Snapticon: Developing Effective Listening Skills for Group Oral Discussion

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Abstract: In many higher education institutions (HEIs) around the world, one of the popular English oral assessments for ESL learners is group discussion. In group discussions, it is vital that they have the ability to manage topics in a discussion by knowing how to initiate a topic, expand on the topic, seamlessly shift from one topic to another as well as close the topic appropriately. Students are therefore required to utilise their verbal and non-verbal skills to actively interact with all group members. Listening and speaking skills are equally important for effective communication including participating in group oral discussion. In order to help ESL learners to be active participants in group discussions, a card game called Snapticon was created. Open-ended questionnaires were distributed to 25 respondents in the study and observations were made while the game was being played. It was found from the findings that the respondents were positive as they regarded the game as interesting and fun. Therefore, it can be concluded that *Snapticon* has the potential to be used as a learning material to help develop ESL learners' effective listening skills in group oral discussions. Moreover, the use of Snapticon enables learners to be interactionally competent when participating in group oral discussions.

Keywords: Effective listening skills, gamification, group discussions, interactional competence, ESL learners

1. Introduction

In his bestseller book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People: Powerful Lessons in Personal Change*, Covey (2004) states that "Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply." (p. 239). Not surprisingly, this is the same pattern observed in group oral discussions among ESL learners in higher education institutions (HEIs). Students participating in group oral discussions is a common requirement in university classes (Reese & Wells, 2007), so much so that in many ESL courses, group oral discussion is part of students' overall assessment evaluation (Galaczi,

2018). Not only that, in Malaysia, the speaking component of the Malaysian University English Test (MUET), an exam taken largely for university admission, requires students to perform two types of tasks namely individual presentation and group interaction (Malaysian Examination Council, 2019). In 2021, to align with the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), this Speaking exam format has undergone a very minor change in format. In this latest format, a group consisting of two to four students will be assigned a situation. In the first Speaking task, students will have to prepare for their individual presentation within the time given. While others are presenting, they will have to listen to the other candidates. After everyone has presented, it is then followed by the group interaction. In the group interaction, a topic is asked to the students. All of them will have to interact with each other to discuss the topic in the group, and at the end of a stipulated time, they should arrive at a decision (Malaysian Examination Council, 2019). In the speaking component, students are assessed in terms of accuracy, fluency, appropriacy, coherence, and cohesion, use of language functions, managing a discussion, and task fulfilment (Malaysian Examination Council, 2019) - all of which demand students to effectively convey their ideas and opinions, think critically, keep the conversation going and use English fluently and confidently.

Thus, it can be seen why group oral discussion is part of the Speaking component for MUET, as it is an example of an oral communicative task which requires the speakers to listen in order to respond. As the basic components of effective listening revolve around speaking and understanding, one must really learn how to truly hear the message being conveyed (Pepe, 2020). Brownell (2015) suggests that there are six main stages towards effective listening. The stages include hearing (passive physiological process in receiving the sound), understanding (assigning meaning to stimuli), remembering (recalling from stored memory), interpreting (understanding message from the speaker), evaluating (analysing the information received), and responding (sending feedback through verbal and non-verbal behaviour).

However, group discussions can prove to be difficult or frustrating for ESL students (Caplan & Stevens, 2017). In view of the issues faced by the ESL students in group discussion settings, Ngah et al. (2018), looked at the interaction of 20 students consisting of second and final year students in their group mock discussion. This mock discussion was conducted with the aim of preparing them for their group oral discussion which was one of the assessments that the students had to undergo in order to complete their Level 3 English course. Similar to the assessment, the students were divided into groups of four (4) and they sat facing each other for approximately twenty minutes to take turns to elaborate and expand the topic, often agreeing or disagreeing with one another.

