

Scrabble game technique: A game changer for English vocabulary learning

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Manuscript received January 31, 2022, revised July 1, 2022, accepted July 4, 2022, and published online November 7, 2022.

Recommended APA Citation

Sari, D. F., Sahardin, R., Yani, V., & Yusuf, Y. Q. (2022). Scrabble game technique: A game changer for English vocabulary learning. *Englisia: Journal of Language, Education, and Humanities*, 10(1), 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.22373/ej.v10i1.12388>

ABSTRACT

Students' learning outcomes of vocabulary mastery in reading comprehension at junior high schools in Banda Aceh, Indonesia, are relatively low. To tackle the issue, the Scrabble Game Technique (hereafter, SGT) is hoped to be a game-changer. This study aims to investigate EFL students' learning outcomes through the use of the SGT in learning English vocabulary through narrative texts to seventh-grade students at a junior high school. The aspects assessed for each type of vocabulary included nouns, verbs, pronouns, adverbs, adjectives, and conjunctions. The research design was quantitative with pre-experimental research that used a one-group pre-test post-test design to measure the students' learning outcomes after three treatments with the SGT. A total of 30 seventh-grade students were selected by purposive sampling. The instrument used to collect data was a test, comprising 30 questions in total, with 18 multiple choices, 6 fill-in-the-blanks, and 6 matching-the-word. The tests were further analyzed using the right-hand t-test after the pre-requisite test was met. It was found that the percentage of mastery of nouns and verbs in the post-test was better than in the pre-test, with the improvement of nouns at 93%, verbs at 91%, pronouns at 84%, adverbs at 72%, adjectives at 71%, and conjunctions at 71%. Furthermore, the t-count was 19.68 with $p = 0.05$, $dk = 29$, and $t\text{-table} = 1.70$. It was concluded that students' learning outcomes were better after being taught through the SGT.

Keywords: *Scrabble Game; Vocabulary mastery; EFL learners*

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1. Introduction

Vocabulary is an important part of language proficiency since it determines how well learners talk, listen, read, and write (Richards, 2002). And thus, if a language learner lacks vocabulary, he or she will have trouble understanding other language skills such as speaking, reading, writing, and listening. As a result, one of the areas of learning that students must grasp is vocabulary. Students studying English, for example, would struggle to speak the language if they had a limited vocabulary. Moreover, without a proportional amount of vocabulary, they would stagger in the process of learning English since making meaningful sentences in communication would be a hassle. Students can describe everything that comes to mind without grammar, but they cannot convey anything without vocabulary. In line with this, vocabulary is an oral part of effective communication, and a command of many words will make a better writer, reader, and listener (Langan, 2001).

Reading and comprehending a message is difficult without first recognizing the words and the structural phrases that organize those words (Nouri & Zerhouni, 2016). As a result, reading is a process of learning new words and integrating their meanings into sentences (Sandjaja, 2001). Therefore, teachers need to assist children in reaching various components of the vocabulary threshold (i.e., vocabulary size and depth) to improve their reading skills (Nouri & Zerhouni, 2016). The final result of the reading process is that the reader can understand what they read by making summaries of their reading.

Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that many EFL students still face difficulties in reading due to their lack of vocabulary, especially in Indonesia (Amiruddin, 2019; Dzulfikri, 2016; Razali & Razali, 2013; Setiawan & Wiedarti, 2020). In terms of vocabulary in reading skills, the students have not reached the *Kriteria Ketuntasan Minimal* (or Minimum (Score) Completion Criteria), which is 70. Out of the standard percentage for vocabulary mastery, the students only scored 60 out of 100 on average. Ironically, they still struggle in understanding even the simplest short text from their textbook. A pilot investigation from interviews with the English teachers and a number of students at the school revealed that they could not answer the questions from the texts because they did not know the meaning of most of the words in the texts. In a nutshell, the main problem in their reading comprehension was the lack of vocabulary. This situation further leads to their demotivation and inactiveness in the English class.

To solve the problems described above, teachers' efforts must be involved in finding and applying suitable strategies or techniques for vocabulary learning to improve reading skills. Teaching vocabulary is an important element of a teacher's instruction (Harmer, 2002); meaning that mastering vocabulary should be interesting and satisfying for both teachers and students. Employing suitable strategies or techniques, proper learning materials, and creating an enjoyable learning environment can encourage students to positive learning in the classroom (Banks, 2014).

