

AUGMENTING EFL STUDENTS' SPEAKING SKILLS THROUGH THE MYSTERY BOX GAME

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Abstract: This study examined how employing the Mystery Box game affected tenth-grade students' speaking skills at a senior high school in Lhokseumawe, Aceh, Indonesia. It employed pre-experimental quantitative research. A number of 25 students from class X-3 were purposively chosen as the sample of this study. In collecting the data, the researchers used tests (pre-test and post-test) as the instrument, and the results were analyzed by using statistics. The results showed that the mean scores of the pre-test and post-test were 37.2 and 73.2, respectively. The mean score of the post-test was higher than the mean score of the pre-test, with the T-test value of 4,556, and the critical value in the t-table (0.05) of 1.711. This implies that the t-score is higher than the t-table ($t\text{-score} = 4.534 > t\text{-table} = 1.711$), and thus the alternative hypothesis (H_a) of this research was accepted and the null hypothesis (H_o) was rejected. In conclusion, teaching English by using the Mystery Box game to improve these EFL students' speaking skills succeeded. Consequently, the use of this game is among the alternative media to be used by English teachers in augmenting their students' skills in speaking English. When students achieve the accuracy and mastery of speaking skills, at a later stage, it can help them move to the improvement of other language skills.

Keywords: EFL students; Mystery Box game; powerpoint-based game; speaking skills.

INTRODUCTION

Speaking skills are among the significant aspects of the English language teaching curriculum in Indonesia, and an important object of evaluation during the students' study time. Speaking is essential for students to practice their capability and understanding, as well as how to deliver ideas accurately, and the students' motivation and interest are indispensable in the process (Suryani & Rosa, 2014). The purpose of teaching and learning English is for students to utilize it for global communication and to pursue their studies. Speaking skills should be performed

simultaneously during the teaching and learning process. However, in most EFL scenarios, students do not use the language in real-life situations while learning in the classroom. And this situation hinders their chance to communicate effectively and appropriately (Oradee, 2012).

Based on the researchers' observation during the Internship Program at a senior high school in Lhokseumawe, Aceh, Indonesia, some indicators of students' difficulties in learning speaking skills were identified. First, most of the students at this school could not use English well because they rarely practiced it in their English classes. They

occasionally employed Indonesian words in their English classes, and communication in English was not fluent as there were many pauses, repairs, and repetitions. Second, they preferred not to participate in speaking practices because they found the skills to be challenging and demanding to their weak ability in speaking. Lastly, they find it boring, and this low motivation led them to gradually cease learning English. Further preliminary interviews with the students also reported that some were not riveted by their teachers' use of learning media because they only used image media in limited formats. This caused students to become easily bored and less interested in learning a foreign language that they deemed difficult (i.e., English).

To deal with these problems, it is urged that language teachers employ interesting media to boost students' interest in learning English. Game is one of the mediums that can be employed; it is a competitive activity played according to some rules within a given context, where players meet a challenge to achieve a goal and win. It involves competition and challenges that become the driving forces to achieve a certain goal (El-Shamy, 2001). Yolageldili and Arikan (2011) found that students are more motivated to learn another language when they are immersed in a game. The use of games in learning can increase students' interest and motivation because games create a pleasurable and fascinating environment (Sari et al., 2022). When students are motivated, they will concentrate on their efforts to improve their academic performance (Iswadi et al., 2014).

The Mystery Box game is an educational game created using PowerPoint (PPT). It is a game that is used as a medium and consists of unknown items that will help the learner learn something (Arta, 2018). As the technological era progresses, educational instructors must be proficient with technology (Muslem et al., 2018; Silviyanti & Yusuf, 2014; Yusuf et al., 2018), such as the PowerPoint on computer media, because it eases communications. PowerPoint media are utilized for educational and learning objectives because of their effectiveness in conveying messages (Daryanto, 2016). This media has many advantages, including being able to provide interesting and dynamic visuals, animation, and sound effects. With attractive visuals, students are happier and enjoy the lessons (Tamami, 2014). Educational games can further improve students' memory so that they can store subject matter for a longer time compared to conventional teaching methods (i.e., teacher-centered) (Vitianingsih,

2016).

