when playing.” PBL is founded on this concept in England. This statement means that children are challenged to learn since it is carried out through a pleasurable play process that is conducted in a directed and planned manner (Department for Education, 2000).

Play-based learning is a fun and suitable technique to transition from early childhood to the school years (Parker, Thomsen, & Berry, 2022). Play-based learning is mandated under early years education policy in several countries, including Finland, South Africa, and Canada. These guidelines usually cover the education of children between zero and eight. This mandate is carried out in numerous ways. In Finland, young children typically participate in self-directed play for more than 2 hours daily. PBL is recognized as a principle in South African practices with children ages three to six. However, implementation presents challenges. Ratios are only sometimes followed when there are regulations and government oversight. Due to increasing demand, class sizes for children aged 5 and 6 vary significantly throughout regions. The absence of programmatic guidelines, family expectations, and limited judgments of school preparedness are more factors. Therefore, despite the requirement for PBL, workbooks and scripted classes still dominate educational efforts because play is frequently just a substitute for leisure time. For many years, kindergarten classes in Canada have placed a high value on play. PBL has recently emerged as a crucial component. PBL still incorporates free, imaginative play, but educators are also required to use play as a pedagogical strategy, which includes incorporating academic learning into play-based contexts. Therefore, it is increasingly crucial for researchers to look at how this strategy can affect children's language development and improve language learning.

Every non-English speaking country must integrate English into their learning curriculum at all levels of study to pursue and compete with other countries, as English is one of the most frequently used worldwide languages by individuals in many countries as a means of communication. Like in Thailand, this educational program begins in kindergarten and goes through the university level. Just like Indonesia, Thailand is a non-native country. English is not taught as a second language in Thailand; instead, it is taught as a foreign language. The majority of Thai people speak Melayu or Basa Thai daily. This led to the issue that most students do not speak English well, and it presents difficulty for the teacher to offer the best method for English learning, particularly at the primary levels. English lesson in Thailand is mainly limited to teaching students how to memorize new words and understand sentence structures (Aprilani, 2021). Students enrolling in the bilingual program class must overcome challenges, including attending classes, participating in class activities, and taking notes while in session. That explains why it can be difficult for Thai students to select the appropriate words because they memorize them without understanding their context or meaning. The extremely large letter or alphabet discrepancies between Thai and English also hinder students' ability to spell words due to interference from their first language. (Mungkonwong & Wudthayagorn, 2017) Stated that students should have a vocabulary of between 300 and 400 words by the time they complete third grade and between 1,050 and 1,200 words by the time they complete sixth grade of primary school. However, how students are taught and learn determines the extent to which they can learn the expected quantity of words.

It is essential to comprehend many forms of play and how they each enhance a child's learning when it comes to playing and learning, especially in early childhood education. Play is employed in an early childhood classroom to assist students' learning (Wickstrom, Pyle, & DeLuca, 2019). Young learners would miss out on a lot of educational and social opportunities without play. Based on (Perkin & Taylor, 1976), 6 to 8 years are typically regarded as young learners in the early grades of primary education. Play-based learning is still meaningful, although it is frequently disregarded in favor of academically oriented educational strategies. However, during this time, active, play-based learning strategies can improve young learners' learning outcomes and motivation in the early primary grades.

Play-based learning is a technique that combines child-directed play with learning objectives that are supported or supervised by teachers or adults (Weisberg, Hirsh-Pasek, & Golinkoff, 2013). Children's play is essential for their social and emotional growth and needs to be preserved. In this concept, play is frequently referred to as an activity in which adults should not become involved and where the teacher's role is "to support, not to disrupt" (Pyle & Danniels, 2017). Another view of the play is that adults play a supportive role. It has been demonstrated that learning is optimized when adults provide feedback or structure an environment toward a learning objective, but the learning environment promotes engaging child-led exploration and discovery. With its adult support and emphasis on a specific learning objective, the play may be the best pedagogical strategy in academic contexts (Zosh et al., 2018). Children do not require continual monitoring while they are playing on their own choice. Adults must provide time and space for students to play safely and inclusively (Pyle, 2019). In order to maximize the learning process and accomplish the learning outcomes, the crucial roles of adults are needed in PBL. Children typically prefer to study the things that interest them.

