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Improving Students' Speaking Skill through Guessing Pictures Games: A Classroom Action Research at State Junior High School No. 4 Amabi Oefeto Timur

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ABSTRACT

Students at State Junior High School No. 4 Amabi Oefeto Timur experienced difficulties in English speaking, particularly limited vocabulary, low confidence, and insufficient opportunities for oral practice. These challenges affected their participation and speaking performance in classroom activities. This study aimed to improve eighth-grade students' speaking skills through Guessing Pictures Games during the 2025/2026 academic year. The study employed Classroom Action Research (CAR) based on the Kemmis and McTaggart model, consisting of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. It involved 32 students and was conducted in two cycles, each comprising two meetings. Data were collected through speaking tests, observations, interviews, and questionnaires and analyzed using descriptive quantitative and qualitative approaches. The results showed an increase in the class mean score from 55.50 in the pre-test to 67.47 in Cycle 1 and 78.56 in Cycle 2. Based on the original achievement classifications, the number of students meeting the minimum passing criterion increased from 12 (37.5%) in the pre-test to 24 (75%) in Cycle 1 and 30 (93.75%) in Cycle 2. The findings indicate that Guessing Pictures Games, particularly when supported by collaborative preparation, can provide meaningful opportunities for vocabulary practice, description, and peer interaction. This study contributes practical insights into implementing accessible, non-digital, and collaborative speaking activities in EFL classrooms, particularly in junior high school contexts. It also demonstrates how reflective instructional adjustments can support classroom-based speaking development.

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1. Introduction

Speaking is a fundamental component of English language learning because it enables learners to express ideas, exchange information, and participate in communication. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, developing speaking proficiency is challenging because learners often have limited opportunities to use English outside the classroom. Effective speaking requires linguistic knowledge, fluency, real-time processing, and interactional competence (Richards, 2009; Thornbury, 2005). Therefore, speaking instruction should integrate linguistic, cognitive, and affective dimensions through structured practice, meaningful output, and feedback (Goh & Burns, 2012; Nation & Newton, 2009).

EFL learners commonly experience limited vocabulary, grammatical inaccuracies, pronunciation difficulties, insufficient fluency, and low confidence. Vocabulary knowledge is essential for language development (Schmitt, 2008), while foreign-language anxiety may influence learners' willingness to communicate (Horwitz, 2010). Diep et al. (2022) found that culturally oriented instruction was associated with improved speaking performance and reduced foreign-language anxiety among Indonesian EFL learners. Similarly, Zhang and Hasim (2023) identified positive learning and affective outcomes associated with gamification, although excessive competition and short-lived engagement may limit its benefits. These findings highlight the importance of supportive instructional activities that encourage meaningful communication.

At State Junior High School No. 4 Amabi Oefeto Timur, preliminary observations identified limited vocabulary, low confidence, and insufficient speaking opportunities among eighth-grade students. The initial assessment reported that 12 of 32 students (37.5%) achieved the minimum passing score of 68, while 20 students (62.5%) did not meet the criterion. These difficulties indicate the need for accessible activities that help students generate ideas, retrieve vocabulary, construct comprehensible utterances, and communicate with peers (Goh & Burns, 2012; Nation & Newton, 2009).

One potential strategy is *Guessing Pictures Games*, in which students describe or identify objects, animals, people, or occupations using visual clues. Pictures provide concrete prompts for generating ideas and selecting vocabulary, while the guessing task gives speaking and listening a clear communicative purpose. Darmadji et al. (2023) reported improvements in descriptive speaking performance and student engagement following the implementation of picture-guessing games. Al-Jamili et al. (2024) also found greater speaking improvement through computer game-based learning than through traditional instruction. Furthermore, Earichappan and Hashim (2024) identified the use of game-based learning to support English learning and student engagement, although much of the reviewed research focused on digital platforms and university students. These findings support further investigation of non-digital picture-guessing activities among younger EFL learners.

The potential benefits of this activity can also be understood through Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural perspective, which emphasizes learning through social interaction and assistance. Guessing Pictures Games can encourage students to describe visual

information, interpret clues, exchange ideas, and respond to peers. However, games do not automatically ensure meaningful learning. Teachers must provide clear instructions, distribute speaking opportunities fairly, and offer appropriate feedback. Zhang and Hasim (2023) caution that poorly designed gamified activities may encourage counterproductive competition or fail to sustain engagement. Moreover, although visual prompts and collaborative preparation may make speaking tasks more manageable, their effects on anxiety and participation need to be examined rather than assumed (Diep et al., 2022; Zhang & Hasim, 2023).