The benefits of the Mystery Box as a PowerPoint-based gaming media are supported by several earlier investigations that were carried out in language learning. First, Arta (2018) investigated the use of the vocabulary 'Mystery Box' to improve English-Indonesian translation skills. It aims to find out whether the use of the vocabulary 'Mystery Box' can improve students' English-Indonesian translation skills or not at a junior high school in Salatiga, Central Java. Second, Fidyaningrum et al. (2021) researched whether the MOFIN Mystery Box media could improve students' vocabulary mastery at an elementary school in Sukomanunggal, East Java. Finally, Utami et al (2022) studied the use of Mystery Box as a learning media for helping students to improve their speaking skills at a junior high school in Lamongan, East Java. All of these studies found that the use of games, especially Mystery Box, in language learning does assist students in developing their language skills, especially in vocabulary building and speaking competence.

Accordingly, to resolve the problem of the students' speaking skills at the school under study, that is in a senior high school in Lhokseumawe, Aceh, this present study intends to use the Mystery Box game. Most previous related studies were conducted on EFL students in Java, hence this study focused on EFL students in Aceh. In contrast to previous studies, which manually used the Mystery Box game media, this study combined it with technology, that is PowerPoint. This research aims mainly to find out whether there is a notable improvement in students' speaking skills or not. To enable the researchers to elaborate on the main problem, the research question for this study is formulated as follows: Does the use of the Mystery Box game help improve EFL students speaking skills?

From the research question, the following hypothesis is formulated: Ha: The use of the Mystery Box game does help improve EFL students speaking skills. Ho: The use of the Mystery Box game does not help improve EFL students speaking skills.

Speaking is one of the language skills that is important to be mastered. According to Brown (2004), speaking is a productive skill that may be observed directly and empirically. According to Bailey and Nunan (2005), speaking is frequently spontaneous, open-ended, and changing yet not always predictable. Brown (2007) further defines speaking as an interactive process of building

meaning in which the main instrument is the voice, which is produced, received, and processed. Chaney (1998) in Kayi (2006) added that speaking is the process of creating and sharing meaning using verbal and nonverbal symbols in a range of contexts. Several aspects are required to develop good speaking and more effective communication. Brown (2001) grouped these aspects to vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency, and comprehension.

Vocabulary is a need for students to achieve good speaking abilities. A student's vocabulary plays a key role in their ability to speak, listen, read, and write in a language. According to Harmer (2007), students can communicate effectively if they have a larger vocabulary or at least 1000 words in a language they are learning. When they are familiar with the words that best explain their views, they can speak better when they have something to say. Meanwhile, pronunciation makes the right sounds for others to understand; having clear pronunciation will make it easier for others to hear and comprehend (Srakaew, 2021). Fluency is the capacity to communicate coherently, sensibly, accurately, and without excessive hesitancy (Nunan, 2004), or in other words, speaking with clarity. Finally, the last aspect of speaking is comprehension. Richards (2008) viewed comprehension as a process of decoding; beginning with the information that is received, comprehension analyzes each level of organization such as sounds, words, phrases, sentences, and texts, until meaning is derived.

Language learning may be a hard task and frustrating for EFL students. However, it can be something interesting and fun if teachers find suitable techniques to teach language. One of the ways to make language learning interesting is by using games. Traditionally, games have been used in the language class as warm-ups at the beginning of the class, and fill-ins when there are extra times at the end of the class (Zhang, 2018). Today, games constitute a more substantial part of language courses. Games are activities with rules, a goal, with elements of fun (Hadfield, 1996). Games involve many factors such as rules, competition, relaxation, and learning. According to Deesri (2002), language games are not activity aimed to break the ice between the students or to kill time, but it is a form of play governed by rules. The games should be enjoyed because this is one of the ways to make the students practice the language while playing the game.