Therefore, in PBL, the teacher is actually in charge of fostering their interest. A teacher must be able to design engaging games for children so that they have an opportunity to play, especially for teaching vocabulary, since vocabulary is an essential component and it has an essential role in connecting with other language skills. Play-based learning is a child's inherent desire to learn based on their interests, strengths and abilities (Amin, 2018). (Amin, 2018) Also, in PBL, children are encouraged to play while learning something from their games. However, the limit of a teacher's ability to develop innovative instructional games for children is one of the current difficulties. The standard of educators needs to be raised. In order to obtain children's interests and help them reach their full potential by their talents and interests, teachers must be imaginative, creative, and sensitive to children's personalities.

Numerous researchers have explored the use of play-based learning for teaching and learning objectives. The pros and cons of implementing play-based learning and the teacher's role have been identified. It is critical to discuss the teacher's role in the classroom when play is taking place while looking at definitions of play. According to several researchers (Edwards & Cutter-Mackenzie, 2011), the teacher guides the children when they engage in play. Another (*ChildsPlay*, n.d.) holds that play should only be a child's work. Play can be excluded from classroom settings for several reasons, including this contradiction over the role of the teacher.

Teachers may engage in play-based learning in a variety of ways. How a teacher evaluates the value of play-based learning impacts how it is implemented (Meaghan Elizabeth Taylor, 2019). A study on the value of the "whole child" in play-based learning was undertaken (Keung & Cheung, 2019). They also found that teachers serve two different roles. To encourage fair play and keep the children's interest, teachers must set up the play equipment in the centers and participate in the play. The teacher must give children open-ended things so that they can play and use their imaginations. When incorporating play into the classroom, teachers should be deliberate and thoughtful about their choices.

Teachers who need help with how to bring students into play result from disagreements on adult interaction within the play. Teachers usually put up children's play areas successfully, but teacher-student interactions become rare and occasionally awkward. To improve and broaden their relationships with students, coaching, observation, feedback, and reflection are suggested for teachers (Gronlund, 2010)

There is a connection between the type of play that occurs in classrooms and teachers' views on play, according to numerous research on the educator's involvement during play (Bigelow, 2015; Pyle & Alaca, 2018). According to (Bigelow, 2015), teachers employ play in a way that focuses on how they define it and how they think it should affect the classroom, whether that influence is social, intellectual, or oral. A teacher's concept of play impacts how, when, and how much play-based learning is employed in the classroom, as stated by (Pyle & Alaca, 2018) research.

Other previous studies have shown the advantages and the efficiency of play-based learning in various contexts (Bakhsh, 2016; Kasetpibal, 2018; Ramadhaniarti, 2016; Reinders, 2015; van Oers &

Duijkers, 2013). Most of the studies also employed the benefits of children through play for students' development, and the research scopes are mostly for kindergarten classes or preschool education. However, play is sometimes viewed as a pointless pastime that serves only to make happy (Amin, 2018). This is another critique against the play-based learning approach to early childhood education. Playing activities are undervalued in early childhood education since it is assumed that they are only intended to make children happy.

Furthermore, studies on teachers' roles in implementing play-based learning specifically for teaching vocabulary still need to be completed. Teachers' knowledge, culture, and belief are integrated (Almubarakah & Arifani, 2021). That is why it is essential to consider the teacher's perspectives while examining their roles in play-based learning strategy for the teaching and learning process.

Therefore, there has been tiny study on teachers' involvement to take their roles in integrating the potential of teaching vocabulary through a play-based learning strategy. This paper aims to how teachers use the PBL strategy to teach vocabulary and scrutinize what Thai teachers think about their roles in teaching vocabulary using the PBL strategy through their perspectives. Hence, to achieve the purpose, this research was guided by the following questions: 1) How do teachers use the Play-Based Learning strategy to teach vocabulary? 2) What are teachers' perspectives on teaching vocabulary using the PBL strategy?

METHODS

Pedagogical Setting and Participants

The study involves three Thai EFL teachers from different primary schools as the participants. They included two females and one male, aged from 25 to 35. The teachers were selected based on their teaching experience and knowledge, especially in their familiarity with PBL strategy in teaching and learning activities. In addition, one teacher is a Co-researcher or primary teacher in a team of the Collaborative Research Program in Academic Collaboration between Thailand and Indonesia from July 2022 to December 2022, and two other teachers are fellow primary school teachers from the principal teacher. Each teacher teaches in a different primary school. Teacher 1 teaches at Ban Tungyai School, Teacher 2 at Bannakhamwang School, and Teacher 3 from Ban Khokklang School. Teachers 1, 2, and 3 were given three of them as a pseudonym. In terms of setting, three classes were observed under the teachers' supervision. The activities were in the middle of the entire course when the research was carried out. Each play-based learning activity lasted around 10 to 15 minutes. Research is carried out during the Research Collaboration program and is focused on vocabulary at the primary level.

