The Use of Crosswords as Reading Comprehension Assessment

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Abstract--Some literature defined language games as a challenging and creative way to be involved in language teaching and learning. There were some word games commonly used and there is one language game that is challenging to be used namely crossword. This study aims to expose the use of crossword as a reading comprehension assessment. The use of crossword is based on the need for a different and creative way to overcome the complexity of the reading process. The crossword analyzed in this study is part of a legally published coursebook. This study involved 19 students as the participants in the classroom who were requested to answer the questionnaire as one of the instruments in this study. Due to the instruction in the coursebook, the uses of the crossword are as the following (1) begin by reading the passage, (2) observe the space of writing the answer, and last (3) guide the students to understand the questions. A digital questionnaire was also administered to define the students' opinion of the use of crosswords as a reading comprehension assessment and there was resulted that 70,9% of the students agreed with the use of crosswords as a reading comprehension assessment. Moreover, there was also defined that 84,2% of the students feel excited about doing the crossword. Finally, though teachers or lecturers need the training to create and design crossword but crossword is proven effective to create a communicative, exciting, and interesting situation in reading teaching, and learning.

Keywords— *reading, assessment, crossword, word games*

Abstrak--Banyak literatur telah membuktikan bahwa permainan kata cukup efektif dalam pengajaran Bahasa. Ada banyak permainan kata yang telah dilibatkan dalam pembelajaran Bahasa selama ini dan ada satu yang cukup menantang dan kreatif untuk digunakan yaitu teka-teki silang. Penelitian ini bertujuan mengekspos penggunaan teka-teki silang sebagai bentuk Latihan pemahaman dalam kelas membaca. Teka-teki silang yang digunakan dalam studi ini adalah yang terdapat dalam sebuah buku ajar yang telah sah terbit. Studi ini melibatkan 19 mahasiswa yang telah menggunakan buku ajar yang disebutkan sebelumnya dan juga menjadi responden kuesioner dalam penelitian ini. Hasil pengamatan menunjukkan bahwa penggunaan teka-teki silang dilakukan dengan tiga Langkah yaitu (1) membaca teks, (2) memahami cara menulis jawaban pada isian teka-teki silang, dan (3) membaca dan menjawab pertanyaan. Hasil instrument kuesioner menjelaskan bahwa 70,9% mahasiswa setuju dengan penggunaan teka-teki silang sebagai bentuk evaluasi pemahaman dalam kelas membaca, lebih jauh 84,2% mahasiwa merasa bersemangat dalam mengerjakannya. Akhirnya, meskipun teka-teki silang adalah sebuah permainan kata yang membutuhkan pelatihan dan kemampuan tertentu dalam menciptakannya namun teka-teki silang terbukti efektif dalam menciptakan ketertarikan dan semangat dalam proses pembelajaran kelas membaca.

Kata Kunci—*membaca, teka-teki silang, pemahaman, permainan kata*

1. Introduction

Reading plays an important role in student's academic life, it is even an indicator of their academic success. However, reading is still a mocking activity to do for most students for some reasons; its complexity, lack of motivation, negative perception, and never becoming one habit. Reading Complexity realized varies as it is defined from the perspectives of process, reader, and text (M. B. Marpaung et al., 2022). In its process, reading is a psycholinguistics process, a language game (Goodman, 1968) because it involved cognition and language in it, it is even more complex because the work of cognition expected previous knowledge to be activated in understanding the new coming information. Readers' background also stands strongly, their attitude, habit, and motivation towards reading play important roles (M. Marpaung, 2022a; M. Marpaung & Sihombing, 2020). Furthermore, the text difficulties also defined readers' comprehension; the familiarity with the ideas (M. Marpaung, 2022b), the types of vocabulary which often let readers stuck in comprehending the ideas (M. B. Marpaung & Sihombing, 2019), and the length of text. Those three conditions added created reading a complex activity to do and contributed to the bad condition of reading habits for students, especially in Indonesia.

Research defined Indonesian students of reading habits as poor condition. The findings are supported by several indications such as (1) only 38% of them are happy while reading, (2) there are 55% of them read by task, (3) 45% of them plan to read stories, and (4) only 7% of them do reading every day for less than 30 minutes (Fahmy et al., 2021). The results showed a dramatic condition that has to be overcome as several studies tried to (Hastini et al., 2020; Setyawatira, 2009), and one idea effectively used is interrelated word games in students' reading material through coursebooks.