According to Brewster et al (2002), some

advantages of using games are encouraging memorization, promoting correct pronunciation, and bringing creative use of language. Games are effective because they provide motivation, lower the students' stress, and give them the opportunity for real communication. In addition, Richard-Amato (1996) also stated that even though games are often associated with fun, teachers should not lose sight of the pedagogical values, particularly in foreign language teaching. When introducing language games, teachers should first explain the purpose of the games to the students so they can also focus on the goal of learning while they play the game. The rule of the games can be negotiated or modified according to the students' needs and interests. Teachers should also consider and pay attention to the level of difficulty. Part of the appeal of the games lies in the challenge but if the games are too challenging, it may discourage students.

In language learning, Hadfield (1999) classified games into three types, they are memorizing, personalizing, and communicating games. The memorizing game is a kind of game that assist students memorize or retain the meaning of words in their minds. Personalizing game is a kind of game intended to encourage students to connect new words to their own experiences. The communicating game is focused on the successful completion of a goal. Accordingly, teachers must select a worthwhile game to aid in the teaching and learning process that is appropriate for the students' needs in the classroom, especially for those who struggle to understand the language being learned.

The Mystery Box game is a fun game that can be used in any lesson, whether teaching online or in the classroom. It is known to encourage students' creativity while also making them more conscious of their thinking (Yanuarto, 2014). The box in this game is the media to help the teacher in the learning process. Media acts as a facilitator in the teaching-learning process (Rao, 2014), meaning that it is used to help the teacher to give information to the students. In the teaching and learning process, the use of media is to make the process run effectively and interesting. The teacher can use unknown items in a Mystery Box to help students improve their abilities to listen to others, recall information, ask purposeful questions, classify items by class, make inferences, synthesize information, and draw conclusions (Rule, 2007). This game process can be performed to assess creativity, responsibility, and student activity in class (Arta, 2018).

The Mystery Box game is in the form of a PowerPoint template that can be downloaded and accessed via the Internet. The teacher can fill in this game template according to the material the students are learning. It is part of the PowerPoint-based game created using Microsoft PowerPoint. A PowerPoint game is a game that is fully contained in a Microsoft PowerPoint file (Siko & Barbour, 2012). Some PowerPoint games can be downloaded via the internet, such as the Mystery Box game. Teachers can use PowerPoint to develop a variety of games that “can make a positive impact on how students learn, how they process and retain information, and how they interact with digital media” (Squire, 2019, p. 44). The advantage of making English games on PowerPoint is that teachers can add visuals and audio to their work. Furthermore, creating games with PowerPoint is an alternative that should be considered while teaching a foreign language.

To play the game, the students are divided into several groups, then they take turns picking a box letter and answering a question. Students have a choice after answering the question. They have the option of keeping the box or giving it to the opposing team. There may be good points (+1000) or bad points (-1000) inside the box. The box letter contains commands for the students to describe things, such as objects, people, places, activities, tourist attractions, or famous historical buildings.

The Mystery Box game employs cooperative learning in which it uses small groups so that students work together to maximize their own and each other's learning (Johnson & Johnson, 1999). Jacobs et al. (2002) asserted that cooperative learning comprises principles and techniques for helping students to work together more effectively. It also refers to a variety of teaching methods in which students work in small groups to help one another learn academic content (Slavin, 1995). The higher-level students will help lower-level ones improve their understanding of the subject. The idea behind cooperative learning is that by giving a reward to a group rather than an individual, the students will be motivated to help one another to master academic materials. Each member of a team is responsible not only for learning the materials but also for helping teammates to understand the subject and complete the task given. Accordingly, creating games combined with the principles of cooperative learning is expected to not only create an atmosphere of achievement but also enjoyment for the students in learning.

METHOD

This research method employed a pre-experimental study (one group pre-test, treatment, and post-test design). Pre-experimental design is a design in which the researcher studies a single group and performs an intervention during the experiment (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The treatment was conducted after the pre-test. After the data were obtained, the analysis and interpretation were done through a quantitative procedure. The researchers computed the mean score of the students' speaking skills, calculated the standard deviation, and calculated the t-test values to know the difference between students' scores on the pre-test and post-test.

The population of this study was all the 106 first-year students of a senior high school in Lhokseumawe, Aceh, Indonesia, in the academic year of 2022/2023. The researchers used purposive sampling to draw a sample from the population by choosing one class as a sample, which was class X-3 consisting of 25 students. This sample was chosen due to the students' majority of having low scores in the English subject, and thus this called for an urgent need for improvement.