Findings of Ngah et al. (2018) revealed that while students were able to keep a conversation going, and use English fluently and confidently, how they managed a discussion lacked effective listening skills. As effective listening skills refer to the ability to comprehend what other speakers have conveyed, to monitor, give feedback, and also to respond within specific contexts (Rost, 2011), giving feedback and responding to others were observed to be done at a very minimal level (Ngah et al., 2018). Although the students were able to initiate the discussion, expand the topic at hand, provide agreement and disagreement where required, they had difficulties in managing their discussion effectively. Ngah et al. (2018) revealed that topic initiation was usually done by the most confident speaker in the group, not necessarily the most proficient speaker. They usually began with greetings and they introduced the topic to be discussed. When there was no uptake by their friends, these speakers would select others by asking the question explicitly by addressing a fellow student by name/role and asking him/her "What do you think?". Sometimes gaze was used to get their friends to self-select themselves to talk. Ngah et al. (2018) shared further observations which are vital to the current study. First, there was reluctance among the students to expand on the topic even though sufficient opportunity was provided; second, in such collaborative discussions, the speakers were considerate to allow each speaker sufficient turn time to talk, third, under topic expansion, while it was great that the students were able to select each other and solicit opinions from each other, they were observed to be focusing on their own thoughts rather than expanding on what other speakers said. Finally, for turn-ending, even though they were not required to conclude, all the groups came to a conclusion at the end of the twenty-minute time frame.

The nature of working in groups which requires them to collaborate with their team members allows the learners to develop communication skills that are essential to be applied in real-life situations. According to Ariffin (2021), working in groups can be an effective way for learners to practise and acquire discourse competence. In developing discourse competence, both speaking and listening skills

should be of the prime focus. In order for a speaker to respond effectively in any kind of oral interaction, he or she should first listen effectively. However, listening skills in oral communicative tasks are often being neglected as the focus is usually on the development of oral production of the speakers (Mart, 2020). Brown (2011) argues that listening is a skill that should be developed and the assumption that listening skill will develop as the oral skills develop should be challenged. As such, "good use of teaching listening strategies is needed to maximise the learning of listening" (Ismail & Aziz, 2020: p. 198).

Ismail and Aziz (2020) who did a systematic review of related studies on the teaching of listening strategies in ESL classrooms to get a more in-depth understanding of models and strategies of teaching listening skills between 2004 and 2016 found that mainly three strategies have been used. They are (1) bottom-up processing (where listeners rely on word-for-word translation, adjusting to the speech rate, oral text repetition and focusing more on prosodic features of the text to give utterances meaning, which means their lack of linguistic knowledge and unfamiliar context will hinder understanding), (2) top-down processing (where listeners rely on prior knowledge of context and situation in memory to make meaning or analyse text meaning for comprehension which include predicting, inferencing, elaborating and visualisation) and (3) interactive processing (considered the most effective strategy as it is a combination of bottom-up and top-down processing) (Ismail & Aziz, 2020).

Ismail and Aziz (2020) who also looked at interventions used in developing listening skills, reviewed 2 studies, both of which targeted interactive processing. The first study was a pilot study which used podcasts with 53 second-year undergraduates and the other was an experimental study with a pre-test and post-test design which utilised video materials for 41 first-year English major learners in their second semester. With podcasts, the participants believed that they could control their learning and with video materials, the combination of visual images and sound enabled the participants to stimulate interactive processing of their listening and connect classroom and the real world (Ismail & Aziz, 2020). While the studies reviewed did improve their listening skills, the listening skills reviewed were not developed for group oral discussions.

A study that aimed to develop listening skills of two groups of undergraduate degree students through effective listening and group oral discussions was by Caspersz and Stasinska (2015). They (2015) wanted to evaluate students' perceptions of whether a formal 'listening' intervention using open space technology (OST) enhanced their understanding of a task and to describe an intervention that can be used by others to foster effective listening by students (p. 2). Originally used in management consulting for facilitating business issues like strategic planning, and future goal setting, Caspersz and Stasinska (2015) employed OST because it allowed their participants to organise themselves to debate ideas that were significant to them. After conducting a pre- and post surveys to collect student perceptions of their experiences, findings revealed that of the two groups, Population Health students fared better than Business students because the context was more familiar to them (Caspersz & Stasinska, 2015). They (2015) highlighted the importance of external (e.g., environment, time of activity, and external distractions) and internal (e.g., personal attributes, attitudes and assumptions, and prior knowledge) factors that impact whether listening is effective or otherwise.

Similar to the study done by Caspersz and Stasinska (2015), the focus of this paper is effective listening, which is more than a cognitive process as the listener must understand both verbal and non-verbal communication that informs what is said in the context in which the speech or interaction takes place which means listening is both an individual and shared process. In the words of Low and Sonntag (2013, p. 785 in Caspersz & Stasinska, 2015: p.1), "listening is highly personal, dependent on our social location and, at the same time, shaped by the listenings of others as well as our relation to the speaking other."