The use of word games in education or teaching and learning activities is not a new idea. They existed spoken and written in all literacies such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing mainly as an assessment to evaluate the process of learning activity not to see the result of it as it happened in a test (Pearson & Hamm, 2005). So, the application of word games in language teaching and learning is an effective way. One word game that is interesting and challenging is crosswords. In a coursebook, it was even used as an assessment of reading comprehension and was proven to challenge reading teaching and learning activities. This study wanted to expose its usage and how it influenced students in reading teaching and learning activities. The followings are the questions in this study:

1. How are crosswords used as a reading comprehension assessment?
2. How do crosswords influence students' reading comprehension?

Due to the questions of this study, the following are some related literature discussed which are grouped into three namely (1) the use of word games in teaching and learning language skills (listening, speaking, and vocabulary), (2) the use of word games in teaching and learning in general, and (3) the effect of word games in improving students perception to English teaching and learning activities. However, the related literature will be explained one by one clearly.

The first related literature is using word games in listening–speaking teaching and learning activities. This study highlighted the concept of word games in second language teaching and learning by Byrne (1995) which stated word games as fun and playful activities governed by rules. Word games were also believed to create a communicative environment in English, especially as a second language teaching and learning. This study involved 38 students with three hours of meetings each week. The participants were divided into experimental and control groups and after getting the data by administering tests as the instrument, there was the result that word games were effectively improving students' ability in listening and speaking (Valipour & Aidinlou, 2014).

The next is about word games that change students' perception of English teaching and learning activities as a second language. This study was done by teacher candidates in the third year as their final project to 112 of 9 years old children in an informal situation in Malaysia. The use of word games was proven effectively created a communicative situation in the teaching and learning activities and so it was very effective in changing students' negative perception of English teaching and learning (Tengku Mohamad Maasum et al., 2015). The next literature came from Pakistan. It was the influence of word games in English as a second language acquisition in vocabulary skills. The project involved 5 teachers and 150 students. The use of word games was observed in the classroom and found effectively create a communicative situation. There are three important effects of word games in vocabulary acquisition (1) word games effectively enlarge the density of vocabulary, (2) word games created spaces for students to actively memorize the vocabulary, and (3) word games challenge students to activate the vocabulary in communication (Perveen et al., 2016). There was also literature in Ukraine that applied gamified training sessions in enhancing students' motivation in Learning English. The project came from the reality of students' low attitude and motivation in learning English. One of the methods tried is a session of gamified training the college students. The findings surprisingly define that gamified sessions in English learning effectively enhance students' motivation and confidence by 66%, so this project proved that word games is positively impacted English teaching and learning (Tsymbal, 2018).

The next literature came from Ghana by applying word games in the process of speaking skills acquisition. This study underlined the importance of speaking skills in students' academic life especially in debating. There were role plays, puzzles, board race gaming, and debate used as language games. The participants in this study were Junior High School Students, and the finding defined that language games are effective in improving speaking skills and positively support English speaking acquisition. The findings of this study also explained that those language games positively improve students speaking skills through the communicative interaction between teacher students and students (Oringo, 2019). There was also a study from Sarawak about the use of language games to support vocabulary retention in rural primary schools. The language games were used such as (1) describing things, (2) matching pairs, (3) jigsaw puzzles, (4) board rush, (5) ball games, and (6) true & false. Those language games were applied to 64 participants who were divided into experimental and control groups. After taking the data through the test as the instrument, the findings revealed those games significantly improve students' vocabulary retention through the process of exercising during the language games. The study found those language games attract students to be actively involved and use the words then finally stored them in their vocabulary retention (Subon & Unin, 2019). The next literature came from Pakistan, which used language games to support English grammar teaching and learning. The study involved visiting teaching and two groups of participants; 19 female students and 31 male students in the Islamic College of Peshawar. There were two instruments used namely a test and a questionnaire. The data analysis concluded that language games effectively improve students' grammar understanding (Dr. Syed Shujaat Ali et al., 2020). Still from Pakistan, language games were also used for early ages students to improve their vocabulary outcomes. The study was held in a government school, involving the third grade of primary school. The study stated its issue by explaining the importance of vocabulary in English acquisition. After taking the data from two groups of students; experimental and control groups the findings explained that language games effectively improve the grammatical skills of early ages students in Pakistan (Bibi, 2020).