A speaking test with a pre-test and post-test format was the research tool employed by the researchers. During the tests, each student was to speak for three minutes of describing an object. During the tests, the students were recorded using an audio recorder. To analyze the data from the pre-test and the post-test, a scoring rubric for speaking suggested by Brown (2001) was used. The assessment comprised the aspects of vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency, and comprehension. The scores of the pre-test and post-test were tabulated using Microsoft Excel and the data was analyzed by using statistical formulas which consist of mean, standard deviation, and t-tests to prove the hypotheses of this study.

In testing the hypothesis, the researcher used the level of significant α 0.05 (5%) which is referred to as the t-table and is usually used in psychological and educational research. According to Sudijono (2003, p. 260), the testing criterion used for hypothesis result is; if $t\text{-test} > t\text{-table}$, it means that the alternative hypothesis (H_a) is accepted and the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected. Furthermore, Sudijono (2003) explained that the t-table with a level significance of α 0.05 with a degree of freedom (df) $n-1$.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of students' pre-test scores

The scores of the pre-tests are presented in Figure 1.

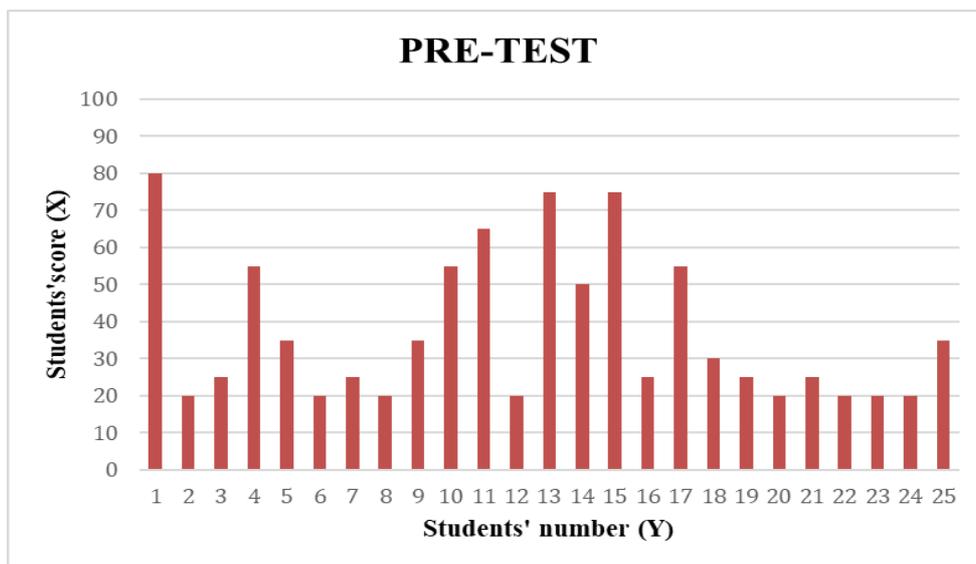


Figure 1. *Pre-test scores*

Figure 1 shows that the highest total score on the pre-test was 80, obtained by one student. Meanwhile, the lowest score was 20, obtained by eight students. The average score of the pre-test was 37.2. It can be concluded that the students' ability in speaking was still low at this stage

because the average score of students was below 50.

The results of students' post-test scores

The scores of the post-tests are presented in Figure 2.