Study Design

The study uses a qualitative approach that is adequate for gathering, analyzing, and interpreting data. This study also decides to employ a case study design to compile in-depth data on a specific case. The two primary data sources regarding research tools are interviews and observations. According to (Quoc, Thanh, Dang, Mai, & Nguyen, 2021), varied data sources contribute to various viewpoints on the issue and offer more in-depth information about it.

Data Collection and Analysis

Non-participant classroom observations (10–15 minutes for each session and once for each class) also three individual interviews (approximately 45-60 minutes each) were used to collect the data. Researchers have made alterations due to the new normal era after the pandemic of Covid-19, and the program was still taking place online by replacing face-to-face focus group interviews with online-based digital and offline classroom observations with online-based observations. The researcher used the Zoom meeting platform and LINE to conduct the interviews in an online private room using a semi-

structured interview design and in English. Not only through voice, researchers also provided interview text to clarify the understanding process regarding the interview topic. Classroom observations have been conducted through a live streaming feature on "Facebook," one of the social media applications with the most users worldwide. The researcher recorded all of her observations in an unstructured field notebook. Also, with the permission of all participants, all interviews were recorded. Before analysis, the whole interview transcripts were sent back to the teachers for review, clarification, and revision.

Totally, the data was collected from 50 minutes of classroom observations and 3 hours of individual interviews with the teachers. A comprehensive, detailed, and triangulated data collection was obtained through individual interviews and observations, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Tools for addressing research questions

Tools	Participants	Research Questions Addressed
Classroom Observations	Three classes (once for each class)	<i>Research Question 1</i> (How do teachers use the Play-Based Learning strategy to teach vocabulary?)
Semi-structured interviews	Three teachers of Thai Primary Schools	<i>Research Question 2</i> (What are teachers' perspectives on teaching vocabulary using the PBL strategy?)

The study of the data collected was conducted using qualitative thematic analysis. For observational data, this process involved identifying and classifying every classroom event that occurred in play-based learning classes that were observed. While for the interview, the questions are focused on the teacher's perspective on their roles in implementing play-based learning for teaching vocabulary, which was adapted and modified from (Heang, Shah, Hashim, & Aliah, 2021). In order to identify themes and subthemes in terms of interview data, the researcher transcribed and examined the transcripts. Initial themes and subthemes formed as a result of these steps and were repeatedly revised before the final framework was created.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The data analysis reported the teachers' implementation and their roles in play-based learning for teaching vocabulary, and those were found in the observation and interview sessions. The findings obtained from the classroom observations were to answer the first research question, where in 3 practical classes, three different teachers used various PBL strategies to teach vocabulary as follows:

1. Teacher 1 used the "Spot It! Cards game" activity for 15 minutes in class 3 at Ban Tungyai School for vocabulary about "toys." The procedure for playing Spot It! Cards game is where students play in groups where one group consists of 3 to 4 students forming a circle, then each student from each group gets ten cards containing random pictures and vocabulary words. After that, they played in turns. Starting with one card provided as an opening or initial key to play, where the essential reference is the picture or vocabulary in the middle of the card. Then each student can show their card by matching the picture or vocabulary in the center of the card by saying the words.
2. Teacher 2 implemented the "Secret Codes" play activity for 20 minutes in grade 6 at Bannakhamwang School with a vocabulary target about "Animals." The rules of playing Secret Codes include students being divided into several groups, then decoding the secret code by

focusing on the letter in front of the code (example: DBU = CAT). Finally, show the answer by pronouncing the vocabulary.

3. Teacher 3 used the "Hot Seat game" activity for 15 minutes in grade 3 at Ban Khokklang School to teach vocabulary about foods. The stages of playing the Hot Seat game are the teacher divides the students into two teams, and each team member plays, in turn, to become a team representative by sitting on a chair in the middle of the circle of students. Students who get their turn to sit on the chair face the back of the screen, where the teacher will display a picture for the student to guess. The other students from each group are tasked with giving clues to the student representatives from each team, and the student who can answer the word first, as instructed by their team, will be the winner.

