



## Using Communicative Games to Improve Speaking in English as a Second Language



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### Abstract

This study aimed to examine whether the use of communicative games can improve the students' speaking ability in the learning process and how it influences them. In doing so, the participants were fifty-eight students (23 females and 35 males) between 16 and 18 years of twelfth grade at a public rural school in Manabí. They had an English beginner's level. Then they were divided into two equal experimental and control groups. This study used a descriptive quantitative method whereas pre-test and post-test were administrated to collect data. The experimental group was taught speaking using two communicative games "guess who" and "gossip", whereas the control group used conventional classes. Analyzing the data through the independent sample revealed the effectiveness of the games application, the experimental group outperformed the control group in the four speaking components. Furthermore, students had a positive attitude toward the utilization of communicative games.

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## 1 Introduction

This study aims to examine whether the use of communicative games can improve the students' speaking ability in the learning process. Speaking is defined as an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing, receiving, and processing information. Its form and meaning are dependent on the context in which it occurs, the participants, and the purposes of speaking (Burns & Joyce, 1997). Speaking strategy is not something inherited from teachers or someone as a gift (Yunus, 2014). We need to consider that speaking is probably the most difficult skill for students to master and the only one that you need to find someone else to practice, in difference from the other skills that can be acquired by yourself at home or other places. Teachers can increase the learning performance of all students to the highest levels by using games. Games are present throughout all stages of life, and they are commonly funny and entertaining. According to several studies (Ashok et al., 2013), these generate a significant increase in the acquisition of Language. A game is a type of play where participants follow defined rules. (Houghton et al., 2013), Games that incorporate curriculum content or other educational material are referred to as educational games (Michel, 2016). (Boyle, 2011), posits that games play a vital role in building students' self-confidence. As educational tools, games are constructive as they liven up teaching methods that are normally considered dull and boring. Therefore, the games that teachers use should be designed to be teaching materials, not just materials to provide classroom entertainment. Considering that these tools have shown great effectiveness in the teaching-learning process they might be contemplated more frequently in classes. The use and application of any game must take into account the student's needs, the space, and the time. In addition to having clear and simple rules to follow.

This work addresses the contributions of using communicative games in the English language learning process in twelfth-grade students at a High School in Manabí Province, where it was possible to find shortcomings through the different rubrics when applying games. In the classes with the experimental group, with the application of the rubrics, the data collected showed that students tend to increase their performance when teachers use resources like communication games that were focused on speaking, so it is declared as a scientific question: In what ways the use of Communicative Games such as "Gossip" or "Guess who", might contribute to the twelfth-grade students improve a speaking skill? This works aims to propose a set of actions to collect data in the experimental group in the classes where the communicative games were applied with twelfth-grade students in a High School in Manabí Province. To achieve this objective, the different scientific tasks contribute to reaching different stages that conclude with the fulfillment of the main objective, the specific tasks were a) know the background of students to adapt on the one side the games to use and the criteria, b) determine the students of control and experimental group c) establish the communicative games that will be applied with the experimental group d) apply the communicate games on the English classes, e) collect the data to be analyzed. With this research, the researcher will provide information that may give an advantage to some teachers when improving their speaking skills through different actions done in the study so other tutors may either check or use them (Reves & Medgyes, 1994; Mukammal et al., 2018; Spahiu & Kryeziu, 2021).

This study is important because speaking is one of the most difficult skills that students can develop, there are many reasons why speaking is not easy to improve so this journal will benefit teachers by introducing the procedure and the materials. This article is organized as follows: Introduction where the components or variables communicative games and speaking sill are described, and the relationship between them is established, the problem, the objective, and a summary of the methodology are stated; in the Materials and Methods section, the information and the treatment given to the data are detailed. in the Results section, the data obtained in the field are analyzed to finally establish the discussion and the conclusions of the subject.

### *Literature review*

Many English teachers try new tools and techniques in their daily lessons to explore how the teaching-learning can be improved. "Games have been accepted as a valuable tool for language learning since they can enhance learners' language uses. They can also create an enjoyable learning atmosphere and friendly interaction among learners" (Ashok et al., 2013). Brown (2008), in his TED speech said: "a game is something more than having fun, it is vital".