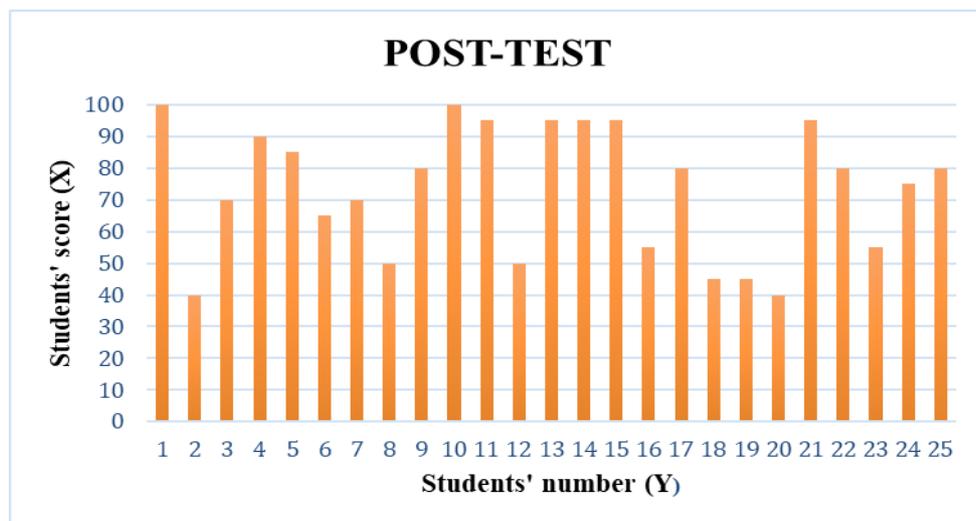


Figure 2. *Post-test scores*

Figure 2 shows that the highest total score was 100, which was obtained by two students. While the lowest score in the post-test result was 40, it was obtained by two students. The mean score of the post-test was 73.2. It could be seen that in the post-test, students' scores had increased.

The comparison between pre-test and post-test scores

The results of the students' scores from the pre-test and the post-test are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. *Classification scores of pre-test and post-test*

| No | Score | Category | Number of students | |
|----|--------|-----------|--------------------|-----------|
| | | | Pre-test | Post-test |
| 1 | 86-100 | Excellent | 0 | 8 |
| 2 | 71-85 | Good | 3 | 6 |
| 3 | 56-70 | Fair | 1 | 3 |
| 4 | 41-55 | Poor | 4 | 6 |
| 5 | < 40 | Very Poor | 17 | 2 |

As shown in Table 1, there is a difference

between the test results before and after the treatment. The pre-test results showed that 17 students were in the very poor category (score < 40), 4 students were in the poor category (scores between 41-55), 1 student was in the fair category (scores between 56-70), 3 students were in the good category (scores between 71-85), and no student was in the excellent category (scores between 86-100). It means that the average of the students' ability in the pretest was still low. However, the post-test results revealed that the students' scores had increased. It showed that only 2 students were in the very poor category (scores < 40), 6 students were in the poor category

(scores between 41-55), 3 students were in the fair category (scores between 56-70 score), 6 students were in the good category (scores between 71-85), and 8 students were in the excellent category (scores between 86-100). This implies that there was an improvement in the students' scores in speaking skills after being taught by using the Mystery Box game.

The comparison between pre-test and post-test mean score

Figure 3 presents the significant improvement in the students' speaking skills between the pre-test and post-test.

