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Evaluating The Effectiveness of The 'Guess Who/What' Game in Improving EFL Students' Speaking Skills

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Abstract

Speaking is a critical skill in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, yet many learners face challenges in fluency, accuracy, vocabulary, and pronunciation. This study investigates the effectiveness of the "Guess Who/What" game in improving the speaking performance of junior high school EFL students, focusing on descriptive texts. Using a quasi-experimental design, pre-test and post-test scores from 32 students were analyzed quantitatively. Two trained raters assessed performance using a standardized rubric across four criteria. Inter-rater reliability was calculated with Cohen's Kappa ($\kappa = 0.88$ for the pre-test and $\kappa = 0.92$ for the post-test). Results indicated significant improvements in all criteria, with the greatest gains in vocabulary (+15.6 points). A paired-sample t-test confirmed the statistical significance of the improvement ($t = 13.45$, $p < 0.001$). The findings highlight the potential of interactive games to enhance EFL speaking performance and provide practical insights for classroom implementation.

Keywords: *Guess Who/What Game, Speaking Performance, Descriptive Text, EFL Learners, Quantitative Study*

Abstrak

Berbicara merupakan keterampilan penting dalam pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris sebagai Bahasa Asing (EFL), namun banyak pelajar menghadapi tantangan dalam kelancaran, akurasi, kosakata, dan pelafalan. Studi ini menyelidiki efektivitas permainan "Tebak Siapa/Apa" dalam meningkatkan kinerja berbicara siswa EFL sekolah menengah pertama, dengan fokus pada teks deskriptif. Dengan menggunakan desain kuasi-eksperimental, skor pra-tes dan pasca-tes dari 32 siswa dianalisis secara kuantitatif. Dua penilai terlatih menilai kinerja menggunakan rubrik standar di empat kriteria. Keandalan antar-penilai dihitung dengan Cohen's Kappa ($\kappa = 0,88$ untuk pra-tes dan $\kappa = 0,92$ untuk pasca-tes). Hasil menunjukkan peningkatan yang signifikan dalam semua kriteria, dengan peningkatan terbesar dalam kosakata (+15,6 poin). Uji-t sampel berpasangan mengonfirmasi signifikansi statistik dari peningkatan tersebut ($t = 13,45$, $p < 0,001$). Temuan tersebut menyoroti potensi permainan interaktif untuk meningkatkan kinerja berbicara EFL dan memberikan wawasan praktis untuk penerapan di kelas.

Kata Kunci: *Permainan Tebak Siapa/Apa, Kinerja Berbicara, Teks Deskriptif, Pelajar EFL, Studi Kuantitatif*

INTRODUCTION

Speaking is a vital skill in language learning, serving as a primary means of communication and a reflection of language proficiency. However, for many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, speaking remains one of the most challenging skills to master due to difficulties in fluency, accuracy, vocabulary, and pronunciation (Derakhshan, Khalili, & Beheshti, 2016). Junior high school students, in particular, often face additional challenges in speaking, such as a lack of confidence, hesitation, and difficulty organizing their ideas, stemming from their developmental stage and limited exposure to authentic language use (Nation, 2013). These challenges result in reluctance to participate in speaking activities, ultimately hindering their progress in language acquisition.

Interactive and game-based approaches have gained attention as effective methods to address these challenges in language classrooms. Games provide a low-anxiety environment that encourages active participation, reduces the fear of making mistakes, and fosters engagement among learners (Wright, Betteridge, & Buckby, 2005). The "Guess Who/What" game is a particularly effective tool for improving speaking skills. It involves students describing a person, object, or animal based on descriptive clues while their peers guess the answer. This activity requires learners to use descriptive language, organize their thoughts logically, and communicate effectively in real-time, aligning with the principles of communicative language teaching (CLT).