In the study of Andyani (2012), it is reported that learners' listening ability was improved after learning with games for a period. For English reading ability, Huy (2016), stated that after learning with games, her participants' reading ability was developed. The effectiveness of games on the improvement of English writing can be seen in the study of Wulandari et al. (2016), where she concluded that EFL learners' writing ability could be developed through

games after her review of related literature. Games were also used to improve learners' communication skills as can be seen in the study of [Dewi et al. \(2017\)](#). The findings revealed that using communicative games as means of instruction improved the students' achievement and results of speaking skills. Students enjoyed their lessons and got more motivation, interest, and confidence through their learning.

Those studies report that using games generates visible effectiveness in learning the acquisition of English. Furthermore, show the satisfaction of students using them, improve their attitude toward the foreign language, promote a stress-free healthy environment, and serve as a support to remembering new vocabulary. Evidently, the use of games in classes always must be monitored by the teachers, to guide learners in the right direction according to their needs. They must be rule-governed and easy to understand and play. If we provide the tools and do not provide relevant directions it cannot generate adequate results ([Sermsook et al., 2020](#)), mention that "games are fun and meaningful activities that need to be controlled by a precise number of regulations in order to make them the most effective for language learning". [Ibrahim \(2017\)](#), mentions that "Language games comprise many factors such as rules, competition, relaxation, and learning. Rules must be clear, few and well-explained so as no difficulty is faced."

### *Communicative language teaching*

[Yoon \(2004\)](#), describes how Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has had great acceptance as an effective manner of teaching English as a Foreign Language. He emphasizes that CLT is focused on learning to effectively communicate simply by obtaining grammatical structure. [Larsen \(2000\)](#), contends that "this real-world efficiency begins in the classroom, as students use the target language through a variety of communicative activities such as role-playing, problem-solving tasks, speaking games, etc." Communicative Language Teaching is an approach that encourages students to use English to communicate with others with the intention to practice without the stress of making mistakes while learning.

### *Communicative games*

According to [Phillips \(1997\)](#), "Communication Games in the foreign language classroom help students to see learning English as enjoyable and rewarding. Playing games in the classroom develops the ability to cooperate, to compete without being aggressive, and to be a good loser". In fact, these tools strengthen interaction and communication in a clearer and more concise way. The interesting part is that to apply you only need to be clear with the rules to challenge the students to be competitive and try to win. You could use it according to their needs. In addition, [Harmer \(2001\)](#), also stated that "Communication Games are designed to provoke communication between students and frequently depend on an information gap, so that one student has to talk to a partner in order to solve a puzzle, draw a picture, or find similarities and differences between pictures".

### *English second language games gossip*

Gossip can be a troubling thing for many people, as gossip is often not true. However, gossip games can be a lot of fun. Use gossip games as educational tools to help students to communicate with each other. Play this game in a classroom. It works best with less than 30 people. You can create groups according to your preferences. Line up everybody in a circle or in a straight line. Pick a starting player. The starting player produces a piece of humorous gossip about somebody in the group or any information related to the topic, such as "My mom cleans the house every day." The starting player picks a player in the circle and whispers this gossip into her ear. This person then whispers the gossip into the ear of the person to her right. This gossip circle continues until it gets to the last person in line. This person restates the gossip they heard, which may be drastically different from the initial gossip. Use this game to illustrate how fast gossip travels and how different it can end up being.

### *Guess Who*

Each player starts the game with a board that includes cartoon images of 24 people and their first names with all the images standing up. Each player selects a card of their choice from a separate pile of cards containing the same 24 images. The objective of the game is to be the first to determine which card one's opponent has selected. Players alternate asking various yes or no questions to eliminate candidates, such as:

- "Does your person wear a scarf?"
- "Does your person wear glasses?"
- "Is your person a woman?"

The player will then eliminate candidates (based on the opponent's response) by flipping those images down until only one is left. Well-crafted questions allow players to eliminate one or more possible cards.