Consequently, this study intends to employ a good balance of a fun and enjoyable way of learning English to improve students' vocabulary. One of the strategies is by performing games (Lee, 2012). Essentially, a language game is an activity that encourages students to learn by acquiring specific skills in the classroom (Nguyen & Nga, 2003). Accordingly, Scrabble Game Technique (hereafter, SGT) is one of the language games (Lidiasari, et al, 2017; Masela, 2017; Onasanya, et al., 2021). Scrabbled words are mixed letters/alphabets in a confused or untidy way (Hornby, 2004), and then they are arranged to be a meaningful word, phrase, or sentence. The game has been known to optimize students' way of thinking, trigger creativity in defining and constructing new things, and increase their knowledge and understanding (Chairiah, et. al., 2020; Lidiasari, et al., 2017; Lin, et al., 2007; Onasanya, et al., 2021). In scrabble, one of the most important aspects of the game is the precision and speed with which the players answer the question (Sheppard, 2002).

Subsequently, seeing the positive outcomes of using the SGT, this research focused on the eighth-grade students in Banda Aceh, especially the junior high school students of MTsN (*Madrasah Sanawiah*) Rukoh since the teachers of the school informed to have never implemented this technique before in teaching vocabulary to their students. Thus, it aimed to answer two research questions:

1. Is the use of the SGT effective to improve the students' vocabulary in reading comprehension?
2. What category of vocabulary do the students master better after the SGT was used?

The results of this study are expected to enrich teachers' teaching techniques, especially in Aceh, on vocabulary development and retention to EFL learners. The theory and practice of the SGT contribute to the literature on English language teaching and learning, particularly in teaching reading. It is also hoped that it can be used as a reference for researchers who intend to conduct similar research on this topic in the future.

2. Literature review

2.1. Vocabulary

Words let speakers communicate their beliefs, ideas, and feelings in every form of communication, therefore learning a language is inextricably linked to learning a vocabulary (i.e., spoken or written). According to Celce-Murcia (2001), vocabulary is the most significant component of language since it influences the four basic language abilities of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. In reading, for instance, vocabulary helps define the message of a text. It is a complex conscious and unconscious mental process in which the reader applies a variety of strategies to recreate the author's ostensibly intended meaning (Mikulecky, 2011). This means that when someone reads a text, she tries to reconstruct what she already knows about the topic or subject being read. This reconstruction and recollection process depends on how adept she is at vocabulary. Guessing, predicting, checking, and asking oneself questions are all part of

this active skill (Grellet, 1999). When she lacks a knowledge glossary on words, she bounds to face countless difficulties in understanding the text. That is why vocabulary mastery affects one's reading comprehension.

To comprehend a reading passage, someone seizes the total message of what the author tries to impose on her. Finding the passage's primary principles and supporting concepts was one way (Blachowicz & Ogle, 2008). As a result, to comprehend the text, readers must not only comprehend the meaning of the text, which includes understanding the words (vocabulary), phrases, sentences, idea, main idea, supporting details, and so on, but also a new data entry (information) introduced in the textual content, which may or may not affect the previously stored information in their minds. For this reason, reading comprehension is thought to be a method of extracting meaning from a text (Woolley, 2011). Rather than deducing meaning from single words or sentences, the goal is to achieve a whole knowledge of the text. That being the case, some reading text and grasping its comprehension is a tough play for students that require a specific technique of learning.

