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The Effectiveness of Crossword Puzzle Game in Enhancing English Vocabulary Mastery Among Elementary School Students

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Abstract

Vocabulary mastery is a fundamental aspect of language learning, particularly for young learners at the elementary level. However, many students find traditional vocabulary instruction monotonous and less engaging. This study aims to investigate the effectiveness of the Crossword Puzzle Game as an interactive teaching strategy to enhance English vocabulary mastery among fifth-grade students. Conducted as community service activity at SDN 30 Cengkeh, Padang, the study involved a one-day intensive training session on June 4–5, 2025. Using a descriptive qualitative approach combined with classroom observation and student feedback, the findings indicate that the Crossword Puzzle Game significantly increased student motivation, engagement, and vocabulary retention. Students showed high enthusiasm during group activities, improved their ability to recall and apply new words, and reported that learning became more enjoyable. This study recommends the integration of crossword puzzles as a supplementary tool in elementary English classrooms to create a fun and effective learning environment.

Keywords:

crossword puzzle, vocabulary mastery, elementary students, game-based learning, English language teaching

A. INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of digital technology has significantly influenced teaching and learning practices in higher education, particularly among Generation Z students who have grown up in technology-rich environments. Generation Z learners are commonly described as digital natives who are accustomed to visual content, mobile devices, and multimedia interaction in their daily lives. According to Seemiller and Grace (2019), Generation Z students tend to prefer technology-integrated learning environments that support creativity, flexibility, and independent learning. These characteristics suggest that educators need to design innovative learning strategies that align with students' digital habits and learning preferences.

In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), speaking is widely recognized as one of the most essential yet challenging language skills. Many students experience anxiety and hesitation when expressing ideas orally due to limited opportunities for meaningful practice. Richards (2020) emphasizes that speaking competence requires consistent practice, interaction, and exposure to communicative tasks that allow learners to actively use language in meaningful contexts. Similarly, Brown and Lee (2019) state that speaking development involves not only linguistic knowledge but also confidence, fluency, and the ability to organize ideas effectively. Therefore, creating opportunities for repeated and flexible speaking practice is essential to support students' speaking development.

One promising strategy that supports speaking practice is the integration of short video-based learning supported by digital technology. Short video-based learning allows students to record their speaking performances, review their own recordings, and improve their speaking through repeated practice. The use of video technology also promotes student engagement and creativity in language learning activities. Mayer (2021) explains that multimedia learning environments enhance students' understanding by combining visual and auditory information, which supports deeper cognitive processing. Furthermore, Reinders and White (2021) highlight that technology-assisted language learning provides learners with opportunities to practice language beyond classroom boundaries, encouraging autonomous learning and increased engagement.

Several recent studies have reported positive outcomes related to the use of video-based learning in language education. For example, Wang (2022) found that video-based speaking activities increased students' confidence and participation in EFL classrooms. Similarly, Hafner and Miller (2021) reported that digital video projects supported students' creativity and improved their communication skills through meaningful language use. Despite these promising findings, many previous studies have primarily focused on

measuring students' speaking performance quantitatively, such as test scores and speaking achievement levels.

However, limited attention has been given to exploring students' learning experiences when engaging in short video-based speaking learning, particularly among Generation Z learners in General Speaking courses at the university level. Understanding students' experiences is important because it provides insights into how students perceive the learning process, the benefits they gain, and the challenges they encounter. This gap highlights the need for qualitative research that explores students' perspectives and experiences in technology-assisted speaking learning environments.

Therefore, this study aims to explore Gen Z students' experiences with short video-based speaking learning in a General Speaking course. Specifically, this study seeks to identify students' perceptions, benefits, and challenges when participating in technology-assisted short video-based speaking activities. The findings of this study are expected to contribute to the development of innovative speaking instruction strategies and provide practical insights for educators in integrating technology into EFL speaking classrooms.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to explore Gen Z students' experiences with short video-based speaking learning in a General Speaking course. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because this study aimed to understand students' perceptions, experiences, and responses toward the use of technology-assisted short video activities in speaking learning.

1. Participants

The participants of this study were second-semester students enrolled in a General Speaking course at the English Education program of a private university. The participants consisted of 20 students who were categorized as Generation Z learners. These students were selected because they were actively involved in speaking activities that integrated short video-based learning during the semester.