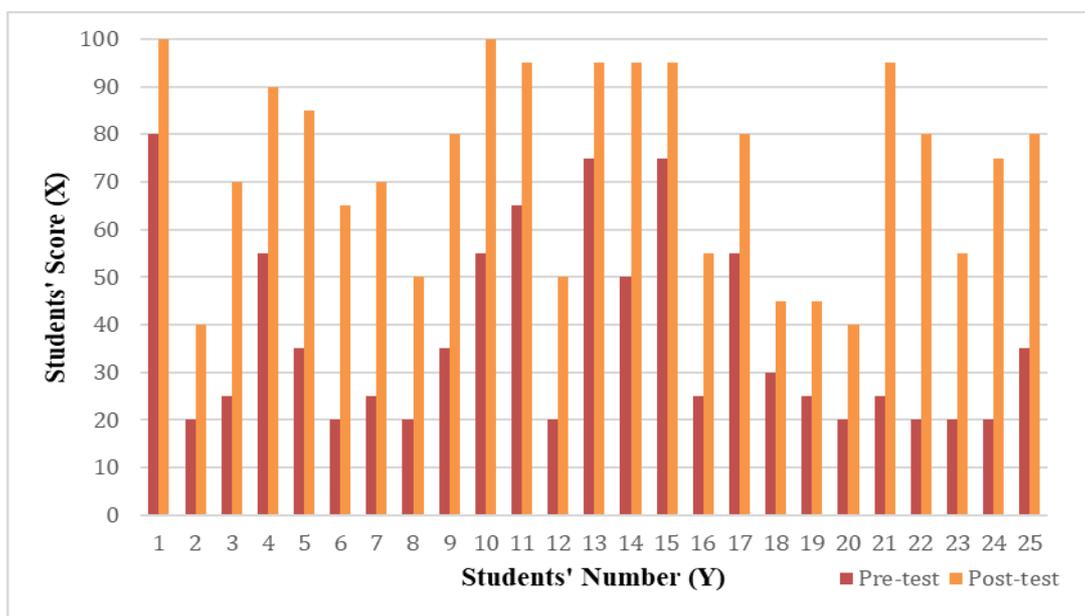


Figure 3. *Pre-test and post-test scores*

Figure 3 shows that the highest score on the pre-test was 80, while the lowest score on the pre-test was 20. For the post-test, the highest score was 100 and the lowest score was 40. In addition, the average score of students' achievement in the pre-test was 37.2. Whereas the average score in the post-test was 73.2. This denotes significantly different results between the pre-test and post-test after using the Mystery Box game was implemented to improve students' speaking skills. This game succeeded in assisting students to develop their speaking skills.

The comparison of pre-test and post-test scores in the aspects of speaking

Vocabulary

Figure 4 displays the significant improvement in the students' vocabulary between the pre-test and post-test.

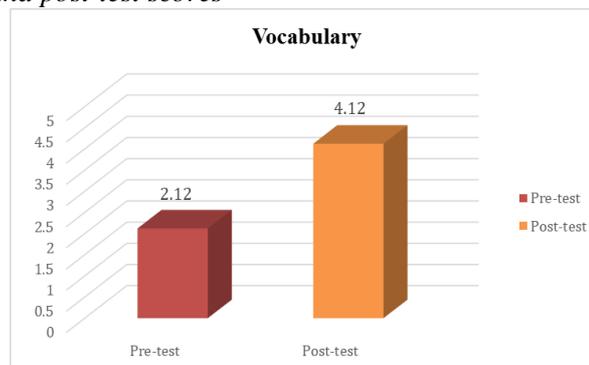


Figure 4. *The mean score of the vocabulary aspect in pre-test and post-test*

From Figure 4, the improvement of scores between the pre-test and post-test in the vocabulary aspect is displayed. In the pre-test, the score for vocabulary was 2.12. Meanwhile, in the post-test, the score for vocabulary was 4.12. The vocabulary score of the post-test was higher than the pre-test.

Pronunciation

Figure 5 presents the significant improvement in the students' pronunciation between the pre-test and post-test.

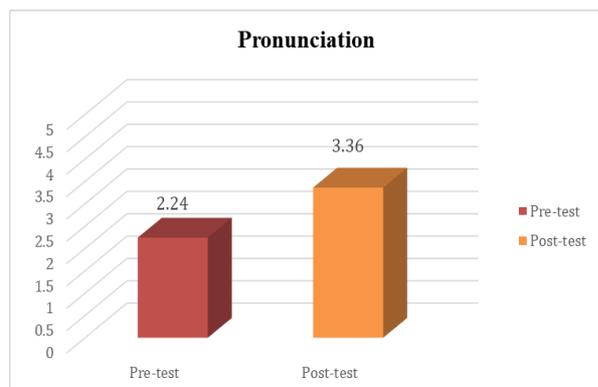


Figure 5. The mean score of the pronunciation aspect in the pre-test and post-test

Figure 5 shows the improvement of scores between the pre-test and post-test in the pronunciation aspect. In the pre-test, the score of pronunciation was 2.24. Meanwhile, in the post-test, the score of pronunciation was 3.36. Here, the pronunciation score of the post-test was also higher than the pre-test.

Fluency

Figure 6 illustrates the significant improvement in the students' fluency between the pre-test and post-test.