The researcher also conducted classroom observations using the observation sheet as a guide to facilitate the process of data that needed to be collected during the teacher's session in implementing the PBL strategy. An observation guide adapted from (van Oers & Duijkers, 2013), a stage or strategy that becomes part of the teacher's repertoire to create productive play activities. The more of observation process can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2. Observation sheet for the implementation of PBL

Observation Items	Teacher 1	Teacher 2	Teacher 3
1) Orienting: The teacher explores the student's personal experiences related to the vocabulary given through PBL and shares them with others. The teacher knows the orientation or benefits of the given play activity.	Yes	No	Yes
2) Structuring and Deepening: The teacher introduces a problem for the students and discusses what is to be done.	Yes	Yes	Yes
3) Broadening: The teacher connects the play activity during the lesson with students' capacities (target vocabulary that has been determined).	Yes	Yes	No
4) Contributing: The teacher provides new tools or media for play-based learning that answer the specific needs of students.	Yes	Yes	Yes
5) Reflecting: The teacher's ability to reflect or evaluate the ongoing activity.	Yes	Yes	Yes

In addition, the findings generated from the interviews were to answer the second research question, where during the interview process, the researcher asked specific item questions on how each teacher's perspective on their roles in PBL for teaching vocabulary in the pre-determined context adapted from (Heang et al., 2021), including teachers' roles in the context of engagement with the students, teachers' roles as reflective pedagogues in implementing PBL, and teacher's roles in the

context of partnership with the parents of the students. The findings of teachers' perspectives on their roles in implementing PBL to teach vocabulary can be illustrated in table 3 below.

Table 3. The results of teachers' perspectives on their roles in PBL for teaching vocabulary

Teacher's Name	Teacher's Response		
	Context 1 (Engagement with the students)	Context 2 (Reflective Pedagogues)	Context 3 (Partnership with the parents)
T. Firn (Teacher 1)	facilitator and model leader	observer	communicator
T. Patty (Teacher 2)	facilitator and leader	planner and observer	advisor
T. Nat (Teacher 3)	leader and facilitator	reflector	connector

Discussion

From the observation conducted by the researcher using the observation sheet, it was reported that Teacher 1 implemented the play activities in sequence and accordance with the stages of the observation aspects. The PBL activity stages implemented by Teacher 1 enabled students to participate in the vocabulary teaching and learning process actively. Students enjoyed the play activity by achieving 90% of the vocabulary target. While Teacher 2 has done the stages of play activities, there is one stage that Teacher 2 did not show, which means Teacher 2 needed to show her ability to introduce students' daily experiences with the learning topic or target vocabulary at that time. The researcher tried to discover why the first aspect was not seen in the observation. Teacher 2 explained that the focus of the play activity at that time was only to strengthen students' memory of the vocabulary and to know more that the student's ability to spell the letters of each vocabulary. The final result was that students followed the playing process as said by Teacher 2, where students only focused on identifying the letter codes that make up the vocabulary. Some students still needed help to arrange the letters of the target vocabulary because they had not memorized the letter codes perfectly. The last observation result is that the researcher did not find the fifth stage in the application of PBL by Teacher 3, where Teacher 3 did not show his ability to reflect on learning at the end of the session. The teacher's reason was that the learning time had run out. The researcher also found that Teacher 3 tried to bring students into their daily experiences related to their vocabulary but at the end of the observation session, which should be the teacher's stage to reflect on learning. The researcher saw that the play process implemented by Teacher 3 was enough to make students enthusiastic about learning vocabulary.

Based on the interview findings focusing on teachers' perspectives on their role in PBL above, the role of the teachers in promoting PBL is that the teacher acts as a moderator and model for students. Teachers have the opportunity to see whether it is working or not by using PBL, especially for teaching vocabulary. Teachers could be a model for students since they can become good examples of how play can be viral to teach vocabulary and engage in it.

