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A PILOT STUDY ON USING CARD GAMES TO TEACH EAP POST-COVID19

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Abstract

This paper describes a pilot study on using an innovative card game called "Cartedinal" to teach speaking skills (under the domain of 'English for Academic Purposes' or 'EAP') for second-language learners. Cartedinal was first introduced and briefed by its innovator to a selected group of final-year, English for Professional Communication students at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Melaka. In addition, the card game innovator also joined as a moderator and facilitator during the entire demonstration sessions. A total of 24 local UiTM Melaka students played Cartedinal in six different sessions; each session involved four students who did not have any background knowledge regarding the card game. Four sessions were recorded and another two sessions were observed live with consent; the recorded sessions were held at different places but the live observation took place in the researchers' office. Throughout the sessions, the students had the total freedom to play the card games using their own creativity, skills, and knowledge – apart from not allowed to refer to any form of dictionary. Based on the observation and post-game interviews, findings showed that as an innovative teaching aid, Cartedinal had positive outcomes and expectations from the players. In addition, there were also a few setbacks pertaining to its rules and gameplay being highlighted during and after the game sessions. The setbacks were addressed, and immediate changes were made to finalize the card game before being prepared to be used in a future, larger-scale, experimental study.

Keywords: Card games, Cartedinal, observation protocols, pilot study

1. Introduction

Using card games to teach languages for language learners is not something new (Gaudart, 1999). However, many have also considered card games to be somewhat conventional as more modern and innovative games have been innovated as teaching aids (Yusof et al., 2019) for the new generation of students – there are even digital card games for educational purposes that educators and students can freely use (Kordaki & Gousiou, 2017) which are not limited to language subject matters (Thomas et al., 2019).

Specifically for teaching EAP in improving students' speaking skills, there have been aplenty of options and alternatives when it comes to card games, such as Quartet Card Game (Santoso, 2019), U-NO-ME card game (Lukas et al., 2020) and Cue Card game (Pratiwi, 2021). Recognizing the effectiveness of card games in teaching EAP's speaking skills, researchers have innovated with their own card game aptly named "Cartedinal". This pilot study's concept was inspired by "Jackbox.tv" (Jackbox games, 2023) and "Cards Against Humanity" games (Cards Against Humanity LLC, 2023) using the interaction components of players-audience from Jackbox.tv and the physical card game part of Cards Against Humanity, as well as both games' gameplay structure of building prompts via players' ideas and inventiveness.

Figure 1. Cartedinal's final product design

Figure 1 shows the final product design of Cartedinal, which is basically a card game that involves unique tasks with guidelines and conditions; what makes it different the other card games is the fact that

the tasks can actually be edited or changed during the in-game plays to promote motivation and creativity. Figure 2 outlines the rules on how to play Cartedinal.

1. Cards are separate to "Prompt Cards" and "Winning Conditions".
2. Prompt Cards; Product, Audience, Setting.
3. Product: The item to be sold
4. Audience: The target customers of the item.
5. Setting: The theme of the scenario.
6. Winning Condition: Extra requirement to follow.
7. Every card category (Product, Audience, Setting, Winning Condition) are sorted out on separate stacks of its own category of four cardinal directions in same position of the design of the back of the card.
8. Players are given 2 of each "Prompt Cards".
9. Round will start with one judge, and the rest of the players are presenters.
10. The person being the judge will be changed on each round clockwise.
11. The judge will deal out one of the Prompt Card types from their hand.
12. The other players will deal out two of the Prompt Cards from their hand to complete the prompt, the prompt made from a player will be played by another player.
13. The "Winning Condition" deck will have one card activated for one of each player and shuffled back into its deck.
14. After each players present, the judge will pick which one wins the point for the round.
15. The next round starts with the next judge.
16. The game ends after everyone gets to be a judge for one round.

Figure 2. Rules of playing Cartedinal

2. Problem Statement

For the practitioners in the education industry, recovering from Covid-19 pandemic has not been easy even after a few years. With more and more Malaysian's higher learning institutions (HLIs) are opening their doors for both staffs and students alike to engage in physical environments (Bernama, 2022), everyone is bound to start adapting and adjusting their professional lives back into their mix within university compounds.

