

Students' Perceptions on Card Game (LXpress Card Game) Usage in English Communication Skills

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ABSTRACT

According to the survey conducted by Malaysian Employers Federation (2016), 73.2% of the respondent companies indicated that our graduates lacked problem solving and English communication skills. This issue creates a mismatch between what the employers want in a graduate and what skills a graduate actually possesses. It is without doubt that communication skills are important in order for school leavers and graduates to secure a job. To address this issue, a deck of cards was invented to facilitate ESL students' speaking practices. The objective of this invention is to help students to be familiar with the language functions in interaction. Four (4) basic language functions focused in this game are Explaining/Describing, Expressing Agreement, Expressing Disagreement and Drawing Conclusion. In order to evaluate ESL students' perceptions on this card game, a survey has been conducted. It was found that the ESL students perceived the card game usage as a way to improve their communication skills positively with an average mean of 4.31. The ESL students also agreed that the game provided an environment that was conducive to learning (Average Mean = 4.40) and 5 aspects that can be improved on the card game which were appearance, content, monitoring, timing and availability were also suggested by the students. Recommendations for future studies are also proposed at the end of this paper.

Keywords: Language Card Games, Language Functions, Students' Perceptions, Speaking Skills.

1. INTRODUCTION

In any learning situations, games have been promoted as a tool that can provide tremendous benefits to students. From the general benefits of games like promoting students' intrinsic motivation, to the more specific benefits that can enhance a language classroom, games are positively proposed as warm-ups, fill-ins, or as an occasional bit of spice to add variety (Jacobs, n.d.). The use of games can trigger the seven individual factors that can promote students' intrinsic motivation, namely challenge, curiosity, control, fantasy, competition, cooperation and recognition (Kordaki, 2015). When students play a game, they are engaged in the learning process (Klimova, 2015) and this also helps their social, emotional and cognitive development (Kamii & DeVries, 1980). Students also experience 'a state of flow' whereby they are absorbed in an intrinsically enjoyable activity, they perceive their performance to be delightful and successful, and they deem the activity as worth doing for its own sake (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Meanwhile, utilizing games in a language classroom can generate spontaneous and creative language use (Chen, 2005), form a stress-free and calming environment in a language classroom (Klimova, 2015), and produce contexts for meaningful and useful language (Wright, Betteridge, & Buckby, 2005). As there are abundant of benefits to be gained by playing games in a language classroom, this study aims to address students' speaking problems by creating a suitable speaking game for them.

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It was observed by the researchers that many students in their ESL classrooms lacked the ability to produce correct sentences to express the different types of language functions in a group discussion. As such, this study constructed a language card game named LXpress to address students' weaknesses in speaking skills by focusing on four language functions: Explaining/Describing, Expressing Agreement, Expressing Disagreement and Drawing Conclusion.

In order to find out the usability of this game, this paper aims to present the findings of these three research questions:

1. How do students perceive the usability of LXpress Card Game for their speaking skills?
2. How does LXpress Card Game able to provide an environment that is conducive to learning for the students?
3. What features should be improved to make this game better?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The use of games for language learning has been widely practiced for years. Gaming environment generates positive views among foreign and second language learners as they are motivated to actively partake in the learning process (Azriel, Erthal & Starr, 2005). In conventional classrooms, students always feel anxious when it comes to speaking activities. The immersion of language games in language classrooms has opened many opportunities for students to talk to one another in less intimidated situations. Students develop more self-confidence by engaging in games which help them to relate to others cooperatively and more efficiently, which lower the anxiety level that prevents students from acquiring the language (Sudiargo *et al.*, 2003). Reese & Wells (2007) also agree that games motivate learners to participate and engage themselves in ESL conversations.

It is important for students to be able to express the correct and appropriate language structure when speaking. Students generally know what to say but lack of how to say. Language functions such as describing or explaining, expressing agreement and disagreement and drawing conclusion are some of the important expressions that assist students to organize their ideas. Teaching those inputs would be a daunting task unless it was done lightly but in a very meaningful way. In doing so, a language game is one of the feasible meaningful activities to conduct which permits students to work on their own phase. Learners are free to construct their own ideas and express creativity while learning in a fun way. They do not only enjoy the game, but also practice the language incidentally (Dwi, 2015).