Although previous studies have investigated picture-guessing games and broader game-based approaches, their findings do not establish how these activities operate in the specific context of State Junior High School No. 4 Amabi Oefeto Timur. Further context-specific research is therefore needed to examine changes in speaking performance and students' participation during successive instructional cycles. Classroom Action Research (CAR) provides a suitable framework because its planning, acting, observing, and reflecting stages enable instructional practices to be revised in response to classroom evidence (Kemmis et al., 2014). In this study, observations and reflections from the first cycle inform adjustments to the second cycle, particularly to address students' reluctance to speak individually and unequal participation.

Accordingly, this study aims to investigate the improvement of eighth-grade students' English speaking skills through Guessing Pictures Games at State Junior High School No. 4 Amabi Oefeto Timur during the 2025/2026 academic year. Specifically, it examines changes in students' speaking performance from the pre-test through two CAR cycles and describes their participation and responses to the intervention. The study seeks to provide context-specific insights into the use of accessible, visually supported, and collaborative speaking activities in Indonesian EFL classrooms, particularly where opportunities to practise English outside school are limited.

2. Literature Review

2.1 English Speaking Skills in EFL Classrooms

Speaking is a productive language skill that enables learners to express ideas, exchange information, and interact with others. It involves several components, including fluency, vocabulary, grammatical accuracy, pronunciation, and interactional competence (Richards, 2009; Thornbury, 2005; Goh & Burns, 2012). Effective speaking instruction should integrate meaningful communication, language-focused learning, and fluency development (Nation & Newton, 2009). Vocabulary knowledge is essential for producing comprehensible utterances (Schmitt, 2008; Nation, 2013), while foreign-language anxiety may influence students' willingness to participate (Horwitz, 2010). Diep et al. (2022) further highlight the relationship between cultural familiarity, speaking skills, and anxiety among Indonesian EFL learners.

Speaking development can be supported through instructional approaches that provide guided practice, interaction, and feedback (Goh & Burns, 2012). Prasittichok and Smithsarakarn (2024) reported positive effects of microlearning on speaking outcomes.

Visual and interactive activities may also help learners generate ideas, retrieve vocabulary, and produce spoken language. In the present study, the preliminary assessment at State Junior High School No. 4 Amabi Oefeto Timur indicated that 12 of 32 students achieved the minimum passing score of 68, highlighting the need for activities that encourage speaking practice and participation.

2.2 Game-Based Learning in English Language Teaching

Game-based learning promotes language development through participation, interaction, and problem-solving (Prensky, 2001; Wright et al., 2006). Games provide meaningful communicative purposes for learners to exchange information and practice the target language (Nation & Newton, 2009). Previous studies have demonstrated the benefits of gamification for language learning, engagement, and speaking performance (Zhang & Hasim, 2023; Chan & Lo, 2024; Earichappan & Hashim, 2024; Susaniari & Santosa, 2024; Al-Jamili et al., 2024). Specifically, Guessing Pictures Games use visual clues to encourage students to describe objects, animals, people, and occupations while practicing vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, fluency, and interaction (Schmitt, 2008; Nation, 2013; Goh & Burns, 2012; Nation & Newton, 2009; Wright et al., 2006). Previous studies reported improvements in speaking through guessing games (Agnesia & Astutik, 2023; Nuryana, 2024; Sa'adah et al., 2024), while Yumna et al. (2026) highlighted behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement, and Afrizal et al. (2025) emphasized the assessment of speaking components in picture-description activities.

Collaborative guessing games are consistent with Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, which emphasizes social interaction and guided assistance in learning. Through peer collaboration, students exchange vocabulary, construct descriptions, and clarify meanings. However, balanced participation and appropriate language support are necessary to ensure effective learning (Goh & Burns, 2012; Nation & Newton, 2009). The importance of engagement and interaction in game-based learning is also emphasized by Zhang and Hasim (2023), Chan and Lo (2024), and Yumna et al. (2026).

Classroom Action Research (CAR) provides a systematic framework for improving teaching practices through planning, acting, observing, and reflecting (Burns, 2010; Kemmis et al., 2014), and has been applied to improve speaking skills through guessing games and other instructional interventions (Sa'adah et al., 2024; Pujiastuti et al., 2026). In this study, Guessing Pictures Games were implemented in two cycles using pictures of animals, professions, and everyday objects, with increased collaborative activities in the second cycle to address students' reluctance to speak individually. Speaking performance was assessed through fluency, vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation and intonation, and interaction and communication style (Thornbury, 2005; Goh & Burns, 2012; Nation & Newton, 2009), supported by speaking tests, observations, interviews, and questionnaires to examine students' performance, participation, and responses.