The next literature came from Indonesia, it utilized communicative language games for

speaking skills. This study was realized in a Junior High School in *Barat Daya* by involving 24 students in the second grade. The study was experimental, so the participants were divided into experimental and control groups. There were two instruments used in this study namely interview to know the student's experience with the communicative language games and test to see the improvement of their speaking skills. The findings defined that communicative word games were proven able to improve students speaking skills (Maryam, 2020). Still in Indonesia, the next literature came from Bali, it was about the use of learning based on games in English class. For note, the games used here were digital games from the platform Duolingo, Kahoot! Quizizz, and ESL Games Plus. This study underlined its issue with the phenomenon of digital access which was not support students' achievement. However, digital access could be used as the basic concept of learning English. The findings of this study explained that digital games didn't support students' achievement in any English literacy however they can facilitate teaching and learning activities differently and creatively so those improve students' interest in learning English (Ghazy et al., 2021).

The related literature concluded with three impacts of language games on language learning, namely (1) stimulating learning interest, (2) developing fluency in specific language skills, and (3) giving motivation to the learners (Syafiqah Yaccob & Md Yunus, 2019). In conclusion, language games such as (1) describing things, (2) fill in the blanks, (3) true and false, (4) boggle, (5) crosswords, and others are effectively used as a part of a second language and foreign language teaching and learning, they are effectively proven to create a communicative and interesting situation in studying. Reminding the focus of this study which is exposing the way crosswords are used as a reading comprehension assessment and the way crosswords affect students in reading, the pieces of literature and their conclusion are the basic theory to define the use of crosswords as a reading

comprehension assessment in this study. Again, this study will discuss the way how crossword is used as a reading comprehension assessment by explaining the process one by one, and (2) defining how crossword affects students' reading comprehension by the theory of reading motivation. The renewal of this study comes from two parts (1) the word game which is used is different from the previous studies, this study used crossword as the word game to be observed, which is something new, and (2) the procedure of the analysis that used a questionnaire to know students' opinion about the use of crossword as a reading comprehension assessment.

2. Research Method

This study focused to expose the use of crosswords as an assessment for reading comprehension. There were two instruments used namely (1) crosswords as a reading comprehension assessment in a coursebook which is legally published entitled BASIC READING *(Membaca Bagi Pemula)*: 25 Basic Lessons to be a Great Beginner Reader ISBN 9786230223570, the crosswords are on pages of 37-38 & 77-78 (Marpaung, MB. 2021), and (2) a questionnaire for taking the students responses to the use of crosswords, which was administered by the help of google form, you may check the link of the questionnaire here, the questionnaire had also been validated and had been checked its reliability and you may check the validity and reliability status here (sheet 6). The questionnaire was composed of 10 questions due on the theory of reading motivation (to see the impact of crosswords as a reading comprehension assessment on the students reading motivation (Al Seghayer, 2013; Alhamdu, 2016; Alvarado & Adriatico, 2019; Baba Öztürk & Aydogmus, 2021; Baki, 2020; Davis et al., 2018; Dukpa & Dhendup, 2021; Huang & Reynolds, 2022; Jones, 2020; Rohmani, 2022; Vera Valencia, 2017; Wigfield et al., 2016)), moreover, the questionnaire used the Linkert scale of disagree, quite agree, agree, and strongly agree. The

questions in the questionnaire are in the following ideas:

| The Ideas of the Questions	Number of questions
Attract students' interest	1
Create a communicative situation	2,3,5,6,9
Motivate students to read more	4,7,8,10

Table 1. Ideas distribution in the questionnaire

The data was taken in two procedures (1) the students were taught by applying the crosswords in the coursebooks and (2) the questionnaire was administered after the learning process. Due to the focus and instruments in this study, this study is concluded as a mix-method study or a qualitative–quantitative study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Soegiyono, 2011).