### *Speaking skill*

Speaking is one of the four English Language Skills (Writing, Reading, Listening, and Speaking). Luoma (2004), defines speaking as an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing, receiving and processing information. Most conversations take place face to face which allows speakers to get immediate feedback, i.e. "Do listeners understand? Are they in agreement? Do they sympathize (Cornbleet & Carter, 2001), This ability is usually judged in real time between the transmitter and the receptor. The judgment is instantaneous and will show the level of atypical features of speech. Brown & Abeywickrama (2004), has stated that there are six components of speaking: pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension, and task. In this study, we focused on four.

### *Fluency*

Richards (2009), mentioned a brave definition of fluency, "natural language use occurring when a speaker engages in meaningful interaction and maintains comprehensible and ongoing communication despite limitations in his or her communicative competence". The definition of fluency has the Latin origin as "flow." It can be the same as other languages define fluency as flow or fluidity as stated by Kopponen and Riegenbach (2000 in (Jamatlou, 2011)). And nowadays, the definition of fluency itself is closer to a simple definition of the term in applied linguistics and also seems to share at least one feature resembling "fluidity." Overall, the researcher goes on conclusion of being fluent in speaking can be defined as the natural ability to speak spontaneously as quickly, smoothly, accurately, lucid, efficient, and comprehensibly with few numbers of errors that may distract the listener from the speaker's message under the temporal constraints of online processing.

### *Pronunciation*

Pronunciation refers to the traditional or customary utterance of words. From that statement, it can be concluded that pronunciation is the way for students to produce the utterance words clearly when they are speaking (Kline, 2001). English pronunciation does not amount to mastery of a list of sounds or isolated words. Instead, it amounts to learning and practicing the specifically English way of making a speaker's thoughts easy to follow (Gilbert, 2008). Moreover, pronunciation includes all those aspects of speech that make for an easily intelligible flow of speech, including segmental articulation, rhythm, intonation, phrasing, and more peripherally even gesture, body language, and eye contact (Fraser & Perth, 1999).

### *Grammar*

Grammar is needed for the students to arrange correct sentences in conversation both in written and oral forms. Grammar is defined as a systematic way of accounting for and predicting an ideal speaker's or hearer's knowledge of the language. This is done by a set of rules or principles that can be used to generate all well-formed or grammatical utterances in the language (Purpura, 2004). Moreover, the other definition of grammar stated by Greenbaum & Nelson (2002), argues that Grammar refers to the set of rules that allow us to combine words in our language into larger units. The grammar of a language is the description of the ways in which words can change their forms and can be combined into sentences in that language (Harmer, 2001),

### *Vocabulary*

In Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary (Hornby, 1974) "vocabulary is defined as the total number of words in a language, the words known to a person and a list of words with their meanings, especially at the back of a book used

for teaching a foreign language”. In spoken language, the vocabulary tends to be familiar and every day (Turk, 2003). It means that in order to understand spoken language or speaking, the vocabulary used must be very common and used in regular speech. Without a large vocabulary, we cannot employ the structure and function we may have learned for understandable communication, which is why vocabulary is crucial for successful second language use. One could argue that the ability to effectively communicate through language is a key to success.

### *Motivation*

#### *The affective filter hypothesis*

The Affective Filter hypothesis expresses that several 'affective variables' play a facilitative, but non-causal, role in second language acquisition. These variables include motivation, self-confidence, anxiety and personality traits. Krashen (1981), claims that learners with high motivation, self-confidence, a good self-image, a low level of anxiety and extroversion are better equipped for success in second language acquisition. Low motivation, low self-esteem, anxiety, introversion and inhibition can raise the affective filter and form a 'mental block' that prevents comprehensible input from being used for acquisition. In other words, when the filter is 'up' it impedes language acquisition. On the other hand, positive affect is necessary, but not sufficient on its own, for acquisition to take place.

## **2 Materials and Methods**

Research Design: This study used a pre and post-research design. Typically, a pretest is given to students at the beginning of a course to determine their initial understanding of the measures stated in the learning objectives, and a posttest is conducted just after completion of the course to determine what the students have learned. The pretest was used to know the speaking level of each student, after two weeks of application of the games a posttest was used to determine if the use of the games showed improvements in the participant's speaking. The design is presented as follows:

E:	01	X1	02
C:	01	X2	02

Setting and Participants: The participants were twelfth-grade students at a public rural school in Manabí. Fifty-eight students (23 females and 35 males) between 16 and 18 years. The participants had an English beginner's level. At the beginning of the school year, the participants took a diagnostic test which revealed a low score for the majority. The participants have a low socioeconomic level. Most of them did not receive English classes in elementary school or only received it in the seventh grade. In addition, it is necessary to mention that during the two years of the pandemic, English classes were irregular due to the lack of internet access for several students.