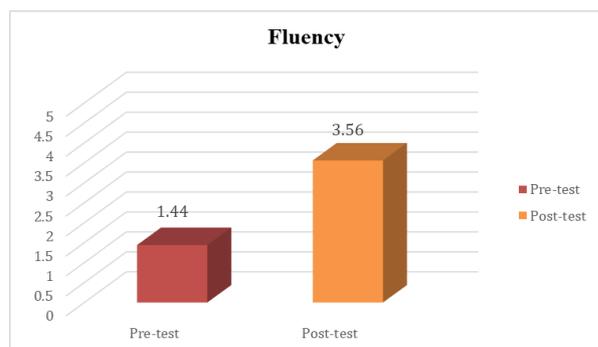


Figure 6. The mean score of fluency aspect in the pre-test and post-test

From Figure 6, the improvement of scores between the pre-test and post-test in the fluency aspect is displayed. In the pre-test, the score of fluency was 1.44. Meanwhile, in the post-test, the score of fluency was 3.56. The fluency score of the post-test was higher than the pre-test.

Comprehension

Figure 7 presents the significant improvement in the students' comprehension between the pre-test and post-test.

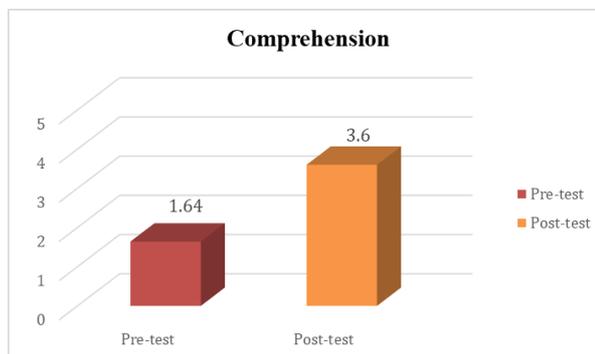


Figure 7. The mean score of comprehension aspect in pre-test and post-test

Figure 7 shows the improvement of scores between the pre-test and post-test in the comprehension aspect. In the pre-test, the score of comprehension was 1.64. Meanwhile, in the post-test, the score of comprehension was 3.6. It can be seen that in the post-test, students' comprehension scores increased.

Hypothesis testing

Table 2 shows the mean and t-score of the pre-test and post-test results.

Table 2. Mean and t-score of the pre-test and post-test

| Test | Total Score | Mean | Standard Deviation | T-Value | T-table |
|----------|-------------|------|--------------------|---------|---------|
| Pretest | 930 | 37.2 | 14,57 | 4,556 | 1.711 |
| Posttest | 1830 | 73.2 | | | |

Table 2 shows that from the pre-test scores, there was a significant improvement in the post-test scores. The mean score of the pre-test was 37.2, while the post-test was 73.2. The higher post-test scores proved that the treatment by using Mystery Box game media to improve students speaking skills in all aspects was successful. Figure 8 shows a clearer depiction of the results for each aspect of the speaking skills.

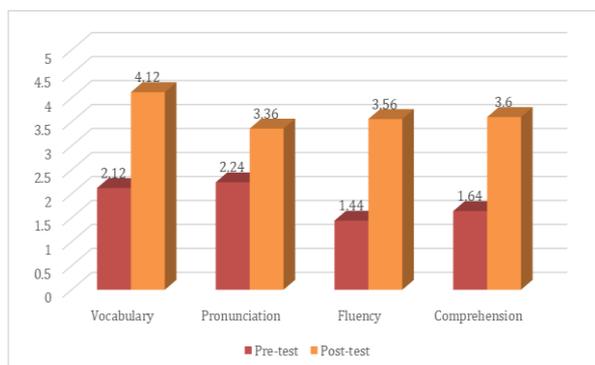


Figure 8. The mean score of each speaking aspect in the pre-test and post-test

Figure 8 shows the mean score between the pre-test and post-test in all aspects. In the pre-test,

the mean score of vocabulary was 2.12, pronunciation was 2.24, fluency was 1.44, and comprehension was 1.64. Meanwhile, in the post-test, the mean score of vocabulary was 4.12, pronunciation was 3.36, fluency was 3.56, and comprehension was 3.6. A t-test formula was further conducted for reliability. The standard deviation between the pre-test and post-test was 14.57, and the obtained t-value was 4.556. In addition, the number of students in this experiment was 25, so the degree of freedom (df) was $n-1 = 25-1 = 24$. After obtaining the t-value, the researchers referred the score to the critical value on the t-score measurement table to find out whether the difference was significant or not. The t-table for five percent alpha and 24 degrees of freedom was 1.711, and the t-value was higher than the t-table ($t\text{-value} = 4,556 > t\text{-table} = 1.711$). Subsequently, the alternative hypothesis (H_a) clarified that there is a significant improvement in students' speaking skills after using the Mystery Box game and this hypothesis was accepted, and the null hypothesis (H_o) states that there is no significant improvement in students' speaking skills after using the Mystery Box game was rejected.