These decisions came about after many studies have been conducted regarding their online undertakings during the heights of the pandemic (Johari & Jamil, 2022a) (Muhamad et al., 2021). Educators and educational institutions throughout the globe are actively advancing from the recent Covid-19 epidemic with several activities and strategies for the next years. The epidemic has affected the overall nature of HLIs. Covid-19 has shaken the world of learning. It has provided both obstacles and opportunities. The many efforts made by universities and HLIs are laudable since they proved that, despite the disruption, they were and continue to operate at the highest potential levels of efficiency and effectiveness.

Apart from online programs which have been initiated by universities for their students over the last three years (Johari & Jamil, 2022b), there were also gamification-based methods which have been introduced (Naseri et al., 2022) that had generated a lot of students' perceptions of the use of

gamifications (Devendren & Mohamad Nasri, 2022) in their learning processes. Specifically focusing on using mobile-assisted language learning to improve students' speaking skill, there were also studies that had been done to compare before and after Covid-19 pandemic times (Rajendran & Md Yunus, 2021).

This research project catapults the notions above by innovating a card game to teach speaking skills under the domain of EAP.

3. Research Questions

This pilot study questions whether the innovative card game Cartedinal can be used as a teaching aid to improve university students' speaking skills.

4. Purpose of Study

The purpose of this pilot study is to address any possible flaws, setbacks, and settings that can be improvised for future implementations by observing a selected group of students playing Cartedinal with their course mates.

5. Research Methods

A pilot study typically requires a minimum number of participants; Julious (2005) deduced that 12 participants per group would be suitable for a pilot study. With that consideration, this study involved 24 participants. All of them were final-year students enrolled in Diploma in English for Professional Communication (LG120) program at Universiti Teknologi MARA Melaka. They were chosen because of their English language proficiency is averagely higher than students from other programs, which is vital in testing the difficulty levels of the tasks available in Cartedinal. A mix of two observation protocols has been utilized for this project; unstructured direct observation (Holmes, 2013) and recorded video observation (Bachman et al., 2016).

For the very first batch of Cartedinal prototype, unstructured direct observation was utilized where researchers invited the two groups of four LG120 students to play the card game in researchers' office. After they have given their prior consent and confirmed their availability, they were briefed about the Cartedinal; they were also given the flexibility to ask any question regarding the rules during the in-game sessions. Throughout the sessions, researchers were there as facilitators to navigate the gameplay until it finishes. Comments, feedbacks, questions, and complaints were jotted in notes for compilation. After both sessions have finished, several tweaks were made to improve on the physical conditions and arrangements of Cartedinal – the second batch of Cartedinal prototype was done after two weeks.

For the second batch of Cartedinal prototype, researchers again invited more students to volunteer for the playing session. However, the observation was changed to recorded video in order to accommodate the students' availability – two sessions were recorded in their respective hostel rooms; one session was recorded in one of the university library's private study rooms; and the last one was recorded at a student cafeteria. Similar to the previous direct observations, all their live, auditory feedbacks have also been duly recorded in the videos.

Figure 3. Playing session at hostel room

Figure 4. Playing session at library's study room

Figure 5. Playing session at students' cafeteria

6. Findings

Based on the observation protocols conducted, additional notes were jotted during-and-after all the live sessions and the recorded videos were observed. Following the said events, the researchers have

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triangulated a set of thematic codes that have been categorized into three separate categories. The main objective is simply to classify any *similarities* and *differences* from the interpretation of the volunteers' oral feedbacks. This procedure will not have any post-discussion or analysis as the data (every volunteer's feedbacks) will be accepted as they are – honest opinions and comments based on their perceptions, which can easily differ from other students.