2. Procedures

The implementation of short video-based speaking learning was conducted as part of regular classroom activities. Students were assigned to create short speaking videos related to topics discussed in the course. Each student produced several short videos during the learning process, such as self-introduction, daily activities, and short storytelling. The videos were recorded using smartphones and edited using simple video-editing applications such as CapCut or similar tools.

During the implementation, students were encouraged to rehearse their speaking performance before recording the videos. After submitting the videos, feedback was provided by the lecturer to support students' speaking improvement. This process allowed students to practice speaking repeatedly and reflect on their speaking performance.

3. Data Collection

Data were collected through classroom observation, students' short video assignments, and semi-structured interviews. Classroom observation was conducted to examine students' participation and engagement during short video-based speaking activities. Students' short videos were collected as supporting documents to understand how students performed speaking tasks during the learning process.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore students' experiences, perceived benefits, and challenges in using short video-based speaking learning. The interview questions were developed based on the objectives of the study and organized into several indicators to ensure the relevance of the collected data. The interview blueprint used in this study is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Interview Blueprint

No.	Research Focus	Indicator	Interview Questions
1	Students' experiences	General learning experience	How do you feel about learning speaking through short video assignments?
2	Students' experiences	Participation in activities	How did you participate in short video-based speaking activities?
3	Perceived benefits	Speaking confidence	Do short video assignments help increase your confidence in speaking English? Why?
4	Perceived benefits	Speaking practice	How do short video activities help you practice speaking?
5	Perceived benefits	Creativity	Did creating videos make learning speaking more interesting? How?
6	Challenges	Technical difficulties	What difficulties did you face when recording or editing videos?
7	Challenges	Time management	Did you experience difficulty managing time when preparing videos?
8	Overall perception	Future use	Do you think short video-based speaking learning should continue to be used? Why?

4. Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The analysis began with organizing and reviewing the data obtained from observation notes, interview transcripts, and students' video reflections. Next, the researcher identified important statements related to students' experiences and categorized them into meaningful codes. These codes were then grouped into broader themes representing students' perceptions, benefits, and challenges in using short video-based speaking learning. Finally, the themes were interpreted to provide meaningful insights into students' experiences in technology-assisted speaking learning.

C. FINDING

This study involved 20 Gen Z students enrolled in a General Speaking course who participated in short video-based speaking learning activities. Data were collected through classroom observation, students' short video assignments, and semi-structured interviews. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis based on the interview blueprint indicators. Triangulation among observation notes, video assignments, and interview responses was applied to ensure the credibility of the findings. The summary of students' responses is presented in Table 2.

No	Indicators	Interview (Yes)	Observation Evidence	Video Assignment Evidence
1	Positive general learning experience	18	Students showed enthusiasm during tasks	Most videos completed successfully
2	Active participation	17	Students engaged in preparation activities	Videos submitted on time
3	Speaking confidence	17	Students spoke more confidently in class	Reduced hesitation in videos
4	Speaking practice improvement	18	Students practiced repeatedly	Improved pronunciation across videos
5	Creativity and interest	15	Students discussed creative ideas	Use of subtitles, music, transitions
6	Technical difficulties	8	Students asked about editing problems	Editing errors in early videos
7	Time management difficulty	9	Some late submissions observed	Longer preparation duration

8	Future use acceptance	19	Positive classroom responses	Improved video quality over time
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To provide a clearer overview of students' responses across the indicators, the percentage distribution is presented in Figure 1.