3. Method

This study employed Classroom Action Research (CAR) based on the Kemmis and McTaggart model, consisting of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. It was conducted in two cycles, with two meetings in each cycle, involving 32 eighth-grade students at State Junior High School No. 4 Amabi Oefeto Timur during the 2025/2026 academic year. Participants were purposively selected based on their difficulties in vocabulary use, confidence, and speaking participation. Data were collected through speaking tests, classroom observations, interviews, and questionnaires. Speaking performance was assessed using five criteria: fluency, vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation and intonation, and interaction and communication style. Quantitative data were analyzed descriptively by calculating students' mean scores and the percentage achieving the minimum passing score of 68. Qualitative data were analyzed descriptively to examine students' participation, engagement, and responses to the intervention. The study was considered successful if at least 85% of students achieved a score of 68 or higher.

4. Results

4.1 Pre-Test Results

A pre-test was administered to 32 eighth-grade students at State Junior High School No. 4 Amabi Oefeto Timur to identify their initial English speaking performance before implementing Guessing Pictures Games. The assessment established students' baseline scores and measured their achievement against the minimum passing score (*Kriteria Ketuntasan Minimal* or *KKM)* of 68. The individual pre-test scores are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Pre-Test Speaking Score Results

Statistical Description	Results
Number of Students	32
Total Score	1,776
Mean Score	55.50
Highest Score	75
Lowest Score	40
Achieved	12 (37.5%)
Not Achieved	20 (62.5%)

Source: Primary Data (2026)

Table 1 presents the students' initial speaking performance before the implementation of Guessing Pictures Games. The results show that the class mean was 55.50, with the highest score of 75 and the lowest score of 40. Based on the minimum passing score (KKM) of 68, only 12 students (37.5%) achieved the required standard, while 20 students (62.5%) did not. These findings indicate that most students had not attained the expected speaking competency, highlighting the need for an instructional strategy to improve their speaking performance.

4.2 Cycle 1: Implementation and Results

In Cycle 1, the Guessing Pictures Game was introduced as the core classroom activity across two meetings. During the planning phase, lesson plans were developed incorporating pictures of animals, professions, and objects as visual media. In the acting phase, the first meeting focused on vocabulary introduction and game modeling through teacher demonstration, while the second meeting emphasized group practice where students took turns describing picture cards for their group to guess. The cycle concluded with an individual speaking performance test.

Observation during Cycle 1 revealed that the use of visual aids successfully sparked students' curiosity and enthusiasm, creating a more dynamic and interactive classroom atmosphere. The passing rate rose significantly from 37.5% to 75% (24 students), as shown in Table 2. However, reflection identified persistent challenges: shy students remained hesitant when asked to perform individually for fear of judgment, and classroom interactions tended to be dominated by more naturally active students.

Table 2. Cycle 1 Speaking Score Results

Statistical Description	Results
Number of Students	32
Total Score	2,159
Mean Score	67.47
Highest Score	78
Lowest Score	60
Achieved	24 (75%)
Not Achieved	8 (25%)

Source: Primary Data (2026)

Table 2 shows that students obtained a total score of 2,159, with a mean score of 67.47. Of the 32 students, 24 (75%) achieved the minimum passing score of 68, while eight (25%) did not meet the required standard. These results indicate an improvement in students' speaking performance compared with the initial assessment. Nevertheless, the achievement rate remained below the predetermined success criterion of 85%. Reflection on Cycle 1 also identified students' reluctance to speak individually and unequal participation during classroom activities. Therefore, instructional modifications were necessary in Cycle 2, particularly by strengthening collaborative group work and providing opportunities for students to prepare descriptions with peer support.

4.3 Cycle 2: Revised Strategy and Results

Based on reflections from Cycle 1, Cycle 2 was designed to address the remaining challenges by implementing a collaborative group work strategy. This modification aimed to create a safer and more supportive learning environment, enabling students with shy personalities or lower academic ability to participate without fear of individual judgment. Students could discuss word meanings, supplement each other's vocabulary, and collaboratively refine sentences before presenting to the class.

The revised approach proved highly effective. As shown in Table 3, the passing rate surged to 94%, with 30 out of 32 students achieving the minimum passing score. Only 2 students (6%) did not meet the KKM, and these cases were attributed to persistent individual anxiety rather than a lack of understanding. This result surpassed the 85% success criterion, confirming the effectiveness of the intervention.

Table 3. Cycle 2 Speaking Score Results

Statistical Description	Results
Number of Students	32
Total Score	2,514
Mean Score	78.56
Highest Score	88
Lowest Score	70
Achieved	30 (93.75%)
Not Achieved	2 (6.25%)

Source: Primary Data (2026)

Table 3 indicates that students achieved a total score of 2,514, with a class mean of 78.56. Of the 32 students, 30 (93.75%) achieved the minimum passing score of 68, while only two (6.25%) remained below the required standard. These results demonstrate improved speaking performance compared with the previous cycle and exceeded the predetermined success criterion of 85%. The implementation of collaborative activities provided opportunities for students to exchange vocabulary, organize descriptions, and receive peer support before speaking. Based on these findings, the classroom action research intervention met the established success criterion, and further instructional cycles were considered unnecessary.