3. Findings and Discussion
3.1. Findings

The following findings are grouped based on the questions of the study (1) the use of crosswords as a reading comprehension assessment and (2) the way crosswords influenced students reading motivation. The following are findings of how crosswords are used as a reading comprehension assessment. Look at the following picture:
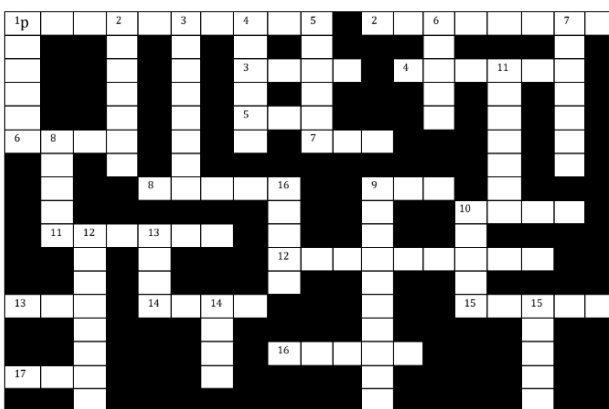
Picture 1. The visibility of crosswords in the coursebook

The picture above showed how crosswords are visibly displayed to the students, it is placed after the text or below the text. The session of doing the crosswords is after the reading comprehension session. The picture above is the place of students write their answers. Unlike the assessments of essays and multiple choice, crosswords offer an interesting place to put answers by the color of black and white. This different way of doing a reading comprehension assessment attracts students' attention.

Below the crossword table which is the place to write answers, there are questions of reading comprehension in two groups of the vertical line and horizontal lines, look at the following picture:

Horizontal Line	Vertical Line
1. Noun, Action to avoid diseases	1. Noun, Actor
2. Adjective, wash	2. Cure (stop) the virus
3. Noun, couple	3. Not positive
4. Noun, care	4. System of survive
5. Adjective, new	5. Country
6. ......though	6. Frightened someone
7. Neither.......	7. Not Illegally
8. Adverb, no	8. Toxic
9. Verb, more than walk	9. Rules
10. Noun, top	10. Score
11. Time	11. Copy
12. Noun, condition	12. Propose (bargain)
13. Before	13. Got
14. Noun, Information	14. Together
15. Current	15. After 7
16. Base	16. Lift up
17. Male kid	

Picture 2. The visibility of comprehension questions in crosswords

The picture above is what students had as questions for their reading comprehension assessments. There are many crucial corrections to the questions to make them understandable for students. However, the purposes of the questions are (1) to assess student's reading comprehension, (2) to enhance student's vocabulary, and (3) to guide students to find the synonym and antonyms of the lexical. In conclusion, questions as a part of crosswords trained students to evaluate their comprehension related to the passage that had been read, enhance vocabulary capacity, and learned the concept of synonymy and antonymy in a fun, interactive, and communicative situation. After each crossword activity, students will be reminded to check their answer to the last part of the coursebook in the key answer chapter, as the following example:
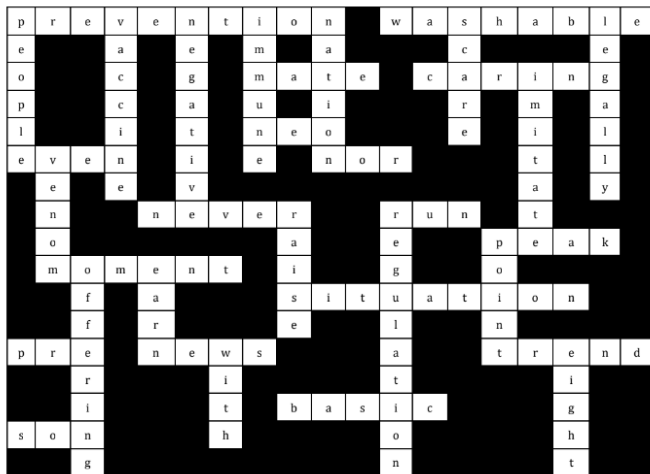
Picture 3. The visibility of the crosswords' key answer

remind students to answer the next crossword better. In addition, the crossword is an exciting and fun game that commonly makes its taker curious to know what is the correct answer. Furthermore, this key answer also helps students to be more familiar with the crossword, especially for academic purposes, as its purpose is to train students' reading comprehension, vocabulary density, and semantic relation skills.