Sampling and Instrument: Convenience sampling was used as the participants were students in the school where the researcher teaches. The instrument was a rubric to score students speaking ability. The scale used included four components: grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency. The rubric and its items were validated by the researcher's supervisor. Additionally, was sent to 7 English teachers in Manabí province to be analyzed and validated. To determine the speaking score of each student the researcher used the Practical Rating Rubric of Speaking Test (PRRST) an adapted rubric of “TFU Foreign Language Assessment Rubrics” which based on feedback given some items were deleted, the fourth category (Overall Fluency) and the score zero (0. Not able to perform) in table 1.

Table 1  
Speaking fluency assessment rubric\*

Categories	1-Inadequate	2-Needs improvement	3-Meets expectation	4-Exceeds expectations
<b>Grammar</b>	Uses only basic structures and makes frequent errors.	Uses a variety of structures with frequent errors or uses basic structures with only a few errors.	Uses a variety of sentence structures but makes some errors.	Uses many different structures depending on contexts with only few grammatical errors.
<b>Vocabulary</b>	Uses only simple vocabulary and expressions. Sometimes uses inadequate vocabulary, which hinders the student from responding properly.	Uses limited vocabulary and expressions and makes frequent errors in word choice. Does not try to use new words learned in class or expand vocabulary and expresión.	Uses varied vocabulary and expressions learned in class and makes only a few errors in word choice.	Uses appropriate expressions and a wide range of vocabulary learned in and outclass.
<b>Pronunciation</b>	Frequent problems with pronunciation and intonation. Voice is too quiet to hear. Hard to understand	Pronunciation, rhythm and intonation errors sometimes make it difficult to understand the student	Pronunciation, rhythm and intonation are almost clear and accurate, but only occasionally difficult to understand.	Pronunciation, rhythm and intonation is almost always. Clear and accurate.
<b>Fluency</b>	Speaks with much hesitation, which interferes with communication	Speaks with some hesitation, which sometimes interferes with communication	Speaks with some hesitation, but it doesn't usually interrupt the flow of conversation	Speaks smoothly with little hesitation and doesn't interrupt the flow of conversation. Speaks with confidence

(\*Adapted from TFU Foreign Language Assessment Rubrics)

Procedures: There were two games applied, one in each week in a row. Three times a week.

Stage 1: Pretest

Students were measured with a basic introduction of themselves. Using the rubric, the researcher got the initial score of participants in Speaking.

Stage 2: Game playing

*Gossip*

In the first week, the selected game was “gossip”. The researcher created randomly the 6 groups. Each group was formed of 5 participants. The rules were explained and gave some extra direction to play the game in an orderly way. Also, it was mentioned that at the end of the game the winning group would get extra points. The participants were

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able to decide the order of each one in the line. On the first day of the appliance, the researcher chose and wrote the message on a secret paper. A student chose randomly the phrase to transmit it. The phrase was read to the first student in the line by the researcher and repeated as much as possible to memorize and clarify pronunciation, to finally pass it to the next student. That day any group could complete the correct message, and no one won the game. The next day the dynamic was similar. But in this opportunity, they chose a leader to write two messages that later they again randomly chose it. At that time each group only had the opportunity to transmit one message each. They were improving little by little. But again, any group won. On the last day of this game, the leader chose a paper randomly and now he or she had the possibility to see the message and to hear me to clarify the pronunciation. After that, the students start to transmit it. In this chance, there was a group winner (Tavil, 2010; Jeanjean et al., 2010; Chien et al., 2020).