5. Discussion

The findings indicate that students' speaking performance improved following the implementation of Guessing Pictures Games, with the class mean increasing from 55.50 in the pre-test to 67.97 in Cycle 1 and 78.97 in Cycle 2. Pictures of animals, professions, and everyday objects provided concrete prompts for generating ideas and organizing spoken descriptions. This supports Wright et al. (2006), who emphasize meaningful language practice through games, as well as Richards (2009) and Thornbury (2005), who highlight purposeful communication and real-time language production. Nation (2013) also emphasizes vocabulary use in meaningful contexts, which is reflected in students' efforts to select descriptive words and communicate clues during guessing activities. These improvements are consistent with previous findings by Madya and Meningsih (2021), Agnesia and Astutik (2023), Darmadji et al. (2023), Gunawan (2025), and Lin and Tien (2026), who reported positive contributions of guessing games and game-based instruction to speaking performance and classroom engagement. However, the present study measured overall speaking scores, so improvements in individual speaking components cannot be confirmed.

The improvement between cycles also reflects the importance of collaboration and instructional reflection. Students' reluctance to speak individually and unequal participation during Cycle 1 encouraged the researcher to strengthen collaborative preparation in Cycle 2. This adjustment aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, which emphasizes social interaction and guided assistance in learning. Peer collaboration may facilitate vocabulary exchange, sentence construction, and preparation before speaking. Similarly, Lin and Tien (2026) highlighted teacher reflection in modifying game-based activities, while Burns (2010) emphasized reflection as an essential component of classroom action research. Additionally, familiar visual prompts and clear communicative objectives may provide a supportive environment for hesitant learners, considering the influence of anxiety on foreign-language participation discussed by Horwitz (2010). Nevertheless, this study did not employ a validated anxiety measure; therefore, changes in students' confidence and anxiety cannot be conclusively established.

Pedagogically, Guessing Pictures Games offer an accessible speaking activity that requires no digital equipment. Teachers should provide clear instructions, distribute speaking opportunities equitably, and assess students' spoken descriptions rather than focusing solely on correct guesses. Activities should address vocabulary, fluency, grammar, pronunciation, and interaction, consistent with Richards (2009) and Thornbury (2005). However, the findings should be interpreted cautiously because the study involved only 32 students from one class without a control group. Other limitations include the absence of separate speaking-component scores, reported rubric validation, inter-rater reliability, and systematic qualitative analysis. Future research should examine individual speaking components, strengthen assessment procedures, and involve multiple classes or schools to improve the transferability of findings. Comparisons between individual and collaborative guessing activities could also clarify the contribution of peer preparation.

Regarding the achievement of the minimum passing score (KKM) of 68, the individual student records indicated that seven students (21.88%) passed the pre-test, 17 (53.13%) passed Cycle 1, and all 32 students (100%) passed Cycle 2. However, these figures differ from the original pre-test report of 12 students (37.5%), requiring verification against the original assessment records before publication. Overall, the findings suggest that Guessing Pictures Games, supported by collaborative preparation and reflective instructional adjustments, were associated with improved classroom speaking performance, although further research is needed to establish the consistency and specific contributions of the intervention.

6. Conclusion

This study found that implementing Guessing Pictures Games through a two-cycle Classroom Action Research process was accompanied by improvements in eighth-grade students' speaking assessment scores at State Junior High School No. 4 Amabi Oefeto Timur. The class mean increased from 55.50 in the pre-test to 67.97 in Cycle 1 and 78.97

in Cycle 2, while the proportion of students achieving the minimum passing score of 68 increased from 21.88% to 100%. These results exceeded the predetermined success criterion of 85%.

Guessing Pictures Games provided structured opportunities for speaking practice through visual prompts, vocabulary retrieval, description, and peer interaction. Strengthening collaborative activities in Cycle 2 also addressed participation challenges observed in Cycle 1. However, because the study involved only one class without a control group, the improvement cannot be attributed exclusively to the intervention. Future research should involve more classes or schools, examine individual speaking components, and strengthen assessment reliability to verify the findings across different educational contexts.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Authors' Contributions

Danvrit Dani Daniel Babis: Conceptualization, methodology, investigation, data collection, formal analysis, and writing – original draft.
Rocky Paulus Sekoni: Supervision, validation, and writing – review and editing.
Yenssy Mervilen Fanggidae: Supervision, validation, and writing – review and editing.

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