The next finding is from the instrument of questionnaire as it is administered to know the student's responses on the use of crossword as the reading comprehension assessment. The following is the finding of how crossword affects students' reading comprehension. In this finding, there were 19 college students involved to answer the questionnaire. The finding is displayed in a table as the following:

The function of this part is to let the students evaluate their answers, the evaluation will

List of questions	Response of the Participants (%)			
	Disagree	**Quite Agree**	**Agree**	**Strongly Agree**
Crossword made me **interested** to read the passage	5,3	10,5	**73,7**	10,5
Crossword made me **excited** to read the passage	5,3	10,5	**84,2**	-
Crossword made me read the passage with **pleasure**	-	21,1	**73,7**	5,3
Crossword made me read the passage **several times**	-	15,8	**68,4**	15,8
Crossword **created a new situation** in the reading lesson	-	15,8	**68,4**	15,8
Crossword offers **happiness** by challenging my thinking	-	10,5	**52,6**	36,8
Crossword made me **exciting finding the answers**	-	10,5	**78,9**	10,5
Crossword **motivated** me to read the passage	-	26,3	**63,2**	10,5
Crossword **forced** me to read the passage often	5,3	15,8	**63,2**	15,8
Crossword made me **happy and excited** to do reading	15,8	-	**78,9**	5,3
Mean	**3,1**	**13,7**	**70,5**	**12,7**

The data gained was displayed in the table and some keywords are bolded to show what is the point of the questions. The responses of the participants were listed from question 1 to question 10, and at the end, there was a calculation to find the mean of the score, the mean was calculated by summing up the score for each option (disagree, quite agree, agree, and strongly agree) and then each group score is divided into several questions, at the end the mean score results. From this data, there are two important pieces of information which are gained (1) the highest responses from all options, and (2) what questions are the most favored by participants. The data even provide access to define the total responses for each question.

3.2. Discussion

The following discussions are grouped into three (1) the discussion of how crossword is used as a reading comprehension assessment, (2) how crossword affects students' reading comprehension, and (3) how possible crossword is to use as a reading comprehension assessment in the future.

The findings of this study explained the way crosswords are used as a reading comprehension assessment. It started by displaying the text/passage, asking the students to read the passage, then guiding the students to do the crossword. The visibility of the crosswords started from the space of the answers and then continued to the questions. The teaching and learning interaction through crossword started with reading the passage, understanding the space of writing the answers, then reading and answering the questions. The following figure showed how crosswords used as a reading comprehension assessment:
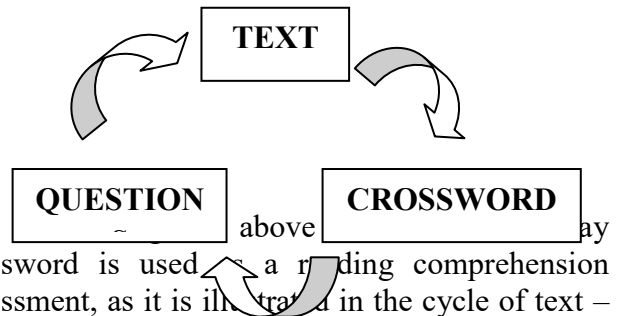
Figure 1. The use of crossword as a reading comprehension assessment

above crossword is used as a reading comprehension assessment, as it is illustrated in the cycle of text – activated from text to crossword then questions then finding the answers by reading the text again. This cycle triggered students to read the text more or several times. In conclusion, the way crossword is used as a reading comprehension assessment is by activating students thinking from its way of how to do it, such as (1) firstly, reading the passage, (2) observing and understanding the crossword space, and (3) read and answer the questions by re-reading the text.