Students are expected to be able to apply basic speaking expressions beyond the class compound. This is crucial especially for graduating students. Future employers will look for candidates who are able to communicate efficiently. Indeed, language skills have become one of the employability requirements set by companies. Based on findings in a research conducted by Wan Irham, Shafinah and Azhari (2007) to an R&D department in Kedah, the administrators considered candidates who were able to verbally express ideas in English, to deliver presentations using English, to write report in English, to speak English fluently, to have a good command of English language grammar and to have persuasive skills in English language. Hence, the ability to communicate in the target language is vital in order for one to get hired. Language games can be one of the best practices that teachers might apply to enhance students' speaking skills as they promote a stress-free atmosphere in a language class (Klimova, 2015). Learners will naturally acquire the language as games encourage creativity and spontaneous use of the language (Chen, 2005).

In addition, to win a game, students need to focus, think fast and communicate among peers. This allows students to have the opportunity to talk more than the common book-based approach in learning English. In Ramos (2014), students in a Korean University desired for a more active classroom and they commented on the limited conversation opportunities they always had. Similarly, Lee et al. (2014) reported that their research participants felt discouraged in English class as there was inadequate chance for conversation practice. Letting the students to communicate in a natural setting is often conformed by many researchers as useful in language education. Ramos (2014) states that “communicative competence implies the inclusion of critical thinking development, one of the capacities of language learning” (p.164). Hence, conversation opportunities indeed, nurture student-centered learning which further enhances critical thinking skills.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study employed a descriptive research design in order to find out the students’ perceptions on card game usage for communication skills.

3.1 Population and Sample

The population for this study was 45 ESL students of UiTM Cawangan Johor Kampus Pasir Gudang. Purposive sampling was utilized in order to get the targeted ESL students.