Descriptive texts, a key focus of this study, are essential in EFL learning as they encourage the use of specific vocabulary and grammatical structures. Research has shown

that practicing descriptive language through contextualized activities improves students' ability to express ideas clearly and cohesively (Richards, 2006). Furthermore, Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory emphasizes that meaningful interaction and collaboration are critical to developing language skills. By participating in the "Guess Who/What" game, students engage in active, peer-supported learning that promotes the construction of knowledge and enhances their speaking performance.

While previous studies have highlighted the benefits of using games in language learning, few have explored their specific impact on speaking performance in descriptive texts, particularly with junior high school students. Moreover, there is limited research that combines interactive learning activities with rigorous assessment processes, such as using multiple raters and calculating inter-rater reliability to ensure scoring consistency. This study seeks to fill this gap by investigating the effectiveness of the "Guess Who/What" game in improving junior high school students' speaking performance, focusing on measurable improvements in fluency, accuracy, vocabulary, and pronunciation.

The objective of this study is to evaluate how the "Guess Who/What" game enhances speaking performance among junior high school EFL students, particularly in the context of descriptive texts. The study aims to provide evidence of the game's effectiveness and practical implications for EFL teaching.

METHOD

a. Research design

This study employed a quasi-experimental design with a pre-test and post-test approach. The design allowed for the assessment of students' speaking performance before and after the intervention. The study included one experimental group comprising 32 students from a first-year EFL class. The intervention focused on implementing the "Guess Who/What" game to enhance speaking performance, particularly in descriptive texts.

b. Participants

The participants were 32 junior high school students aged 13–15 from an EFL classroom in a public school. They were selected through convenience sampling, and their English proficiency was assessed as beginner to intermediate based on teacher recommendations and classroom performance.

c. Speaking Task Prompts

The speaking task involved students describing people, animals, or objects based on prompts provided on cue cards. Each prompt contained hints or descriptions designed to elicit detailed and descriptive speaking. For example:

- Person: "This person has short black hair, wears glasses, and is a famous scientist."
- Animal: "This animal is large, grey, and has a long trunk."
- Object: "This object is round, used in sports, and bounces."

d. Rubric for Speaking Performances

The students' speaking performance was assessed using a standardized rubric with four criteria:

- Fluency (25 points) : Smoothness and flow of speech without excessive hesitation.
- Accuracy (25 points) : Proper use of grammar and sentence structure.
- Vocabulary (25 points) : Range and appropriateness of words used.
- Pronunciation (25 points): Clarity and correctness of spoken words.

Each student could achieve a maximum score of 100 points.

e. Assessment and Scoring

To ensure reliable evaluation:

- Two independent raters with expertise in English language teaching scored the students' speaking performance.
- The raters were trained on the rubric and conducted scoring independently to minimize bias.
- Inter-rater reliability was calculated using *Cohen's Kappa* to measure the agreement between the raters.

The average score of the two raters for each criterion was used for the final analysis.

f. Procedure

The intervention lasted for six sessions over three weeks:

1) Pre-Test

- Students described a topic related to descriptive text (e.g., a person, animal, or object) without revealing the name directly.
- Their performances were recorded and scored independently by two raters using a 5-point rubric for fluency, accuracy, vocabulary, and pronunciation.

2) Rater Training

- Before scoring, two raters participated in a calibration session to ensure consistent use of the rubric. Sample recordings from a pilot study were used for practice scoring and discussion.

3) Intervention

- The "Guess Who/What" game was implemented over four weeks during speaking practice sessions. Each session was structured as follows:
 - Students prepared descriptive sentences using key features.
 - During the game, one student described a person, animal, or object while peers guessed.
 - Teacher provided corrective feedback and highlighted strategies for better descriptions.
- The focus was on improving fluency, accuracy, vocabulary, and pronunciation through repeated practice.