The other interesting facts are from the way how crosswords influenced students learning reading. 10 questions were answered by 19 respondents. Each question is questioning one point due to the students feeling about the crossword, and in the table above they were shown by its bold types. For every question there were four options to choose from; disagree, quite agree, agree, and strongly agree, and after a process of calculation for 10 questions there was 3,1% disagree, 13,7% quite agree, 70,5% agree, and 12,7% strongly agree for the use of crossword. For a better description, the following is the chart:
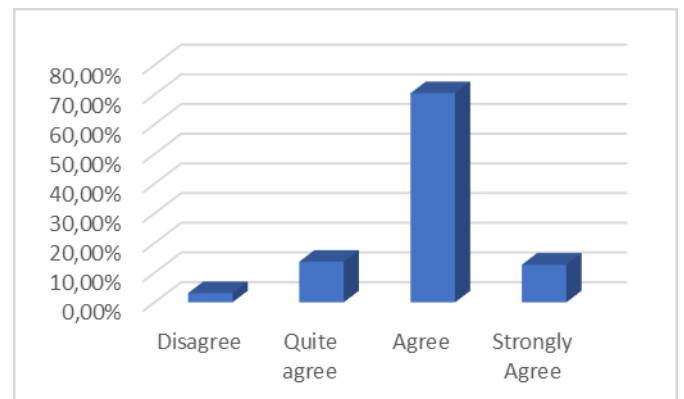
Chart 1. The percentage of students' responses to the crossword usage

The chart clearly defined the student's agreement to the use of crossword as a reading comprehension assessment. For more detail, for each point of the question, there was a percentage of 'excitement' as the highest 84,2%, which meant 84,2% of students agree that the use of crossword as a reading comprehension assessment excited them. A little lower than it, there were 78,9% of students who defined crossword contributed to a happy feeling and excitement in finding the answers. Next, there were 73,7% of students defined crossword as something that attracts their interest and gives pleasure in reading class. Next, there were 68,4% of students defined crosswords created a new situation for the reading class that guide them to read the passage several times. There were also 63,2% of students who defined crossword as something motivated and a little forced them to read the passage more. Last, there were 52,6% of students defined crossword as a way of giving them happiness in the class of reading. For a better description of the percentage for each point of the question, the following is the chart:
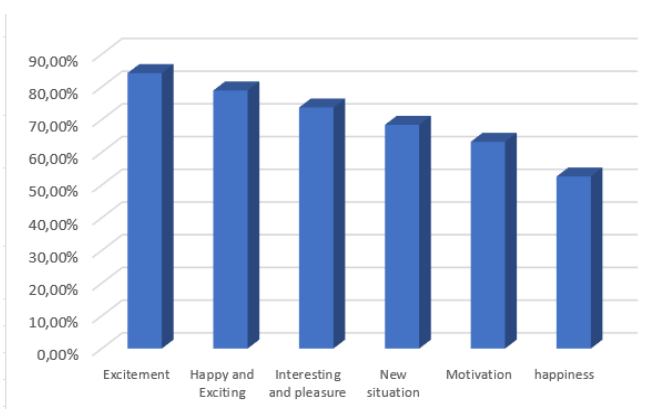

Chart 2. The percentage of how crossword affects students' reading

The chart above clearly explained the students' responses to the use of crosswords. Mostly, students defined crossword as exciting them during reading class, a little lower is for a

happy feeling and excitement to answer the crossword. They also defined crossword as an interesting activity that gave them pleasure. Crossword also defined creating a new situation, then triggered them to be motivated to read the passage. The last, students defined crossword as an activity that gave happiness.

From all of the literature which supported word games or language games in language teaching and learning especially for language skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, and also considering the findings in this study, the use of crosswords as one of the language games is effectively applicable for reading teaching and learning process, and one of its suitable function is as a comprehension assessment. This reality is a description of a good condition to use crossword in the future. So, crossword as one of the language games is suitable to be continually used in the future.

4. Conclusion

Language games are a creative suitable and innovative way to use in teaching and learning activities of language skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. There are some examples of language games such as boggle, true and false, completing sentences, describing it/ thing, and one of them is crossword. The analysis data in this study defined crossword as a suitable word game to use in reading as a comprehension assessment. The use of crossword as a reading comprehension assessment is by firstly asking students to read the passage, then guiding the students to know the space provide to be filled and lastly asking the students to read the questions and answered them by re-read the passage. The benefit of this word game is the way students know the answer to all questions which forced them to read the passage again or read it several times, this condition trained and lets the students remember some vocabulary and finally comprehend the content of the passage or text deeper. However, the crossword is a special word game that needed a special skill and

creativity to be created but it is worth it to be used in language teaching and learning activity.

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