2.2. Vocabulary mastery in language learning

The ability of a learner to internalize the substance of the lesson taught as a whole is regarded as mastery (Bromley, 2007). The mastery of English vocabulary itself is coined by Harmer and Thornbury (2002) as someone who has sufficient word knowledge and language achievement. This includes comprehending the vocabulary and its phonological system both in speech and in writing (Henry & Pongrantz, 2007). It is the ability to understand the meaning of words, produce the words properly, and employ the words in context. In language learning, such as English, it is not possible to use good and clear English without having sufficient vocabulary. Therefore, English teachers must help students improve their vocabulary in learning because it is a core component of language (Richards & Renandya, 2002). In the early stages of learning, vocabulary that are connected to students' experiences plays a vital role in the development of their language. With consistent practice in learning, the larger vocabulary the students master, the better they perform their language. Hiebert and Kamil (2005) described vocabulary in two forms: production and receptive or recognition. Production refers to words one uses in everyday speaking and writing. Meanwhile, receptive or recognition refers to all of the words one recognizes in written and oral contexts. The more one can extend his reception or recognition of words, the greater his chance of enlarging his production of vocabulary (Faraj, 2015). In teaching and learning, the literature has noted that some processes can be taken into account in converting receptive vocabulary into productive vocabulary.

Some elements affect students' productive use of language. First is the instructional methods (Stahl & Nagy, 2005), such as teaching vocabulary in isolation and providing more time and opportunities for vocabulary learning in the classroom. The second one is materials (Waring, 2002), such as textbooks and authentic materials

used to teach students. The third one is learning settings (Faraj, 2015), such as providing and boosting students' motivation and using words in real-life contexts while teaching in the classroom. Finally, the fourth ones are procedures and teaching techniques (Nation, 2001), such as using visual aids to illustrate meaning, discussing both examples and illustrative uses of the word, creating games out of vocabulary learning, implementing activities that are interesting to all learning types, and reinforcing words by making them visible in the classroom (i.e., posters, cards, etc.). The mastery of vocabulary cannot be denied in learning English, and it should be developed naturally by students' experience in life according to their needs and education.

2.3. Scrabble game technique

As discussed earlier, there are many ways to afflict students' productive use of language, and among them is creating games out of vocabulary learning. In this research, the researchers focus on the use of the SGT, which is known as one of the techniques that can help students enhance their vocabulary mastery in reading comprehension. It is "a game arranging the words and letter which has been randomly located to create a word that has meaning" (Shoimin, 2014, p. 166). This game is used to improve vocabulary thinking insight. When it comes to the classroom, a scrabble game can improve pupils' concentration and quickness of thought (Huda, 2016). In this game, the teacher assigns workouts or questions to the students based on the competency that needs to be accomplished. They must respond to the questions using the offered random possible answers. They must also work together with other members of the group to address the challenge by critically thinking together.

There are three procedures of the SGT; those are planning, main activity, and evaluation (concluded by Hajar, 2019; Nurjamah, 2015; Shoimin, 2014):

1. Planning; in this step, the teacher prepares all of the teaching-learning materials and media.
2. Main activity; here, three main steps are involved, which are the introduction, core activity, and closing. In the introduction (5 minutes), the teacher greets the students in a friendly manner when entering the classroom, checks the students' attendance, and then explains the learning objectives and further motivates the students to learn. Next, in the core activity (30 minutes), the teacher groups the students into groups consisting of 3-4 students, and gives a leaflet containing a text for them to read and to understand its structure and function. The teacher explains the categories of parts of speech: noun, pronoun, verb, adverb, adjective, and conjunction contained in the text.

Afterward, the teacher introduces the SGT to the students and explains how to play it. Here, she asks them to memorize several words according to the part of speech categories contained in the text. The teacher gives them time to arrange letters and word fragments so that they form a meaningful word, then write them down on a piece of paper to determine the part of the speech category of the word. Then the teacher asks them to recall the words that have been compiled and provides feedback regarding their

vocabulary mastery. At this stage, the teacher provides them opportunities to reflect on learning and further motivates them so that all of them participate in the learning process. Finally, in closing (5 minutes), the teacher concludes the lesson and ends it for the day.

3. Evaluation; this step depends on the students' learning outcomes. The teacher assesses the proper arrangement of meaningful words in each group and makes efforts to find and learn the meaning of new vocabulary together in the dictionary.

Several studies have been conducted in Indonesia to attest to the effectiveness of the SGT in reading to improve EFL students' vocabulary. Umasugi, et al. (2018) conducted experimental research on seventh graders in Maluku on improving students' vocabulary via scrabble games. Lidiasari, et al. (2017) conducted similar research as well to seventh-grade students in Sambas. In the same way, Chairiah, et al., (2020) researched junior high school students' perception in Banjarmasin on using the SGT to improve their vocabulary. The results showed their positivity towards the game where they found that it beneficially influenced their vocabulary learning. This technique has even been demonstrated to be effective for deaf students (see Sintya, et al., 2017). Thus, the results of this research proved that the SGT gradually improved the students' vocabulary in reading.