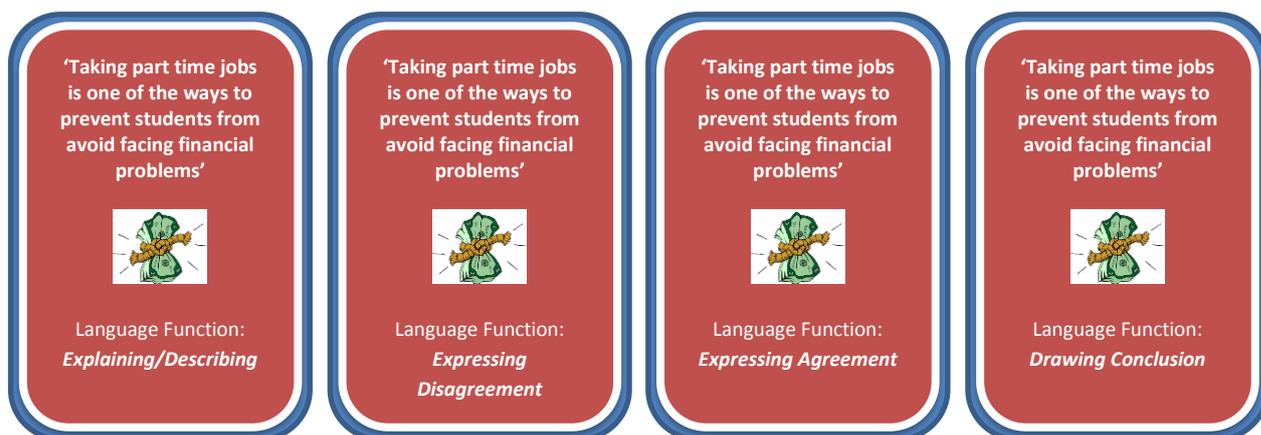
3.2 Instrumentation

3.2.1 ‘LXpress’ Card Game

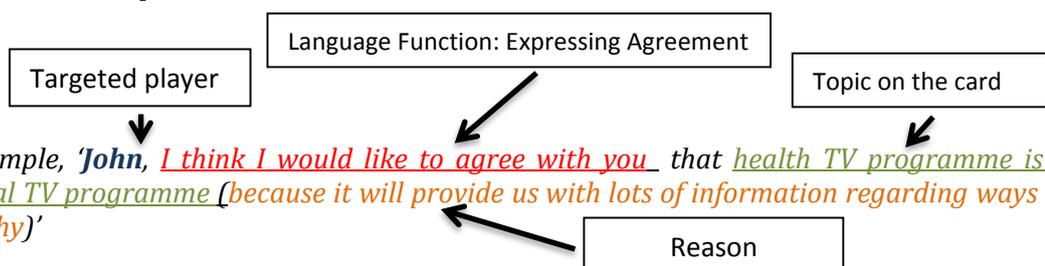
‘LXpress’ Card Game is a game designed by 4 lecturers of UiTM Pasir Gudang to help them with ESL teaching and learning activities. The name ‘LXpress’ is derived from the term ‘Language and Expression’. As the name suggests, this card game focuses on improving speaking/communication skills by using language functions as a part of game requirements. Four language functions focused in this game are *Explaining/Describing*, *Expressing agreement*, *Expressing Disagreement* and *Drawing Conclusion*. Upon finishing playing this game, it is expected that the players will be familiar with various kinds of language expressions.

How to play ‘LXpress’ Card Game

- ‘LXpress’ Card Game can be played by a group of 4 to 5 people or in groups (4-5 groups).
- This deck of cards has 8 topics;
 1. ‘Depressive people should seek help from doctor in order to overcome depression’,
 2. ‘Taking part time jobs is one of the ways to prevent students from facing financial problems’,
 3. ‘One of the most beneficial TV programmes is on health’,
 4. ‘The best way to help natural disaster victims is by providing them with cash donations’,
 5. ‘One effective way to improve spoken English is by watching more English programmes’,
 6. The best way to reduce global warming is by encouraging people to use public transport’,
 7. ‘The most important characteristic of a good neighbour is helpful’ and
 8. ‘Playing video games is bad for our health and a waste of money’
- Each topic has 4 cards. The cards that belong to a topic can be easily recognised as they all feature the same topic, the same colour and the same picture. *Eg:*



- Every card in a topic has a different language function. It is either:
 - *Explaining/Describing*,
 - *Expressing Agreement*,
 - *Expressing Disagreement* or
 - *Drawing Conclusion*.
- Deal out all the cards so that every player gets an equal number of cards. The dealer starts by asking another player for a card needed to complete a topic. To ask for the card, the language function stated in the desired card has to be used and a sentence has to be constructed by using the chosen topic.



- For example, 'John, *I think I would like to agree with you* that *health TV programme is a beneficial TV programme* (*because it will provide us with lots of information regarding ways to be healthy*)'
- It is advisable for every player to use different expressions in order to familiarise himself/herself with different ways of giving expressions.
- Examples of expression for every language function:

Language Functions	Examples of Expression
Explaining/Describing	Let me explain how..., In my opinion..., There are 3 benefits of..., The idea of... is the best because...
Expressing Agreement	I agree with you that..., I share the same view that..., I completely agree that...
Expressing Disagreement	I disagree with you that..., I think, it would be better if... But, don't you think that ...
Drawing Conclusion	In conclusion..., To sum up..., In a nutshell..., As a conclusion..., Let me conclude by saying that...

- If the targeted player (John) has the card, he must give it to the person who requested the card. A player may continue asking for cards until he/she makes a mistake. When a mistake is made, the next player will take his turn. That player can retake the cards that have been

taken in the previous round. When a player gathers all 4 cards in the same topic, he must put the 4 cards face down on the table in front of him and shout 'LXpress!'

- The player who collects the most sets is the winner!

3.2.2 Questionnaire

A set of questionnaire with 19 questions regarding the players' perceptions on the card game were distributed to the respondents. The 19 questions consisted of 17 Likert scale questions and 2 open-ended questions.

3.3 Data Collection Procedures

The questionnaire was administered to the respondents by the researchers. One learning period was required for the game and the survey to take place. Before distributing the questionnaire, the respondents were required to play the game in the class. The rules and the ways to play the game had been clearly explained to the respondents before they played the game. After the game had finished, the questionnaire was distributed to the respondents. All respondents answered and returned the questionnaire on the same day.

3.4 Data Analysis

Data from the questionnaire was subjected to descriptive statistics, involving the analysis of means in order to answer the research questions. This research employed Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) Version 18 to analyse the data.

4. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

4.1 Research Question 1

How do students perceive the usability of LXpress Card Game for their speaking skills?