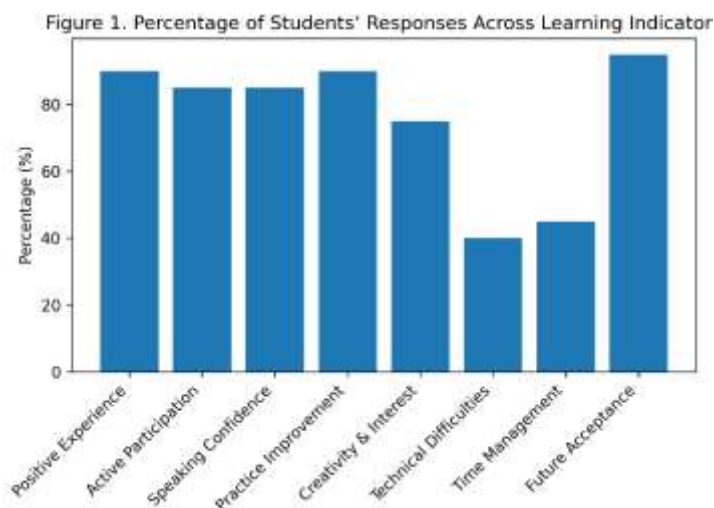


Figure 1. Percentage of Students' Responses Across Learning Indicators

Figure 1 illustrates the percentage distribution of students' responses across the eight learning indicators. The results indicate that most indicators received high positive responses from students. The highest percentage was found in future use acceptance (95%), indicating that the majority of students expressed strong willingness to continue using short video-based speaking learning in future courses. Similarly, positive general learning experience and speaking practice improvement each reached 90%, suggesting that students perceived the learning method as enjoyable and beneficial for improving their speaking abilities.

In addition, active participation and speaking confidence each showed a percentage of 85%, demonstrating that students were actively engaged in video-based speaking activities and gradually developed greater confidence in expressing their ideas orally. Creativity and interest also showed a relatively high percentage (75%), indicating that students enjoyed integrating multimedia elements such as subtitles, music, and visual effects into their speaking tasks.

However, the chart also reveals several challenges experienced by students. Technical difficulties were reported by 40% of students, mainly related to editing skills and

the use of video applications. Similarly, time management difficulties were reported by 45% of students, suggesting that preparing video assignments required additional time and effort. Despite these challenges, the overall pattern shown in Figure 1 indicates that the benefits of short video-based speaking learning outweighed the difficulties experienced by students.

To provide deeper insights into students' experiences, the findings are further explained in detail based on each indicator presented in Table 2. The following subsections describe students' responses, observation evidence, and video assignment evidence corresponding to each learning indicator.

1. Students' General Learning Experience

Most students (18 out of 20) reported positive general experiences in using short video-based speaking learning. Interview responses revealed that students perceived this learning method as enjoyable and flexible.

One student stated: *"I feel happy learning speaking through short videos because it is more flexible and less stressful."* (Participant 6)

Classroom observation supported this finding. Students showed enthusiasm when receiving video assignments and appeared more relaxed during speaking preparation. Compared to traditional classroom speaking tasks, students demonstrated more confidence during practice sessions. Furthermore, analysis of students' short video assignments showed that most students successfully completed their videos. The majority of videos demonstrated clear speaking attempts, indicating that students responded positively to the learning method.

2. Participation in Video-Based Speaking Activities

The findings showed that 17 students actively participated in video-based speaking activities. Interview responses indicated that students were motivated to improve their speaking performance through repeated practice.

One student mentioned: *"I practiced several times before recording the final video because I wanted to make it better."* (Participant 10)

Observation results indicated that students were actively involved in planning their videos, discussing topics, and practicing speaking. Students frequently interacted with peers and asked questions regarding recording techniques. Video assignment analysis also confirmed active participation. Most

students submitted their videos on time, and several demonstrated improved performance across multiple submissions.

3. Speaking Confidence

Increased speaking confidence was one of the most prominent findings in this study. Seventeen students reported feeling more confident when speaking English after completing video assignments.

One student explained: *"I feel more confident speaking English because I can repeat my speaking until I feel satisfied."* (Participant 12)

Observation data showed that students became more willing to speak during classroom discussions after completing several video tasks. Some students who were initially hesitant began to participate more actively. Video assignment analysis also revealed reduced hesitation and improved speaking fluency across submissions, indicating increased confidence over time.

4. Speaking Practice Improvement

Most students (18 students) reported that short video assignments improved their speaking practice. Interview data indicated that students practiced speaking multiple times before submitting their videos.

One student reported: *"Recording videos helps me practice pronunciation because I repeat speaking until it sounds correct."* (Participant 8)

Observation results showed that students frequently rehearsed their speaking scripts during preparation sessions. Students practiced pronunciation and sentence structure before recording. Video analysis further supported this finding. Later videos showed clearer pronunciation and improved fluency compared to earlier submissions.