Huda (2016) further pointed out some advantages of using the SGT. This technique is known to train students to think quickly and precisely, to practice answering the question with random answers of words with the alphabet arranged in rummages, and to direct the students to be disciplined and cooperative while working together. Other advantages include cooperative working, fun learning activities, solidarity in a group, memorable impressive materials, and competitiveness (Shoimin, 2014). However, this technique also comes with disadvantages. Huda (2016) mentioned some of the drawbacks as cheating, uncreative, only receiving raw materials that only need to be processed properly, limit on the number of players, age appropriateness, boring, and not everyone being good with words (i.e., does not want to play), which leads to some students to end up feeling inferior. Shoimin (2014) added that the game also needs time to be applied, creates noise in the classroom, and may disturb the learning process, students can get distracted and bored since it is an indoor game.

3. Method

3.1. Participants and location

This quasi-experimental quantitative research utilized the pre-experimental approach with a one-group pre-test post-test design to measure the students' learning outcomes after learning with the SGT. A total of 30 eighth-grade students of MTsN Rukoh in Banda Aceh were purposively selected based on their urgent need for vocabulary improvement compared to the other eight-grade students in other classes of the school.

3.2. Data collection

The instrument was tests, in the form of pre-test and post-test. In the pre-test on the first meeting, the students were to read a text story of ‘Sura and Baya’ (taken from Zaida, 2013) comprising 335 words. After reading this text, the students were then to follow a test in the form of 30 questions, consisting of 18 multiple choice questions, 6 fill-in-the-blanks, and 6 matching the words. Afterward, the treatment process consisted of teaching English with the use of the SGT in three consecutive meetings (second, third and fourth meetings). In each of the treatment meetings, the teacher followed the procedures of the SGT (Hajar, 2019; Nurjamah, 2015; Shoimin, 2014).

Finally, in the post-test on the fifth meeting, the students read the same story given in the pre-test (i.e., ‘Sura and Baya’), and followed a similar test in the form of 30 questions, consisting of 18 multiple choice questions, 6 fill in the blanks, and 6 matching the words. Hence, the questions and answers, despite having a similar pattern, have been slightly changed so they would not be exactly the same as the post-test.

3.3. Data analysis

The results of the pre- and post-tests were then statistically examined. The mean scores from both the pre-test and post-test were calculated first (Arikunto, 2009). The next step was to see whether there were any significant differences between the pre-test and post-test results (Ary, et. al., 2006). With the t-table at the level of significance $\alpha = 0.05$, if the t-test is higher than the t-table, it can be concluded that there are differences in students’ vocabulary in reading comprehension after they are taught using the SGT. But if the t-test is lower than the t-table, it can be concluded that there are no differences in learning in students’ vocabulary in reading comprehension after they are taught using the SGT.

4. Findings

4.1. The result of the pre-test and post-test

The results from the pre-test and post-test showed the minimum score of the students’ pre-test, with 13 as the minimum score and 63 as the maximum score. Meanwhile, the minimum score of the post-test elevates to 63, with the maximum score of 97.

Based on the pre-test results, the frequency distribution table for the students’ learning outcomes before the SGT is presented in Table 1. From the calculation, the Range (R) of the scores comes at 50 with the interval classes of 5.87 (take 6), and the length of class interval at 8.3 (take 9).

Table 1
The frequency distribution of pre-test values.

Test Scores	Frequency (f _i)	Median (x _i)	x _i ²	f _i x _i	f _i x _i ²
13 – 21	4	17	289	68	1156
22 – 30	4	26	676	104	2704
31 – 39	10	35	1225	350	12250
40 – 48	7	44	1936	308	13552
49 – 57	3	53	2809	159	8427
58 – 66	2	62	3844	124	7688

From Table 1, the mean value (\bar{x}) is 37.1, the variance (s²) is 154.64 and the standard deviation (s) is 12.44.