Table 1. Analysis of codes from the observation protocols

Categories	Codes
Similarities	1. The game is interesting and challenging
	- *We have to sell the 'old handphone with keypad', even though we have never done it or even used that kind of handphone before.*
	- *So, even if the settings and audience change, we still need to stick to the actual 'product' that we got.*
	- *Even if I'm being serious with you, someone can still think I'm trying to be other things like funny or cynical.*
	- *The 'Appeal to reason' and 'Appeal to people' winning conditions are really creative if paired with fictional products.*
	- *You can't fake it if you are a single university student and having to talk about 'unhappy couples' or 'a rich, crippled old man'.*
	- *Product from domains like technology should be quite easy, but pairing them with certain audience or 'prompt cards' is tricky*
	2. The game can be quite strenuous to finish
	- *So, we can choose for how long to think before every turn, right? But, if it's too short, it's not enough. If it's too long, it can be quite taxing and a bit boring.*
	- *This product kind of dragging you along with it, because you need to sell it but you don't know much about it, or you never even seen it before. So, moderator needs to explain first – imagine if it happens many times throughout the game.*
	- *If anyone gets 'psychopath' as audience, maybe you need bit of time to imagine first or emote first, haha!*
	- *I have a lot going on in my mind right now because I am familiar with being 'overexcited', but I can't seem to pick the best idea.*
Differences	1. Suitable type(s) of players
	- *I think this game can only be played by older people because of their experience and their knowledge; you know, like about life, about things, the world, everything la.*
	- *The game is actually interesting if being played by older students, maybe high school like Form 4 or Form 5 minimum. If played by older players like adults or university students, maybe they will be too serious or too picky about certain acts.*

- *You can't put a certain level for this card game, you know like fixed age – you can't. Something like the playing cards they use for gambling, that one easy because already popular and it's fixed with numbers and letters.*

- *Rather than age, I'd suggest you put proficiency levels, like at least Intermediate or something. But if you do that, you can't sell it. People would think like, "Oh, I'm not smart enough. I can't play this" or smarter people maybe will say "Wah, this card game not for stupid people, huh? Very bad game la if not for everyone." Also, how do you measure people's proficiency level on the card game package? See, it's too difficult to choose what level is suitable.*

- *Why don't you guys imagine this – you're travelling in a car, and it takes long time because of jam or long distance. Even the driver can participate you know, because driver just needs to talk with the correct dialogues and facial expressions. So, anyone can play this – even small children. I'm sure they will enjoy doing these things.*

- *If this card game is given to university students, they'll like it. It's because lecturers can guide them too, but this one can only be used sometimes or once-in-a-semester kind of thing. So, maybe lecturers will also say this game not suitable for English classes.*

- *Like us, right, we are now LG120 students. So, for some of us, it's easy. But we never know what will happen if we give this to LG120 in other class or other campus, they might think it's too difficult. So, I would say this is really suitable for learners who are learning in class or private tuition. For pure entertainment like toys or other card games at home, maybe not suitable unless parents or siblings can guide their family members a who are playing.*

- *I think anyone from any age or level can play this card game, as long as there's a moderator like you to explain everything or anything. That way, people can play on their own after they know the rules.*

- *We don't have to think of it as a challenge every time, we can always make adjustments at some points. I don't think it needs to be limited with things that we can see or think on-the-spot, maybe we can use more time or resources while playing. I think that will ease things for anyone who is playing. So yes, I agree that anyone can play this card game and it doesn't have to be very targeted.*

Underlined: thematic codes

Italics: actual conversation transcribed from (any of) the sessions

5. Conclusions

Based on the analysis of this pilot study, it can be perceived that it definitely has certain levels of setbacks and flaws that can or need to be addressed. It is within the researchers' expectations to have mixed feedbacks because it is a pilot test without any particular background data. One unexpected outcome would be the absence of feedbacks concerning the aesthetic quality of Cartedinal's physical traits – it was almost never mentioned despite it being introduced as a card game. Professional industry

players and academics alike have always been focusing on the first impressions whenever novel games such as innovative card games are being introduced (Peters et al., 2020), with particulars like the games' material quality, colours and designs, sizes and weight, and also retail selling prices.

After careful considerations, the researchers would conduct more vigorous discussions and experiments with more varied demographics; the contents and tasks are also open to possible adjustments. An important possibility would be the inclusion of specifically-tailored contents for specific target groups of customers, for instance medical-based tasks for customers from the medicine world (Li et al., 2021) such as employees in the medical industry, academicians doing healthcare-related studies, and university students enrolled in medicine-related courses like nursing, physiotherapy, and pharmacy programs. The list of potential domains may as well be expanded to a more diverse domains (but not limited to) manufacturing (Ya'acob et al., 2017), management, and technology (Khairuddin et al., 2017) areas.

Acknowledgments

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