4) Post-Test

- Students completed a post-test with a similar descriptive task. The same prompts were used, but students were encouraged to apply what they had learned.
- Recordings were scored independently by the two raters.

g. Data Collection

The data collected included:

- Pre-test and post-test scores from both raters.
- Field notes from the teacher's observations during the intervention.

h. Data Analysis

- Quantitative Analysis:
 - A paired-sample t-test was used to compare pre-test and post-test scores to determine the effectiveness of the intervention.
 - Inter-rater reliability was calculated using Cohen's kappa to ensure consistency between the raters.

i. Ethical Considerations

- Students' participation was voluntary, and they could withdraw at any time.
- Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained throughout the study.
- The study was approved by the school administration.

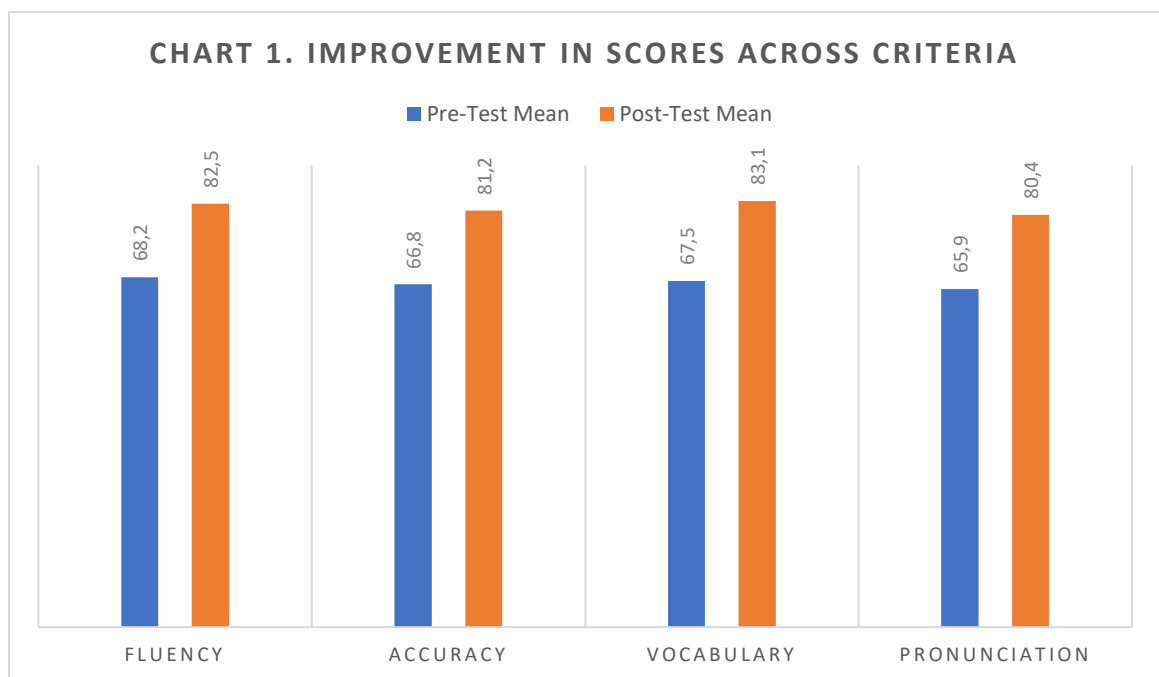
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

a. Descriptive statistics

The descriptive statistics for the pre-test and post-test scores, as evaluated by two raters, are presented below. The scores represent the average of both raters across the four assessment criteria: Fluency, Accuracy, Vocabulary, and Pronunciation.