As effective listening skills are clearly important to be mastered in group oral discussions, our paper aims to describe *Snapticon,* a discussion card game that can be used to stimulate effective listening of ESL learners. This paper begins with the description of our theoretical underpinnings, methodology, findings, and limitations, followed by the conclusion.

2. Game-based Learning

Game-based learning, in simple terms, refers to learning through play, or by playing. Pivec et al. (2003) consider game-based learning an innovative education paradigm that "provides a complex level of interactivity which stimulates users' engagement [in which the] learners are encouraged to combine knowledge from different areas to choose a solution or to make a decision at a certain point, [and they] can test how the outcome of the game changes based on their decisions and actions" (p.217). Pivec et al. (2003) further added that when learners interact with each other, they improve their social skills. In addition, when the gameplay is engaging and entertaining, through repetition within the game context, learners are "expected to elicit desirable behaviours based on emotional or cognitive reactions which result from interaction with and feedback from game play" (Pivec et al., 2003, p.218)

Board games are a part of game-based learning. Despite the digital era and the rise of video games, board games have managed to withstand the test of times. Donovan (2017 cited in Bayeck, 2020) who examined the popularity of board games in recent times, stated that the resurgence of board games is due to internet fatigue. This is not surprising and it explains why there are many learners who, despite the rapid growth of online learning, still prefer to have a blended mode of learning throughout their educational experience even though they could be engaged in learning remotely, individually, and at their own pace. Megat Abdul Rahim et al. (2021) believe that the reason why students favour blended learning is because apart from embracing the innovation of learning using technology, they learn better in face-to-face interaction as it is a better way for quick reference and a better understanding of the subject matter taught.

Likewise, the face-to-face interaction provided by board games and simulations is more engaging, and more meaningful as games and simulations provide students the opportunity for experiential learning, which entails active and reflective engagement with the material on the part of the student (Reese & Wells, 2007). The difference between non-digital games and digital games is the absence of electronic devices such as computers, mobile phones, consoles, or tablets (Bayeck, 2020). Bayeck (2020) who reviewed studies involving board games gameplay found that board games developed for teaching provide new learning experiences and environments, which not only facilitated mathematical thinking and skills and enhanced language skills but also led to behavioural modifications, enhanced collaboration, content learning, communication, negotiation, and cooperation among players, as learning was ingrained in the gameplay.

There are many types of board games. According to Gameology (2020), there are 17 types of board games and it is believed that there are more. Moe (2021) listed 40 different types and board games based on game mechanics as categories were not even included. Among the 40 types Moe (2021) listed were *Abstract* board games, *Bluffing* board games, card games, children's board games, *City Building*, *Civilisation Building, Cooperative*, *Deck Building* board games, *Deduction*, *Dexterity*, *Dice* games, *Educational*, *Role-Playing Games* (RPG) and evidently many more. Some types even overlap, (https://www.gameology.com.au/blogs/news/types-of-board-games-explained). An example of game types that overlap would be *The Resistance: Avalon*. *The Resistance: Avalon* is a card game that takes players back to King Arthur's court and players assume roles from deadly assassin to the omniscient Merlin and to win the game, players must attempt to gather groups to complete quests, which can be thwarted by other players assuming the roles of Mordred's evil agents. Thus it can be seen here, this game falls under several game types which are card game, RPG, and cooperative. Card games are self explanatory. They use cards exclusively and a board is not required (Moe, 2021). *Cooperative* games, as the name suggests are games where players work together to win the game. *RPG* is when players take on characters and assume characteristics associated with these characters. Certainly, games such as these are entertaining and fun but they can be educational too, especially *RPG* types.

A survey conducted by Idrissovaa et al. (2015) found that the majority of EFL learners of mixed-level groups believed that role-play activities could improve their listening and speaking skills as these activities give opportunities for the students to engage with real-life situations as well as to everyday language expressions. Role-plays also help students work together as a team or a group, and communicate in order to understand each other. Role-play can improve students' speaking skills in any situation, and help them to interact. As for the mixed level group students, role-play activities help to overcome difficulties in speaking. Role-plays help students cope with real-life situations, commonly

used expressions, forcing them to think "on their feet". Moreover, it is fun, and most students think that the enjoyment leads to better learning, making them more motivated to learn.