The findings revealed that the Mystery Box game media was effective in increasing the scores of the students' speaking skills in the aspect of vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency, and comprehension. This is proven by the significant differences between the pre-test and post-test scores. These results supported the alternative hypothesis and were congruent with previous findings that found the Mystery Box game to be effective in improving speaking skills, especially vocabulary (Arta, 2018; Fidyanningrum et al., 2021; Utami et al, 2022). In addition to the previous studies which did not use technology, this study employed the Mystery Box game digitally using PowerPoint technology called PowerPoint-based games. The results showed that the use of the Mystery Box game, both manually and digitally, had a significant effect on improving students' speaking skills.

Games create an enjoyable and engaging environment, which can boost students' interest and motivation in the subject matter. When teachers add games to the learning process, students will be engaged and driven to learn (Sari et al., 2022). The gaming atmosphere in the classroom allows the students to enjoy the learning process, and this game process can be performed to further assess creativity, responsibility, and student activity in class (Arta,

2018). The use of the Mystery Box game provides an interesting and unique learning impression for both teachers and students as well, as long as teachers can keep students active in the classroom so that classroom activities are not teacher-centered but student-centered (Paisah et al., 2013). In this study, colorful, clear, and entertaining media from this gain were seen to sustain the students' attention and warm them up to the topics. Student's interest in the lesson is increased by engaging in learning resources.

Rule (2007) has elaborated that through the Mystery Box game, teachers could help children improve their abilities to listen to others, recall information, ask purposeful questions, classify items by class, make inferences, synthesize information, and draw conclusions. It is a student-centered activity that can increase participation, cooperation, and enthusiasm. The students' motivation to learn the language increases when they are actively engaged in a game (Yolageldili & Arikan, 2011). This game provides a fun and interesting learning experience to encourage the students' motivation and self-confidence and, of course, improve their speaking skills, in terms of their vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency, and comprehension. These activities would train them to think creatively and critically. Through peer and group work, every student could learn from the mistakes of their friends (Achmad & Yusuf, 2014). The game further helps them enrich their vocabularies, which can further improve their efforts in learning English.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that there was a significant improvement in the students' scores between the pre-test and the post-test in teaching speaking by using the Mystery Box game to the ninth-grade students in Lhokseumawe, Aceh, Indonesia. The result of the mean score in the speaking aspects of the pre-test was 37.2, while the mean score of the post-test was 73.2. It means that the mean score of the post-test was higher than the pre-test, denoting that a significant improvement was achieved in the students' speaking skills. The t-score was 4.556, the t-table and level significance were 1.711, and the alpha level of significance is 0.05. Since the obtained t-value (4.556) was higher than the critical value at (1.711), the test was statistically significant and the alternative hypothesis (H_a) was accepted and the null hypothesis (H_o) was rejected.

This study has answered the research question on the use of the Mystery Box game to improve

EFL students' speaking skills. The researchers hope the results of this study give beneficial contribution both for English teachers and EFL classrooms in general. Expectedly, this study will enrich the teaching of English classes and media used in speaking practice. Additionally, it is anticipated that this research will assist teachers in assisting students in mastering speaking skills by enhancing students' abilities and improving student accomplishment.

However, the results cannot be generated for all EFL students in Indonesia. Since the sample was limited to only one class in one senior high school in Aceh, further studies are recommended to include more participants and schools to test this game in teaching a foreign language. This study also used the quantitative research design, therefore, future studies should include the qualitative design, such as open-ended questionnaires, observations, and interviews from both the teachers and students to obtain more in-depth views, disadvantages, and advantages on the implementation of this game in teaching speaking skills in English classes.

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