4.2. Normality test of pre-test data

The normality of the pre-test data distribution is conformed at a significant level of 5% ($\alpha = 0.05$) with the degree of freedom (dk) at 3 ($k-3 = 6-3 = 3$), so we get $\chi^2_{1-\alpha(dk)} = \chi^2_{1-0.05(3)} = \chi^2_{(0.95)(3)} = 7,81$. The results of the calculation show that the value of χ^2_{count} is 2.42, while the value of χ^2_{tabel} is 7.81. Therefore, it can be concluded that $\chi^2_{count} < \chi^2_{tabel}$ with $2.07 < 7.81$, therefore it represented normally distributed data.

Table 2
Pre-test normality test.

Test scores	Class limit (x _i)	Z-score	Area boundary	Regional extensive	Frequency is expected (E _i)	Frequency of observation (O _i)
13 – 21	12,5	-1,98	0,4761	0,0817	2,451	4
	21,5	-1,25	0,3944			
22 – 30	30,5	-0,53	0,2019	0,1925	5,775	4
	39,5	0,19	0,0754			
31 – 39	48,5	0,92	0,3212	0,2458	7,374	7
	57,5	1,64	0,4495			
40 – 48	66,5	2,36	0,4909	0,1283	3,849	3
	75,5	3,08	0,4909			
49 – 57	84,5	3,81	0,4909	0,0414	1,242	2
	93,5	4,53	0,4909			
58 – 66						
Total					27,768	30

4.3. Post-test score calculation process

Based on the pre-test results, the frequency distribution table for student learning outcomes after the implementation of the SGT is presented in Table 3. From the calculation, the Range (R) of the scores comes at 34 with the interval classes of 5.87 (take 6), and the length of class interval at 5.7 (take 6).

Table 3

The frequency distribution of post-test values.

Test scores	Frequency (f _i)	Median (x _i)	x _i ²	f _i x _i	f _i x _i ²
62 – 67	2	64,5	4160,25	129	8320,5
68 – 73	3	70,5	4970,25	211,5	14910,75
74 – 79	8	76,5	5852,25	612	46818
80 – 85	10	82,5	6806,25	825	68062,5
86 – 91	3	88,5	7832,25	265,5	23496,75
92 – 97	4	94,5	8930,25	378	35721
Total	30	-	38551,5	2421	197329,5

From Table 3, the mean value (\bar{x}) is 80.7, the variance (s²) is 67.40 and the standard deviation (s) is 8.21.

4.4. Normality test of post-test data.

The normality of the pre-test data distribution has been confirmed at a significant level of 5% ($\alpha = 0.05$) with the degree of freedom (dk) at 3 ($k-3 = 6-3 = 3$), so we get $\chi^2_{1-\alpha(dk)} = \chi^2_{1-0.05(3)} = \chi^2_{(0.95)(3)} = 7,81$. The results of the calculation show that the value of χ^2_{count} is 2.42, while the value of χ^2_{tabel} is 7.81. Therefore, it can be concluded that $\chi^2_{\text{count}} < \chi^2_{\text{tabel}}$ with $2.07 < 7.81$, thus it represented normally distributed data.

4.5. Hypothesis testing

From the test it was found that the Bi value is 43.3, the deviance is 145.25, the standard deviation value (s) is 12.05, and the t-value is 19.68. The significant level $\alpha = 0.05$, the degrees of freedom (dk) are 29 ($n-1 = 30-1 = 29$) so that t-table is 1.70. It can be concluded that $t\text{-count} > t\text{-table}$, with $19.68 > 1.70$, so the SGT is effective to improve the students' vocabulary in reading comprehension at MTsN Rukoh, Banda Aceh. Accordingly, H_0 is rejected and H_1 is accepted.

4.6. Students' pre-test and post-test scores

Based on Figure 1, it can be seen that the highest score of the students who were not taught by using the SGT is 67 while the lowest is 13. Out of 30 students, there was only 1 person who achieved the highest score by answering all 20 questions correctly. The average score was 37.5. There were only 12 students who exceeded the average value. So, it can be concluded that there were more than 50% of the students scored below the average.