Teachers' Roles in the Context of Engagement with the Students

"I think when employing play, the teacher acts as a facilitator because we give them the rules or procedures on how to do the activity and let them explore the activity, and then we also together with students to conclude the lessons, so that's what the teacher role as model leader and facilitator." (Teacher 1)

"I think the teacher can be the facilitator for the students and prepare the context, and knowledge and prepare themselves for getting into the class and answering everything for students. Sometimes a teacher can act as the leader, but if the students can discover the knowledge by themselves, we are just the facilitator." (Teacher 2)

"In my opinion, I act as the leader of the games like the committee, judging, being very fair and clear, but I cannot play with them. The teacher also acts as a facilitator, we have to facilitate them during play." (Teacher 3)

It can be assumed from the perspectives of three teachers that teachers commonly act as facilitators who need to prepare themselves by giving the rules or exploring the learning activities. Additionally, three teachers believe that teachers act as leaders in the context of engagement with the students, which means that teachers need to show them fairly directions and be able to conclude together about the whole lesson.

Teachers' Roles as Reflective Pedagogues in Implementing PBL

From the interview, 2 of 3 teachers believed that the roles of teachers act as an observer to observe what happened in PBL that they used and find out whether PBL can make the students remember or not the vocabulary taught by the teachers. Teacher 2 also said that teachers could be the planner since they have to note everything and see the pros and cons of PBL that they used, then they have to make another task for evaluating the students. Another perspective from teacher 3, as he said that the teacher in this context tends to be a reflector for the students. Sometimes PBL can be a competition between the students. So, It is essential to reflect on students' behavior while playing.

"So as a teacher, we need to act as an observer, so we have to observe what happens in the play that we have used and if there are some issues or some students don't understand the rules, we have to adjust in the next lessons or we have to be careful when instructing in the next time. so teachers need to observe and reflect when teaching." (Teacher 1)

"After we have taught, we have to note and see what are the pros and cons of the game that I used in the class, after that I just make it in the group for another task, so the teacher can be the planner. The teacher also acts as an observer because I have to wait for what my students can get the context or the vocabulary, or what makes my students cannot and can remember, so I have to act as an observer too." (Teacher 2)

"Well, I do not reflect on the content of the games, but I do reflect on their behavior when they play, sometimes they don't want their friends to win, and they just fight each other, so I reflect many things on them. Teachers act as reflectors about languages and their learning." (Teacher 3)

Teachers' Roles in the Context of Partnership with the Parents of the Students

The relationship between teachers and parents of the students is crucial. Teachers are supposed to interact with the parents to control the students actively in learning. Teachers 1 and 2 think that the relationship between teachers and parents is vital because parents also have a role in their children's learning process at home. However, teacher 3 found that parents in his school want to keep their child's study results private.

"I think the relationship between teachers and parents very vital to develop students learning in overall learning, not just vocabulary, so some parents may deal with play-based acts just play, and some of them might want because since the parents learn from traditional learning, so it is important for teachers to mix common ground, understanding the outcome of the play and what are the objectives of the play that why students need to learn to play, so the role of teacher with the parents is teacher need to be a communicator for parents to understand better of the parts of how can they help the students learn better." (Teacher 1)

"Yes, I do. Because I have to advise them, actually in my class they are only 9 students and they live not too far away from the school, so I have to interact with their parents. And my role is actually as the advisor, so I have to take care of the students both like mentally and physically, and also about their learning and everything. So I have to interact with their parents." (Teacher 2)

"I interact with their parents, but parents, especially in my school, do not want to know the students' results, like learning outcomes. They do not care. So, I do not interact with them anymore. They do not care if their children get educated properly or anything. They just say, "oh, it is time for school, so I do not have to take care of my children anymore, just send them to school, then the teachers take care of them. That just works in Thailand." (Teacher 3)

CONCLUSION

From the data collected through interviews and observations using online platforms, English teachers in Thailand have an excellent perspective on their roles in integrating vocabulary teaching and learning through Play-based learning strategies, which are supported by increasing vocabulary from natural phenomena through classroom observations. This happens because the PBL strategy has many positive influences in its implementation, and teacher involvement is still significant and needed by students and parents of students. Teachers' roles included encouraging students to engage in play to develop their skills. Thus, students can improve their vocabulary skills because they can easily participate in PBL strategies with the roles of the teacher. Therefore, it will also increase vocabulary, at least their learning target. The PBL strategy is still a recommended substitute for learning with traditional methods, such as rote memorization. They can overcome these challenges with good cooperation between teachers, students, and parents. Finally, further research should investigate whether this teaching strategy can still be applied to higher education as they have developed their skills much more than at the primary level. Lastly, future research on the issue of the play is strongly recommended, with a larger sample size from the group of teachers and parents. The sample group shows the diversity of the regional parent population.

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