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**INTEGRATING SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY,
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PSS004 - GAME-INTEGRATED COMMUNICATIVE FRAMEWORK: TRANSFORMING ESL SPEAKING THROUGH MAINSTREAM DIGITAL GAMING

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ABSTRACT

This paper introduces the *Game-Integrated Communicative Framework* (GICF), an innovative solution to persistent challenges in Malaysian tertiary ESL education: low speaking confidence, lack of authentic practice, and difficulty with strategic communication tasks like giving instructions and leading discussions. Moving beyond traditional teacher-centered methods, GICF systematically integrates the popular cooperative game *Overcooked* (on the Nintendo Switch) into a structured Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) cycle. This creates a high-engagement, low-anxiety environment where learners practise imperative use, sequencing, and negotiation in time-sensitive collaborative scenarios. A mixed-methods pilot study with 40 A2-B1 CEFR learners at UiTM Sarawak demonstrated significant outcomes: increased classroom engagement, reduced speaking anxiety, and improved accuracy in functional language use. By merging theory-driven pedagogy with the motivational power of gaming, GICF addresses both linguistic and affective barriers to fluency. Furthermore, it presents substantial commercial potential for scalable educational products, aligning with national educational goals and advancing Sustainable Development Goal 4: Quality Education.

Keywords – ESL Speaking, Gamification, Digital Game-Based Learning, Leadership Language, Instruction-Giving

INTRODUCTION

Despite decades of English instruction under national policies (KSSR, KSSM, CEFR), Malaysian tertiary students often graduate with low confidence in spoken English. Traditional, teacher-centered classrooms fail to provide authentic, real-time communication practice, leaving learners anxious and ill-prepared for strategic tasks like instruction-giving and discussion leadership. The *Game-Integrated Communicative Framework* (GICF) addresses this critical gap. It recontextualizes a mainstream entertainment platform into a rigorous pedagogical tool, transforming the popular cooperative game *Overcooked* into a catalyst for language acquisition. GICF is significant for its dual focus: it measurably enhances oral proficiency through structured practice while simultaneously fostering indispensable 21st-century skills like collaboration, leadership,

and problem-solving. Its demonstrated scalability and commercial viability position GICF as a transformative model for modern language education.

OBJECTIVE

The objectives of this project are threefold. Firstly, it aims to design and implement the GICF using mainstream cooperative gaming to enhance ESL learners' instruction-giving, leadership language, and collaboration skills in speaking classrooms. Secondly, it seeks to evaluate GICF's impact on reducing speaking anxiety while promoting authentic, real-time communication in tertiary ESL settings. Lastly, it explores the potential scalability of GICF for broader applications, including teacher training programmes and the development of digital ESL learning resources.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

GICF employs the *Task-Based Language Teaching* (TBLT) cycle to integrate *Overcooked*, a cooperative multiplayer game by Ghost Town Games on the Nintendo Switch into ESL speaking lessons, ensuring gameplay meets defined linguistic objectives rather than serving as entertainment. In *Overcooked*, players collaborate to prepare and deliver food orders under strict time limits, undertaking tasks such as chopping, while managing obstacles such as moving platforms or restricted workspace. Success depends on real-time communication, strategic role allocation, and efficient task delegation within rounds lasting two to four minutes.

GICF is delivered in three stages. In the pre-task phase, the instructor introduces the game, explains the rules, and teaches functional language for instruction-giving, sequencing, and negotiation, such as “*First, boil the rice; then serve the dish*”. Roles are assigned as one *Leader*, one *Coordinator*, and one or two *Implementers*, with each responsible for specific communicative and operational functions.



Figure 1: Learners played *Overcooked* on Nintendo Switch within the GICF using a TBLT approach.

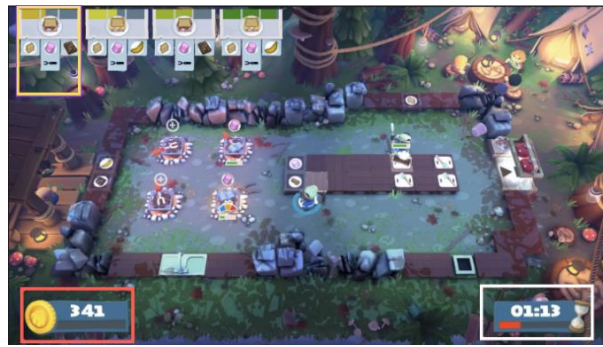


Figure 2: *Overcooked* gameplay interface

During the task phase, learners engage in gameplay using the target language, applying pre-taught structures to articulate strategies, negotiate responsibilities, and respond to challenges. A structured *Gameplay Language Bank* supports this process, categorising expressions by communicative function and role: *Leaders* issue clear imperatives, *Coordinators* manage sequencing, and *Implementers* execute tasks while participating in negotiations.

Table 1: Example of Gameplay Language Bank by Function and Role.

Language Function	Example Sentence	Role Likely to Use It	Purpose in Gameplan
Imperative (Giving direct instructions)	“Chop the onions!”	Leader	Commanding
	“Wash the plates now!”	Coordinator	Urging and instructing
	“Serve the salad quickly!”	Implementer	Prompting teammates

The post-task phase involves reflective discussion, where learners analyse strategies, identify effective expressions, and consider improvements. This structured cycle transforms *Overcooked* from a leisure game into a pedagogical tool that enhances linguistic proficiency while fostering 21st-century skills such as teamwork, leadership, and problem-solving.

NOVELTY

This project’s novelty lies in integrating a mainstream entertainment game into formal ESL pedagogy through a structured, theory-based framework. Unlike most Digital Game-Based Language Learning research focused on educational games, it employs the popular Nintendo Switch game *Overcooked* within a *Task-Based Language Teaching* (TBLT) cycle. The GICF addresses strategic language use and affective factors by embedding tasks in an engaging, low-anxiety context. It recontextualises *Overcooked* into a tool combining linguistic targets, reflective practice, and gamified motivation, retaining its entertainment value while aligning with communicative objectives such as instruction-giving, negotiation, and leadership language.

CONCLUSION

The *Game-Integrated Communicative Framework* (GICF) effectively enhances ESL learners' oral communication, particularly in instruction-giving and collaborative problem-solving, while reducing speaking anxiety and boosting engagement. It fosters leadership, teamwork, and digital literacy through structured integration of the mainstream game *Overcooked*. Rule modifications and scaffolding improved participation and confidence, highlighting the value of pedagogical flexibility and technology alignment with learning goals. Aligned with Malaysia's CEFR reforms and *Sustainable Development Goal 4: Quality Education*, GICF is both a transformative teaching innovation and a market-ready product.