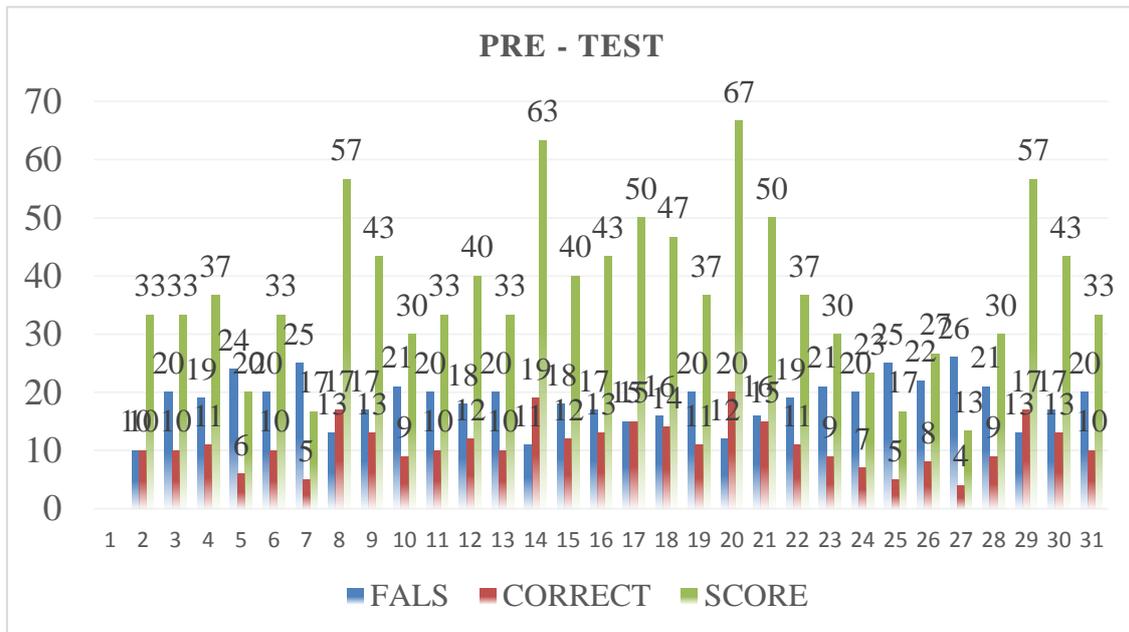


Figure 1. Students' pre-test scores

Next, based on Figure 2, the highest score of students who were taught by using the SGT is 97 while the lowest is 13. Out of 30 students, there was only 1 person who achieved the highest score by answering all 29 questions correctly. The average score was 37.5. There were only 12 students who exceeded the average value. So, it can be concluded that there were more than 50% of students scored above average.