Motivated learners are, according to Garris et al. (2002), "enthusiastic, focused, and engaged [as] they are interested in and enjoy what they are doing, they try hard, and they persist over time" (p. 444). Although not explicitly stated, motivation is key in the Input-Process-Outcome Game Model (See Figure 1 below, from Garris et al., 2002: p.445), a tacit model of learning in studies of instructional games, as the learners are viewed to be "actively constructing knowledge from experience... due to the cyclical nature of the process, [which] is consistent with experiential learning approach" (Garris et al., 2002: p. 446). It is the game features that are determinants of motivation (Garris et al., 2002).

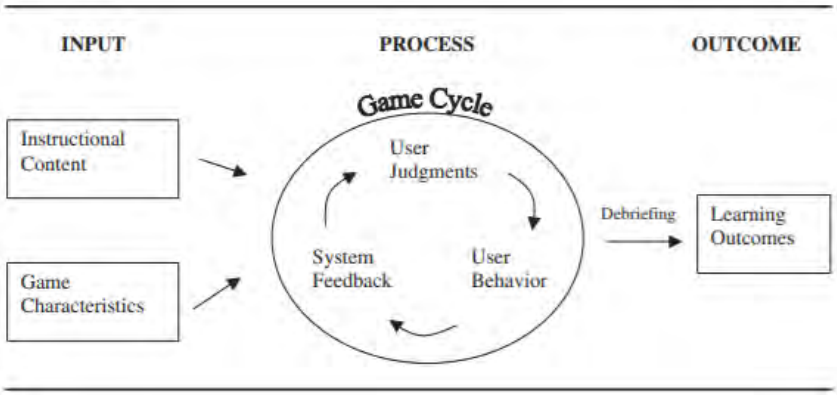

Fig. 1: Input-Process-Outcome Game Model

In Figure 1, Garris et al. (2002) explained that learning takes place when learners actively engage with the learning environment created in INPUT, which refers to the *Instructional Content* and *Game Characteristics*, as they go through the PROCESS, which is cyclical, beginning with *User Judgements* (*i.e.,* subjective evaluation of the game whether it is fun, engaging, interesting, and confidence-building that are represented by self-reports), *User Behaviour* (*i.e.,* learners' affective judgement leads to sustained involvement, or persistent reengagement) and *System Feedback* (*i.e.,* the positive or negative reinforcement in games that indicates whether learners' performance meets or falls below the desired standards which further motivates learners to try harder to win or master the game or abort playing altogether) followed by *Debriefing* (*i.e.,* the process in which experiential learning must be coupled with reflection opportunities) leading to the Learning Outcomes (*i.e.,* basically referring to (1) skill-based (namely, technical or motor skills), (2) cognitive (namely declarative knowledge, procedural knowledge, and strategic knowledge), and (3) affective (attitude-related) outcomes. The main takeaways from the Input-Process-Outcome Game Model are that (a) people learn from active engagement with the learning environment and (b) this experience coupled with instructional support (*i.e*., debriefing, scaffolding) can provide an effective learning environment.

The Development of *Snapticon*

Although the Input-Process-Outcome Game Model proposed by Garris et al. (2002) actually refers to computer or digital games (especially in terms of system feedback in which meeting the desired standards of performance means e.g., levelling up or getting bonus points), this model was aptly applied to the *Snapticon* card game that was created by the researchers to improve learners group discussion skills with particular attention to improve their effective listening abilities through *Rewards* collection in the form of points. This point collection system is in line with system feedback (*i.e.,* the element of gamification), which appeals to players' competitive spirit (Menezes & Bortolli, 2016). This in turn would make them want to try harder to play better (System feedback) and find the game fun, engaging and interesting (User Judgement), leading to persistent reengagement (User Behaviour). Through persistent reengagement, or repetition in playing the game, the learners are "expected to elicit desirable behaviours based on emotional or cognitive reactions which result from interaction with and feedback from game play" (Pivec et al., 2003: p.218). Thus learning outcomes are achieved through the

debriefing process which links between simulation (*i.e.,* the game world) and the real world, making a connection between the events in the game and reality, and relating the game experience to learning (Pivec et al., 2003).