### *Guess who*

For this game, the researcher showed them some pictures with six different characters. They had the opportunity to decide which one they would describe. When they finished creating their description, they shared their work with the class to guess the character. In the next class, the students chose one of their classmates to describe it. After that, they shared their descriptions with the class, and they guessed what the student was previously described. In the last class of that game, they bring a familiar and described it to the class, they again guess the character. At the end of this game the researcher asked for four volunteers. They had the task of choosing one among 34 teachers and preparing his/her description for the rest of the class to guess. Both the one who gave the description and the one who guessed it got extra points.

### Stage 3: Posttest

In this stage, the students were scored using the same rubric as in the pretest. They were challenged to talk about a member of their family. The researcher created some cards with family members, that were face down and they chose randomly and talked about it.

### *Materials*

The materials used in the application of the games were simple: paper, pencil, and a picture of some characters to be described. Technique and Data Analysis: To analyze the quantitative date, the researcher used the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) version 2.3. The rubric items were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

## 3 Results and Discussions

This section presents and analyzes the findings obtained in this study related to the activities, strategies, and materials used in the application of the games during the process of data collection. The following chart was the result of control students speaking ability after the pretest and posttest, in table 2.

Table 2  
Control students results

STUDENT	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29
PRETEST	3	2	3	4	2	2	3	3	4	3	3	3	2	2	2	4	2	2	4	3	3	3	2	2	2	4	4	3	3
POSTTEST	4	2	3	5	3	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	4	3	4	5	3	4	4	3	2	2	3	4	4	3

Source: San Vicente High School

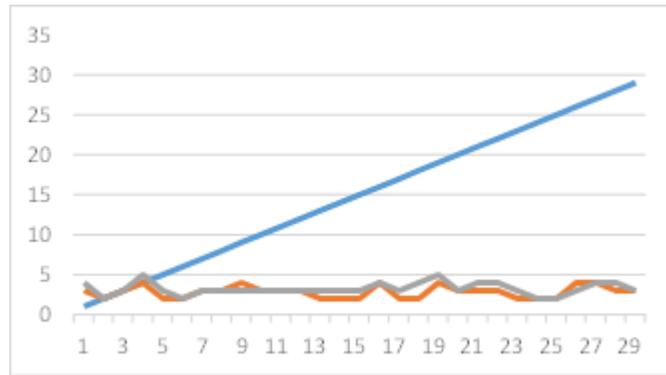


Figure 1. Control group  
Source: San Vicente High School

In graph 1 you can observe the results of the control group, the orange lines that represent the score of the pretest and the gray ones as the result of the posttest. The behavior of the values obtained according to the evaluation rubric is observed where the average of these values of the pretest is 2.83 while in the posttest it is 3.28. There is a slight difference which could have been influenced by the time factor, table 3.

Table 3  
Experimental students results

STUDENT	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29
PRETEST	3	3	2	2	3	3	3	2	3	4	2	2	3	4	3	4	2	2	3	2	3	2	2	2	3	2	3	2	2
POSTTEST	7	8	4	6	6	5	7	6	6	8	6	5	6	9	7	8	5	5	7	5	6	4	4	4	6	5	6	7	5

Source: San Vicente High School

Table 3 was the result of the experimental group speaking ability after the pretest and posttest.

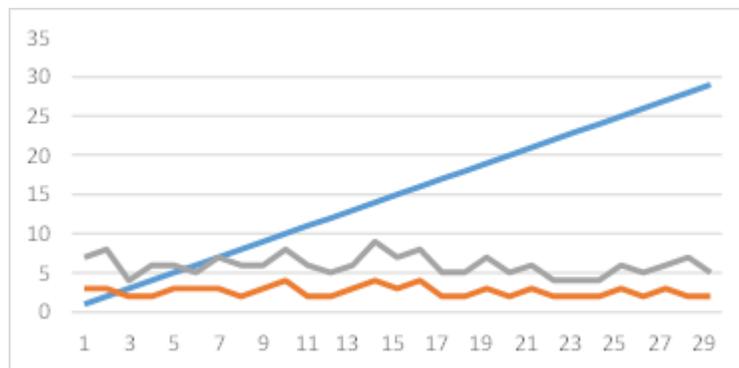


Figure 2. The results at the end of the application of the pretest and posttest in the experimental group  
Source: San Vicente High School

Figure 2 shows us the results at the end of the application of the pretest and posttest in the experimental group. The orange line represents the pretest where the mean was 2,62 and the gray one is the results of the posttest with a mean

5,97. Something interesting to mention is that the average increased 2 points, which means that the application of communicative games has influenced not only increasing the interest of the student but also increased their grades in Figure 3.