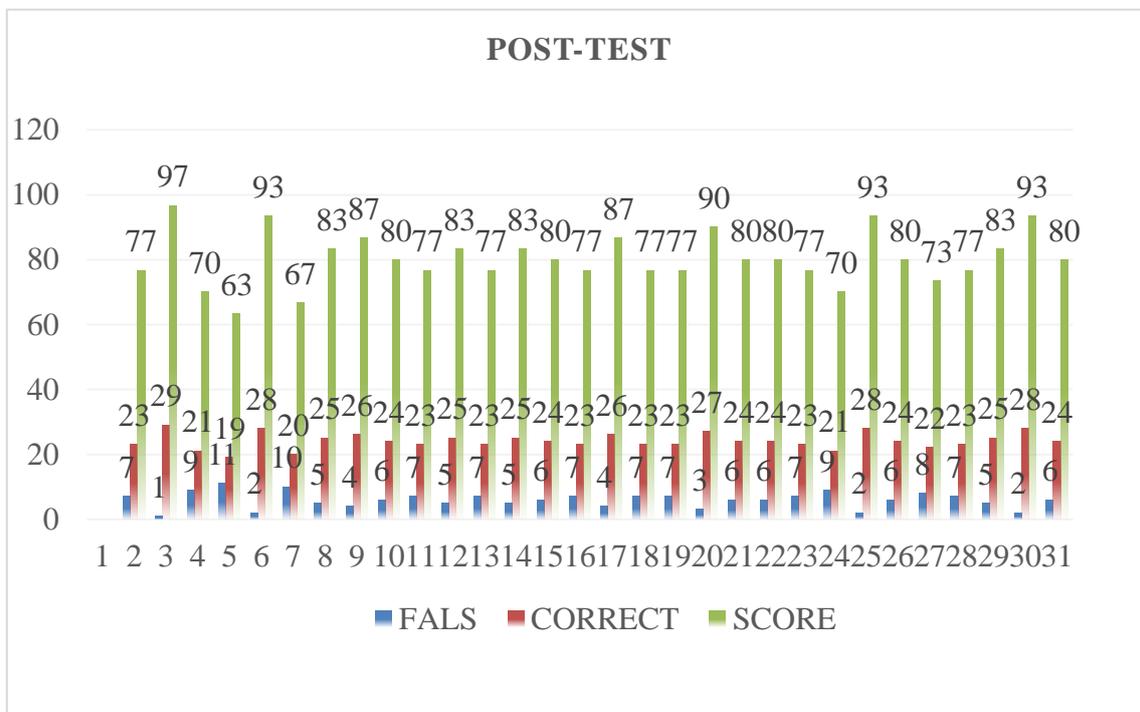


Figure 2. Students' post-test scores

4.7. *The students' mastery of different categories of vocabulary*

Out of 30 questions of the pre-test and post-test that consisted of noun, verb, pronoun, adverb, adjective, and conjunction, the researchers classified the students' mastery of each category of vocabulary. Figure 3 shows the comparison of mean scores in both the pre-test and the post-test. During the pre-test, the mean score of each classification is much worse than after the post-test. In the pre-test, the mean score for nouns was 52%, verbs was 50%, pronouns was 36%, adverbs was 35%, adjectives was 25%, and conjunctions was 25%. Meanwhile, after the post-test, the mean score for nouns was 93%, verbs was 91%, pronouns was 84%, adverbs was 72%, adjectives was 71%, and conjunctions was 71%. From these results, it can be concluded that the SGT is effective in improving the students' mastery of vocabulary. The score of the post-test in vocabulary learning and reading comprehension using the SGT was higher than the score of the pre-test. Furthermore, the students' achievement in vocabulary and reading comprehension was continuously improving when they were taught by the SGT during the treatment process.