It is evident then that much planning should go into the game play to provide a balance of challenges and possible courses of action that support the learning outcomes as well as engagement. Thus, Pivec et al. (2003: p.220) suggested the following steps of game design, elements of learning and engagement to be considered to create a successful game-based learning opportunity: (1) Determine Pedagogical Approach (how you believe learning takes place) (2) Situate the Task in a Model World (3) Elaborate the Details (4) Incorporate Underlying Pedagogical Support (5) Map Learning Activities to Interface Actions (6) Map Learning Concepts to Interface Objects. Again, this is more suitable for digital educational games. However, these steps could be easily applied to non-digital educational games as well, in that the task would be situated in a Model World (*i.e.,* a learning environment that is given its shape and form through the game play and the card illustrations) and the word interface would refer to physical interface rather than virtual ones. After all, board games require actions to be carried out in relation to objects related to the game play.

In Incorporating Underlying Pedagogical Support, Pivec et al. (2003) proposed using a constructivist or exploratory approach focusing on elements that facilitate the learning process. As learners are considered active participants in the knowledge acquisition process, "they should be engaged in restructuring, manipulating, re-inventing, and experimenting with knowledge to make it meaningful, organised, and permanent" by applying seven pedagogical goals, which are: (1) to provide an experience with the knowledge-construction process, (2) to provide experiences encouraging appreciation of multiple perspectives, (3) to embed learning in realistic and relevant contexts, 4) to encourage ownership in the learning process, (5) to embed learning in social experience, (6) to encourage the use of multiple modes of representation, and (7) to encourage self-awareness of the knowledge construction process ((Pivec et al., 2003: p. 220).

In planning what learners should learn in *Snapticon* in terms of INPUT (the *Instructional Content* and *Game Characteristics*), clear goals were defined. *Snapticon* is meant not only to enhance students' discussion skills, where they would learn how to manage a discourse through their given roles in the game to create player awareness of the structure of a discussion, strengthen topic management and turn-taking skills, but also to force them into an environment in which they have to listen effectively to what is being said in order to perform the desired standards or achieve the goals of the game. Thus, *Snapticon* is a role-playing card game that provides social experience in a realistic context which emphasises effective listening as guided by Rost (2011) who categorised it into 4 stages. They are: "(1) sensing (taking in messages); (2) interpreting (arriving at a degree of understanding); (3) evaluating (judging, weighing evidence, deciding on the degree of agreement with the speaker and (4) response (non-verbal feedback to show understanding, and verbal contributions, such as asking questions or paraphrasing)" (Rost, 2011: p. 96).

By having the role cards, learners are provided different experiences every time they engage in the game. Apart from that, 'Special words' were also added to the game as 'Sabotage' cards to enhance and expand players' vocabulary, as well as to get the players to think on their feet as they needed to insert the special word into their discussion contribution. These challenges were also designed to be slightly higher than learners' skill level and from the point collection system, they would be able to assess their own performance. In conclusion, *Snapticon* does indeed apply the seven pedagogical goals with the hope that the interaction with the learning material is always novel when playing with different players in different roles with different actions and different challenges, and that this would translate to knowledge acquisition and behaviour change as learners are motivated to continue to play the game and learn from it through interaction with the learning materials and other players (Bayeck, 2020).

While game-based learning has been proven to enhance learner motivation and increase students interest in subject matter, yet how effective learning is through in terms of learning outcomes achieved is less clear. Pivec et al. (2003) reported that although a number of studies focusing on learning retention were conducted, eight out of eleven studies indicated game-based learning led to better retention; there were still three studies that showed no significant difference. In terms of students' preference, seven of eight studies had findings in favour of game-based learning.

This study aims to gauge learners' perception of the *Snapticon* card game and whether they felt that Snapticon card game improved their discussion skills using English language as the learning

outcome of playing the game. In other words, this paper looks at what students think of the INPUT, PROCESS and OUTCOME whether they felt that *Snapticon* helped them learn to be better communicators in group oral discussions.

3. Methodology

According to Fraenkel et al. (2012), qualitative researchers prefer to look at the quality of a particular activity or its process rather than the frequency it occurs. Thus, this case study research applied a qualitative research design as it aimed to investigate students' perceptions of *Snapticon*. Furthermore, this study also employed non-participant observation, in which the researcher observed the activities of the group but in no way, participated in the activities of the group. A single observation was employed for about 1 hour while the game was being played to observe whether the students who played the *Snapticon* game were indeed more alert, particularly in giving feedback and responding to others as well as whether they were more proactive in initiating the discussion, expanding the topic, providing agreement and disagreement where required. However, the students were not told that they were being observed.