5. Creativity and Learning Interest

The findings showed that 15 students reported increased creativity and interest when creating short videos. Students expressed enjoyment in adding visual and audio elements to their videos.

One student stated: *"I like creating videos because I can add subtitles and music, so learning speaking becomes more interesting."* (Participant 14)

Observation data indicated that students discussed creative video concepts with peers. Many students showed excitement when designing their video content. Video assignment analysis revealed the use of creative elements such as subtitles, transitions, background music, and visual effects. These features enhanced students' engagement in learning activities.

6. Technical Difficulties

Despite the positive outcomes, 8 students reported technical difficulties during video creation. The most common challenges included unfamiliarity with editing applications and storage limitations.

One student explained: *"Sometimes I have problems using editing applications because I am not familiar with them."* (Participant 3)

Observation data showed that several students asked for assistance regarding video editing and file submission procedures. Video analysis also revealed early editing errors, such as incomplete audio and video synchronization problems.

7. Time Management Difficulties

Time management was identified as another challenge, with 9 students reporting difficulty managing time during video preparation.

One student mentioned: *"Preparing the video takes more time because I try to improve the quality."* (Participant 15)

Observation data indicated that some students required extended preparation time before submission deadlines. Video assignment records also showed that several students submitted videos close to the deadline, indicating time management challenges.

8. Future Use of Short Video-Based Learning

Most students (19 students) expressed positive perceptions regarding the future use of short video-based speaking learning.

One student stated: *"This method should continue because it makes learning speaking more interesting and enjoyable."* (Participant 9)

Observation results also showed positive student attitudes toward video-based tasks. Students showed enthusiasm during instruction and willingly participated in activities. Video assignment analysis revealed gradual improvement in video quality across tasks, suggesting students' willingness to continue using this learning method.

D. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that short video-based speaking learning provides meaningful learning experiences for Gen Z students. The positive general learning experiences reported by most students support Wang (2022), who found that video-based speaking activities reduce speaking anxiety and increase student engagement. The increase in students' speaking confidence identified in this study aligns with Richards (2020), who emphasized that repeated speaking practice enhances speaking fluency. The ability to rehearse multiple times before submitting video assignments allowed students to gradually build confidence.

Furthermore, the enhancement of creativity observed in this study is consistent with Mayer's (2021) multimedia learning theory, which highlights the importance of integrating visual and audio elements to improve student engagement. The use of video-editing features such as subtitles and music contributed to increased motivation among students. However, technical and time management challenges were also identified in this study. These findings are consistent with Reinders and White (2021), who reported that technology-assisted learning may initially present difficulties for students unfamiliar with digital tools. In this study, students experienced similar challenges related to video editing and time allocation.

Overall, the findings of this study answer the research objective stated in the introduction, which aimed to explore Gen Z students' experiences with short video-based speaking learning. The results indicate that short video-based learning enhances speaking confidence, improves speaking practice, promotes creativity, and increases student engagement, while technical and time-related challenges remain areas that require instructional support.

E. CONCLUSION

This study aimed to explore Gen Z students' experiences with short video-based speaking learning in a General Speaking course. The findings demonstrate that the integration of short video assignments provides meaningful opportunities for students to improve speaking confidence, enhance speaking practice, and increase learning engagement. The use of short video-based learning created a flexible learning environment

that allowed students to rehearse speaking tasks repeatedly and express their ideas creatively through multimedia elements.

From a scientific perspective, this study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on technology-assisted language learning, particularly in the context of Gen Z learners. The triangulated findings from classroom observation, video assignments, and interviews indicate that short video-based speaking learning not only supports language development but also promotes student-centered learning practices. These findings advance current understanding by demonstrating how digital media, specifically short videos, can function as an effective pedagogical tool in speaking instruction. In terms of practical implications, teachers are encouraged to integrate short video-based speaking tasks into speaking courses to increase student engagement and provide additional opportunities for practice outside the classroom. However, teachers should also provide clear technical guidance and structured time management strategies to minimize potential difficulties related to video production.

Future research is recommended to investigate the long-term effects of short video-based speaking learning on speaking proficiency and communication skills. Further studies may also explore the use of different video platforms or compare short video-based learning with other digital learning approaches to determine the most effective strategies for improving students' speaking performance.

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