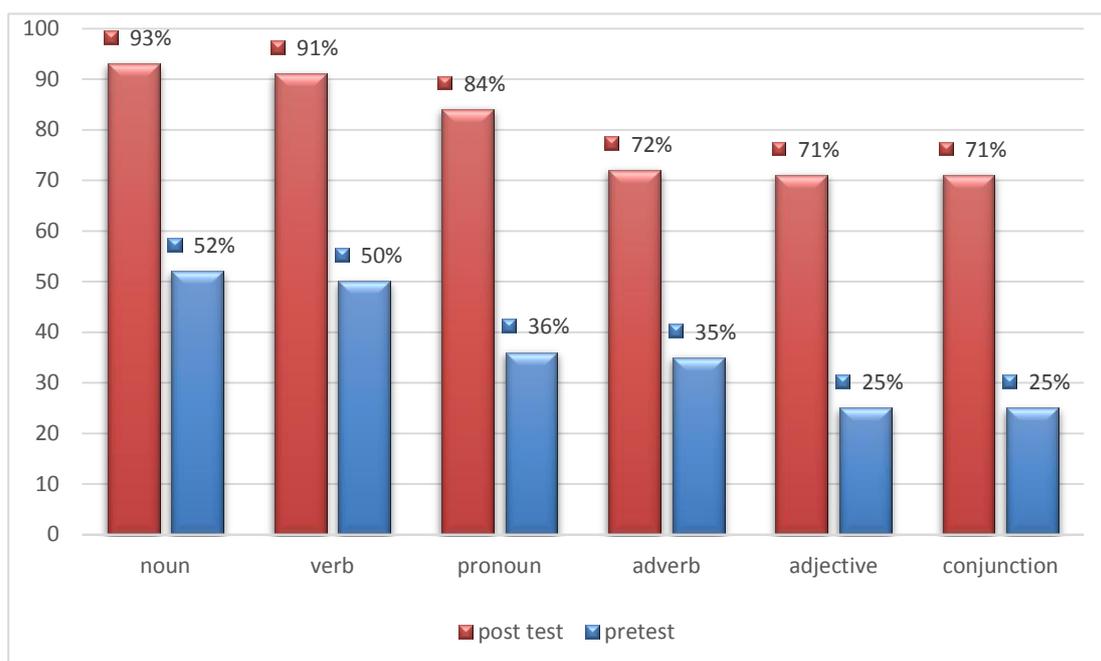


Figure 3. The mean score of the pre-test and the post-test with the SGT

5. Discussion

The results show that the SGT could improve students' mastery of vocabulary in reading comprehension. This is seen based on the comparison of their pre-test score (37.1%) and post-test score (80.7%). The students' post-test was higher than their pre-test score. Of all 30 students, there were 25 students whose scores improved while the other five did not. Furthermore, hypothesis testing based on a paired sample t-test was conducted to prove the theory. The results have shown that the alternative hypothesis

(Ha) of this research was accepted, hence the SGT could improve students' vocabulary mastery in reading comprehension.

These findings indicated that the use of the SGT helped the students comprehend their reading comprehension. This technique also provided a fun way for spelling practice to improve students' vocabulary, reading, and overall grammar skills (Lee, 2012). According to Simmons (2016), scrabble is a game where luck plays a big influence in whether you have good or bad letters on your shelf. Hence, this encouraged the students to try harder and be creative in their efforts to construct meaningful words (Chairiah, et. al., 2020; Lidiasari, et al., 2017; Lin, et al., 2007; Onasanya, et al., 2021). The activities performed by the student during the learning process assisted them to focus and be active during reading (Grellet, 1999).

The literature noted that students learn vocabulary more effectively when they are involved in the construction of meaning rather than memorizing definitions or synonyms (Smith, 1997). As a result, it is intended that by using the SGT to teach vocabulary, students will study more enthusiastically (Shoimin, 2014). As they create the meaning of the term in the offered game, the students also retain the vocabulary that they have learned. Nonetheless, Masela (2017), who investigated whether the SGT had a substantial impact on eighth graders' vocabulary mastering in West Java, discovered that while the game increased students' enthusiasm for studying, it did not help them memorize the words or boost their vocabulary knowledge.

Despite the n-gain showing some students who improved after the game was implemented, statistical examination of the pre and post-tests revealed that the game had no meaningful influence on the students' vocabulary proficiency. However, Syamsul (2015) showed a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test of the experimental class in a pre-experimental investigation on the usefulness of the game in improving students' vocabulary skills.

On a side note, even though there were some studies of the SGT that yielded unexpected results, there were other studies that lead to positive results regarding the effectiveness of using it to improve vocabulary in reading comprehension. The researchers believed that the SGT did not only help improve students' vocabulary in reading comprehension, but also give positive outcomes in their learning process on reading comprehension. Therefore, despite the advantages and disadvantages of the implementation of the SGT (Huda, 2016; Shoimin, 2014); it is up to the teachers in monitoring the situation in the class, that when things get tedious, they should switch or manage to other techniques to spark the students' interest in learning back on track.

6. Conclusion

The mean score of the students who were taught by using the SGT for vocabulary mastery in reading comprehension in the pre-test is 37.1% and the mean score of the post-test is 80.7%. In addition, the mean score of the post-test is higher than the minimum passing score determined by the school (70). Furthermore, The t-table<t-

count is $1.70 < 19.68$, hence, the alternative hypothesis (H_a) is accepted, which means that there was an improvement in students' vocabulary mastery in reading comprehension after they were taught by using the SGT. This means that the implementation of the SGT did help students improve their vocabulary in reading comprehension skills.

This research was conducted with limitations, such as the small number of samples, the trivial meetings of the treatments, and only conducted at one school. Future related research should consider more samples, meetings, and schools to be involved in implementing the SGT to improve vocabulary in reading comprehension. Furthermore, the approach used in this research is quantitative, hence, other research in the future can also focus on qualitative data (i.e., interviews, observations, and documentation) on the effectiveness of the SGT and possible solutions to overcome the shortcomings of this technique in the English classroom.

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