3.1 Research Sample

The sample of this case study is non-random sampling (convenience sampling) as the researcher has access to this class, being the instructor of this class. Typical of a qualitative research, the sample is also purposive. A purposive sample is a sample which is felt would yield the best understanding of the object being studied (Fraenkel et al., 2012) that is relevant to the study. The main inclusion criteria is: the sample had to be tertiary level students as the study wanted to find out if the *Snapticon* game developed was helpful to enhance oral group discussion skills of tertiary students. Thus, the sample for this study was an intact classroom of 25 students, in Semester 2 of 2018/2019 cohort of undergraduate degree comprising Semester 2 Year 1 students and Semester 1 Year 2 students from 6 different engineering faculties. In addition, the students were English as a Second Language (ESL) learners, taking English for Technical Communication, which is the second of three levels of compulsory English courses offered by the Centre for Modern Languages and Human Sciences, Universiti Malaysia Pahang. In the course of 14 weeks, students learned Technical Description and Process Explanation, Standard Operating Procedures as well as Feasibility and Recommendation Reports.

3.2 Research Instrument

An open-ended questionnaire which was distributed to all students, not only those who played, but also those who witnessed the game. The questionnaire consists of 5 questions which are guided by the Input-Process-Outcome Game Model (Garris et al.,2002):

1) What do you think of *Snapticon*?
2) What are the advantages and disadvantages of playing *Snapticon*?
3) Which role do you like the most and why?
4) Is it important to have role cards and why?
5) How can *Snapticon* be improved?

Question 1 requires students to provide *User Judgement* whether they found it fun, engaging and interesting. Findings from Question 1 would show whether they would repeat playing the game (*i.e., User Behaviour*). Questions 2, 3 and 4 looked at the learning outcomes derived from playing the game with Question 2 being more general pertaining to the overall gameplay of the game and Questions 3 and 4 zooming in on specific features of the game such as the role cards. Basically, they solicit students' evaluation of the game play in terms of how the game characteristics assist in the acquisition of the learning outcomes. Lastly, Question 5 requires their evaluation of how the *Snapticon* game falls short of their game experience and expectations.

3.3 Research Material

The research material used in this study is the *Snapticon* card game developed by the researchers to enhance discussion skills, paying particular attention to effective listening skills. *Snapticon* is a discussion card game inspired by *Snap* - a matching game, which is often a part of everybody's childhood memories. To win the game of *Snap*, which is a dexterity type deck-building game, the players must yell out "Snap!" whenever they see a matching pair. As this game also develops and tests players' attention and memory skills, players must be alert as the proceeding card is placed directly on top of the previous card in the discard pile. The player who finishes his/her cards first loses the game.

Adapting this very popular children's card game, *Snapticon* employs selected, widely-used universal emoticons, and is ideal for four players. At the start of the game, each player is randomly assigned a role card. A player could be the Initiator (the one who selects the topic from the TOPIC cards, begins the discussion and introduces the topic), Concluder (the one who closes the discussion after getting players to come to an agreement), Moderator (the one who moderates the discussion to ensure it is balanced and have both positive and negative points), Disagreer (the one who disagrees with all or at least 2 opinions of others). All players must contribute to the discussion and keep the discussion going on top of the role they assume. At the end of the discussion, players should reveal their ROLE cards to be evaluated by other players. REWARD BUTTONS will be awarded on the players' ROLE fulfilment and performance. If the role was perceived as not clearly acted/carried out by other players, the player will collect 1 point. If it was perceived to be partially/inconsistently carried out, the player gets awarded 3 points, and if the role was successfully and consistently performed, other players would award 5 points.

To start, each player is randomly given a role card and five *Snapticon* cards to play to their advantage. *Snapticon* cards consist of two card types which are *Ambush* and *Sabotage* cards which allow players to interrupt, to steal the floor and score points when they utilise the special word on the *Sabotage* cards and execute the action on the *Ambush* cards.