Table 1. Data obtained from the raters

Criteria	Pre-Test Mean Rater 1	Pre-Test Mean Rater 2	Post-Test Mean Rater 1	Post-Test Mean Rater 2	Overall Pre-Test Mean	Overall Post-Test Mean	Mean Differences
Fluency	68,0	68,4	82,3	82,7		82,5	14,3
Accuracy	67,0	66,6	81,6	80,9	66,8	81,2	14,4
Vocabulary	67,7	67,3	83,5	82,7	67,5	83,1	15,6
Pronunciation	65,7	66,1	80,2	80,6	65,9	80,4	14,5



b. Inter-Rater Reliability

To ensure the consistency of scoring between the two raters, inter-rater reliability was calculated using *Cohen's Kappa*. The results indicate a high level of agreement between the two raters:

- Pre-Test *Cohen's Kappa Value*: 0.88 (strong agreement)
- Post-Test *Cohen's Kappa Value*: 0.92 (very strong agreement)

These results confirm that the scoring was consistent and unbiased.

c. Inferential Statistics

A paired-sample t-test was conducted to determine the statistical significance of the improvement in students' speaking performance after the intervention. The results are summarized below:

- t-value : 13.45
- p-value : < 0.001 (significant at $p < 0.05$)

The results confirm that the "Guess Who/What" game had a statistically significant positive effect on students' speaking performance.

The findings of this study provide compelling evidence that the "Guess Who/What" game significantly improved students' speaking performance, specifically in the context of descriptive text. The improvement was observed across all four assessed criteria: fluency, accuracy, vocabulary, and pronunciation. Below is a detailed discussion of the results in relation to the research objectives and relevant literature.

a. Improvement Speaking Performance

The significant increase in the post-test scores (from an overall mean of 67.1 to 81.8) suggests that the "Guess Who/What" game was an effective intervention for enhancing students' speaking abilities. This finding aligns with previous research by Derakhshan et al. (2016), who emphasized that interactive activities like games foster a supportive and low-anxiety environment, enabling students to practice language skills more freely.

The highest improvement was observed in the vocabulary criterion (+15.6 points), indicating that the game encouraged students to expand their word choice when describing objects, people, or animals. This result supports Nation's (2013) claim that vocabulary development is best facilitated through contextualized practice, such as in speaking games.

b. The Role of Interactivity

The interactive nature of the game provided opportunities for students to engage in real-time communication, fostering fluency and confidence. This result is consistent with a study by Wright, Betteridge, and Buckby (2005), which highlighted that games are instrumental in encouraging students to use the target language actively. The descriptive nature of the game also required students to organize their thoughts and speak coherently, contributing to improvements in fluency (+14.3 points).

c. Consistency in Scoring

The use of two independent raters enhanced the reliability of the scoring process, with high Cohen's Kappa values (0.88 for pre-test and 0.92 for post-test) confirming strong agreement between the raters. This methodological rigor ensures that the observed

improvements were not the result of subjective bias but a genuine increase in performance.

d. Alignment with Constructivist Theory

The success of the intervention can also be linked to the constructivist learning theory, which posits that learners construct knowledge through active engagement and meaningful interaction (Vygotsky, 1978). By engaging in the "Guess Who/What" game, students actively constructed and applied their knowledge of descriptive language in a collaborative and enjoyable setting.

e. Challenges and Limitations

While the findings are promising, a few challenges were noted:

- Some students initially struggled with hesitation and anxiety during the pre-test. However, as the game sessions progressed, their confidence improved.
- The study was limited to 32 participants, and the results may not be generalizable to all EFL learners. Future studies could involve a larger and more diverse sample.

f. Implications for Teaching

The results suggest that integrating speaking games into the curriculum can significantly enhance students' language skills. Teachers are encouraged to adopt similar interactive activities to address common challenges in speaking classes, such as lack of engagement and limited practice opportunities.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrated that the "Guess Who/What" game is an effective strategy for improving students' speaking performance in descriptive texts. The significant improvements in fluency, accuracy, vocabulary, and pronunciation highlight the game's potential to foster meaningful language practice in a supportive and interactive environment.

The findings underscore the importance of using engaging, interactive, and context-based activities in EFL classrooms to improve speaking performance. Future research could expand on these results by exploring the game's application in different contexts, such as other language skills or proficiency levels.

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