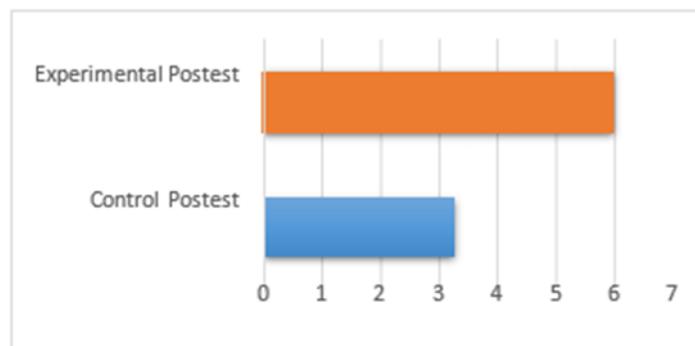


Figure 3. Experimental and Control group posttest  
Source: San Vicente High School

The graph presents a comparative figure where the results obtained from the posttest of the control group are analyzed with the posttest of the experimental group. It is evident that there is a considerable increase when observing the means of both groups. It can be mentioned that the use of games positively influences the students' learning of English (Johnson & Newport, 1989; Johnson, 1994; Morris & Cobb, 2004).

Based on the results, it is important to highlight there are elements that have influenced on the individuals of the experimental group which have to encourage students to improve their spoken participation, they are: a) the presence of a didactic resource (games), textbooks usually bring traditional activities that do not engage students, not only the use of the games is worthy to mention but also the way they were applied, the researcher has described that based on students level, the material had to be adapted; b) motivation, which plays a crucial role in student's learning, the use of games help to keep low the affective filter which automatically helps the language acquisition device to foster the learning process, and c) the methodology the teacher used, along the report, the researcher has mentioned some materials had to be adapted, not only the didactic games but also the rubric to use as well as the rewards for the games. Unexpected results. - an unexpected result that was not supposed to be found is that some students who got low grades increase considerably in the post-test. It can be deduced that the two years of the pandemic affected learning (Ashraf et al., 2014; Cornillie et al., 2012; Boonkit, 2010).

### *Recommendations*

It would be appropriate to gradually include communicative games in foreign language hours since these have been shown to improve students, as well as awaken interest in acting, learning and having fun at the same time. Reward students in a systematic way throughout the learning process, for their effort, improvement, and progress. Do not just leave it as a year-end activity for whoever gets the best grades. In this way, everyone will feel that they are capable of being recognized. Reward systems and motivation in classrooms are new in English classes and, they have not been included in the development of other skills, the author of this work used to ignite speaking skills in learners, it would be produced that motivation and reward systems will be used in the supporting of the other communicative skills. Being a teacher implies constantly renewing and replacing or evolving traditional processes with more dynamic and interactive ones that capture the attention of students in a more significant way, building more solid knowledge.

## **4 Conclusion**

It is evident that the use of games awakens the interest of students in participating actively without feeling shame, fear or anxiety; that means, the use of games contributes to improving the speaking skills in students, without forgetting their final grades were not perfect, what matters is that there was a considerable increase in the grades.

Motivation is essential for students, this is inextricably bounded to the affective filter which influences language acquisition devices in students, based on the results of the application of games, the researcher highlights motivation is a key aspect to consider in the development of the classes, not only in the English classes but also in the other ones.

Teachers have to be creative considering that students have not only been affected by two years of the pandemic which force students to carry the heavy burden of living asking if they were affected by the coronavirus but also by virtual learning to which they were not used to have, being sitting looking at a screen, doing homework without the face-to-face feedback from teachers. Students learn better in real contexts, assigning them specific and tangible challenges, focused on their daily life, which makes them more familiar with the activities, the games have similarities with real-life situations which makes students ask themselves what the correct answer would be to give.

#### *Conflict of interest statement*

The authors declared that they have no competing interests.

#### *Statement of authorship*

The authors have a responsibility for the conception and design of the study. The authors have approved the final article.

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