Fig. 2: Snapticon card game

Fig. 3: Students playing Snapticon

In this game, when the players hear the word '*Snapticon'*, it is a *Sabotage/Ambush* action from the other players, yet it is also an opportunity for the *sabotaged/ambushed* player to score. Thus, players must be alert, and play smart, and plan strategically. Players can use their *Power* cards to assist them in the task or deflect the Ambush, depending on the *Power* card type they receive. There are 5 types of *Power* cards and an example of a *Power* card is a *Block* card, which can be used to block a *Sabotage* or *Ambush* action forced on by one player on another if they feel that the player is already collecting too many points. A speaker being *sabotaged* or *ambushed* may also use this card to nullify the ACTION forced upon him/her.

The end game is to come to an agreement on a topic that was chosen by the *Initiator* at the beginning of the game while collecting as many points from other players as possible. Reward buttons (points) are awarded by the other players when players utilise the special word or action card

appropriately in the discussion context. The reward buttons function as the scoring points for the players. The player with the highest score wins.

3.4 Data Collection Procedures

The class was a 2 hour class, and in the first half hour, the students were introduced to the *Snapticon* game and briefed on the game play by the researcher and two (2) co-researchers. Prior to getting the students to play *Snapticon*, the students were not prepared in any way for the game as the researchers wanted to see how students would react to the game, whether it was playable, or otherwise. Then, after the briefing, four volunteers were called out to play *Snapticon* and the remaining 21 students were told to watch their friends play the game. In the game, the topic that was chosen by the Initiator was "Everyone has a role to play in making Malaysia a safer place to live in. Suggest what can be done at different levels to achieve this." The game lasted for approximately 1 hour after which, all the students (*i.e.,* the 4 players and the 21 student observers) were given 10 minutes to answer the open-ended questionnaire by writing their perceptions of the game. As this was done in class, all 25 students returned the questionnaire.

3.5 Data Analysis Procedure

Data from the open-ended questionnaire returned were qualitatively analysed. Each paper returned was labelled R1 - R25, representing Respondents 1 to 25. Each answer was read, coded and grouped accordingly and consequently, thematically categorised. Suitable headings were given and finally the qualitative data were descriptively presented. The responses in the findings of this study are presented verbatim to enhance understanding as well as to give participants a voice in the data presented.

In terms of observation, the researchers noted down whether players enjoyed playing the game, as well as whether the student observers were engaged in the game, despite not playing themselves. More importantly, the researchers recorded if players were more alert, recorded how they were giving feedback and responding to others as well as whether they were more proactive in initiating the discussion, expanding the topic, providing agreement and disagreement where required. The notes were analysed similar to the open-ended questionnaire data. After the coding process, suitable headings were given. The data from the observation are used to support the students' perceptions of the game in improving their discussion skills particularly in listening skills.

4. Findings

In this section, the findings will be presented based on the five questions asked, beginning with 4.1 to 4.5 below. Many of the answers provided in the returned questionnaire were basically short answers and oftentimes, more than one adjective were used, for example in Question 1. The observation data are presented alongside the findings from the open-ended questions.

4.1 What do you think of *Snapticon*?

For Question 1, as this was related to *User Judgement*, the answers were coded based on the labels "*fun, engaging* and *interesting*", all of which are reasons which are said to influence *User Behaviour*. Based on the responses received, all 25 students gave overwhelmingly positive reviews of *Snapticon.* Three (3) respondents gave the game an overall "good" and under the code "fun" there were a total of 5 respondents who described Snapticon as "fun" (4 respondents), even "double super fun!" (1 respondent).

For "*engaging*", students used adjectives like "funny" (2 respondents), "intense" (1 respondent), cheerful (1 respondent), creative (1 respondent). Although creative was placed under "*engaging*", the researchers also felt that "creative" also belonged to "*interesting*". 18 respondents described Snapticon as "interesting"; fascinating features (two (2) respondents), creative (R23), a new way to communicate (R6), and not boring (R16). As the researchers did model it in a way after the MUET discussion, we liked that this was highlighted, even though it was only by one student.

Observation showed that not only the players were engaged but also the student observers. As can be seen in Figure 3 above, all the students gave full concentration to the game. They laughed at every funny moment and some even tried helping their friends. In other words, they were very involved and very engaged. As a result, all the students gave positive responses to the game, and many were able to give constructive suggestions based on their observations of the game.