Table 1 Students perceptions towards the usability of LXpress Card Game for their speaking skills

Item	Statement	Mean	Indication
3	I feel confident to communicate in English after playing this game	4.40	Agree
4	This game helps me in improving my speaking skills	4.43	Agree
5	This game helps me in Language Functions usage for my speaking skills	4.48	Agree
6	This game helps me in Describing/Explaining	4.45	Agree
7	This game helps me in Making Agreement	4.45	Agree
8	This game helps me in Making Disagreement	4.40	Agree
9	This game does not help me in Drawing Conclusion	4.33	Agree
12	The topic in this game addressed my interests	3.98	Agree
14	I am now more aware of various expressions that can be used in English communication	4.15	Agree
15	I will use the things I learned (language functions) in this task outside of the classroom	4.08	Agree
16	These skills are important for my future and career	4.25	Agree
17	I like to play this game again	4.35	Agree
		Average Mean =	4.31

Table 1 shows the mean score of every item on students' perception towards the usability of the card game for their speaking skills. It was found that the students perceived the card game usage as a way to improve their communication skills positively with average mean of 4.31. The highest mean reported was on item 5 where the students agreed that the game helped them in Language Functions usage for their speaking skills (M=4.48), while the lowest mean reported was on item 12 where the respondents agreed that the game addressed their interests (M=3.98). The students agreed that they felt confident to communicate in English after playing this game and the game helped them in making disagreement with Mean = 4.4 (item 3 and 8).

Table 2 Students' comments on the card game

Item 18: Comments on the card game
<i>"This game is good as it requires us to think fast"</i>
<i>"This game encourages us to communicate by explaining something"</i>
<i>"We have to keep talking in English in order to win the game, even though we are not proficient enough"</i>
<i>"I believe this game can improve my speaking/communication skills"</i>
<i>"This game helps me in overcoming my nervous in speaking"</i>
<i>"I gain more confidence to speak in front of the whole class"</i>
<i>"It is really a fun way to learn English"</i>
<i>"This game can help students to be able to speak fluently"</i>

Table 2 shows the data for item 18, an open ended question regarding the card game. It was found that most of the respondents' comments were positive towards this game in improving their speaking skills. Some of the respondents mentioned that *"The game can help students to be able to speak fluently"*, *"This game helps me in overcoming my nervous in speaking"* and *"I gain more confidence to speak in front of the class"*.

4.2 Research Question 2

How does LXpress Card Game able to provide an environment that is conducive to learning for the students?

Table 3 Students' perception on LXpress Card Game conduciveness to the students

Item		Mean	Indication
1	I have lots of fun playing this game.	4.58	Strongly Agree
2	I feel motivated to communicate in English after playing this game	4.33	Agree
10	This game is suitable to be played in a speaking skills lesson	4.38	Agree
11	This game was interesting to me	4.40	Agree
13	During this task, I was absorbed in what I was doing that time seemed to pass quickly.	4.08	Agree
Average Mean		4.40	Agree

Table 3 describes the students' perception on LXpress card game and learning environment. It was found that the students agreed that the game provided an environment that was conducive to learning (Average Mean = 4.40). The students had a lot of fun playing this game (item 1, M=4.58) and felt motivated to communicate in English after playing this game (item 2, M= 4.33). The students also were absorbed in what they were doing that time seemed to pass quickly (item 13, M=4.08). The students also agreed that this game was interesting and suitable to be played in a speaking skills lesson (item 11, M=4.40 and item 10, M= 4.38).

Table 4 Students' comments on the card game

Item 18: Comments on the card game
<i>"This game is interesting because it is played like a card game (Happy Family Card Game) and it brings back childhood memories"</i>
<i>"It is one of a good game to played in class and to fill in our leisure time"</i>
<i>"It is fun and challenging as we have to be good in strategizing and predicting in order to win this game"</i>
<i>"I feel comfortable speaking in English with my friends in this game"</i>
<i>"This game can improve friendship"</i>
<i>"It is really a fun way to learn English"</i>

Table 4 shows the comments on the card game in relation with the learning environment. Based on the open ended question (item 18), some of the responses received were *"It is really a fun way to learn English"*, *"It is fun and challenging as we have to be good in strategizing and predicting in order to win this game"* and *"I feel comfortable speaking in English with my friends in this game"*.

4.3. Research Question 3

What features should be improved to make this game better?

Table 5 Suggestion for the Card Game Improvement

Feature	Remarks
Appearance	<i>"It is best to use a real card and colourless"</i> <i>"The colour of the card should be the same to avoid easy guessing"</i>
Content	<i>"More interesting topics should be added"</i> <i>"More topics related to the students' age should be added"</i> <i>"More topics on current issues should be added"</i>
Monitoring	<i>"The game should be supervised by more than one lecturer"</i> <i>"When it is played in group, it is best to make sure all members take turn to speak"</i> <i>"Lecturer should check their students' answer (grammar/content)"</i>
Timing	<i>"There should be time limit and time keeper for this game"</i>
Availability	<i>"It is best for this game can be played through gadget as well."</i>

Table 5 shows the suggestions from the students in improving the card game based on an open ended question given (item 19). There were 5 aspects that can be improved which were appearance, content, monitoring, timing and availability. In terms of the appearance, it was suggested that the cards to be the same or colourless to avoid easy guessing. The students also suggested adding more related topics on the content. In monitoring aspect, in order to ensure this game achieves its objective, the students remarked that it was better to have more than one lecturer or facilitator to supervise the game and check on the students' sentences. Another suggestion given was there should be a time limit in this game while answering the question. It was also recommended to make it more accessible as an application for electronic gadgets.

5. DISCUSSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTION

In language learning, it is important for the educators to be as creative as they can in order to attract the students' attention and participation. With an interactive environment, it may lead to an improvement in learning a language (Mubaslat, 2011/2012). The findings of this study revealed that the students provided positive perception towards this card game usage on their speaking skills with an average mean of 4.31 that indicated agreement. In a research done by

Mei and Yu-Jing (2000), through playing games, students can learn English the way they learn their mother tongue without being aware that they are studying, thus without stress, they can learn a lot and even shy students can participate positively. This 'state of flow' (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) makes students engaged in their learning process and they become unaware of their anxiety in speaking. This is supported by the result of this study, where the respondents mentioned that *"This game helps me in overcoming my nervous in speaking"* and *"We have to keep talking in English in order to win the game, even though we are not proficient enough"*. Furthermore, keeping students active is vital and this can be achieved by playing games (Azriel, Erthal & Starr, 2005) because teachers will never be able to actually teach students unless they can get students to participate in their own learning process (Sigurdardottir, 2010). Based on the findings, the LXpress game also has the potential to attract the students' interest to play it again which indicates that this game is able to sustain students' interest in learning English language speaking skills and become engaged in the process as supported by previous studies (e.g. Klimova, 2015; Reese & Wells, 2007).

It was also discovered that, not only this game was useful for the students' speaking skills; it also provided an environment that was conducive to learning for the students. Positive learning environment is important for every student in a learning process to enhance the students' ability to learn and to be productive in and out of the classroom (Wilson-Fleming & Wilson-Younger, 2012). Based on the findings, this game was viewed as fun, interesting and motivating which were important for providing an environment that was conducive to learning. The students felt comfortable to play with their friends and it was perceived to be a good way to learn English. Games are important in motivating students to converse in English (Reese & Wells, 2007) in a stress-free and calming environment (Klimova, 2015) whereby they are able to produce not only meaningful and useful language (Wright, Betteridge, & Buckby, 2005) but also creative and spontaneous language production (Chen, 2005) and at the same time increasing the cooperation among the students (Silsupur, 2017) and their social, emotional, and cognitive development (Kamii & DeVries, 1980).

In order to make sure this game will be beneficial for ESL learners, suggestions for improvement were also asked in the questionnaire. Based on the findings, the 5 aspects that can be improved were appearance, content, monitoring, timing and availability. These aspects were suggested in order to make the game more challenging and at the same time meet its purpose effectively.

However, this study has a few limitations. First, the study only involved a small number of participants. It would be better if the game and questionnaire were conducted with a larger number of participants. Second, this card game was only conducted on tertiary education students. For future studies, this card game should be conducted on students with different level of education and English proficiency to provide wider generalizations for findings. Despite these limitations, the game seemed to exceed most students' expectations of how much they could improve their English speaking skills. The vast majority of comments about the game were positive.

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