4.2 What are the advantages and disadvantages of playing *Snapticon*?

Again, the responses were positive on the whole, and none reported any disadvantages of playing the game. The advantages of the game include that it can improve speaking skills in English, improve discussion skills (12 respondents), improve brainstorming (4 respondents), boosts confidence (2 respondents), makes students talk more and more (5 respondents), more quick-thinking, and alert (2 respondents). Students liked how they had to "think outside the box" (2 respondents) and "be creative" (7 respondents) in order to include the "unexpected" *Sabotage* mystery words into the discussion to be applied "in a good way" (R2). One respondent (R16) was very specific in mentioning that it has improved the way we give our opinion, the way we talk about our opinion, and the way we interrupt the discussion. While R5 responded it can be used in class, one respondent (R18) envisioned that this could be a party game that can also be played in events.

Observation showed that the discussion was much more structured due to the role cards, and that the players had to think on their feet especially when they were ambushed with Sabotage cards, whereby they had to include the mystery word. As stated earlier, the topic of discussion was "Everyone has a role to play in making Malaysia a safer place to live in. Suggest what can be done at different levels to achieve this" and one of the players suggested that people should carry guns and somebody ambushed that player with the word, "Peach" which he said something to this effect, "I own a peach farm. If bad people come to the farm, I will protect it with my gun!". Everybody laughed.

4.3 Which role do you like the most and why?

In terms of which role card was their favourite, some gave two answers but on the whole, 12 answered the *Disagreer* role card, as they have to oppose other players' opinions. Whereas eight (8) respondents chose *Moderator* because it keeps balance in the discussion, three (3) liked *Initiator*, and 1 said *Concluder* was the best role for the obvious reason respectively.

As this is a matter of opinion, there is no observation note to support this. Having said that, what was observed was that the discussion had a structure. From the role cards, the students would learn that a discussion has to be initiated and concluded. At the same time, there would be people who disagreed as well as people who knew to keep the discussion balanced so that all points of view are given.

4.4 Is it important to have role cards and why?

All of the students agreed that the role cards were important for three main reasons. They found that the role cards "help decide the players' job without conflict" and "keep the discussion going" so that "the students do not go into 'silent' mode".

Observation showed that the players were indeed dictated by their roles, and that kept the discussion going. From the researcher's observation, what may have helped the discussion were actually the sabotage cards such as "Argue with the previous speaker and elaborate with examples" or "Crack a joke that is related to the topic at hand". Sabotage cards are actually elements that students rarely do in a discussion. Thus, this meant that the players really had to listen to what the other players were saying and push themselves to fulfil the task given in order to get the reward points. This is how the game develops effective listening skills.

4.5 How can *Snapticon* be improved?

In terms of improvement, the comments from the students were very constructive. Some students reflected that the game only allowed four players to play at one time and that players would have problems playing if they were not proficient, if they were too shy or if they did not have a good sense of humour. When the game was played, one of the volunteers was not as proficient as the others. This observation did not go unnoticed the student observers and in response to how the game could be improved, they suggested that the game should allow for preparation time before the discussion starts for less proficient speakers (2 respondents) and the game should have *Helper* role cards so that they could help friends who are having difficulties, and a *Life* role card that would also allow them to do a google search (R18). Other improvements suggested by the students include introducing more emoticon *Sabotage* options (5 respondents), more fun topics (R9), and more role cards so that more players can play the game (4 respondents). It is also suggested to have an *e-Snapticon*; an online version of the game (R12). A video simulation of how *Snapticon* is played is also recommended to accompany the game as a manual guide (4 respondents).

Whatever that was observed by the students was also noticed by the researchers. When the researcher realised that not all players were of the same proficiency level, the researcher immediately jotted that preparation time had to be given in cases like this. The researcher also observed how one of the players played his own *Ambush* card because he liked the action on it, and this, along with all the suggestions for improvements has inspired a newer version of *Snapticon* which allows up to 16 players maximum including *Helper* roles.

5. Discussion

Based on the data collected, in terms of *User Judgement*, students liked the game as they found it fun, engaging and interesting. Following the Input-Process-Outcome Model, this indicates that they would repeat playing the game (*i.e., User Behaviour*). Furthermore, based on their feedback on how the game should be improved, the students wanted the game to have more than 4 players, and even suggested some suitable roles such as Helper. This interest and enthusiasm for the game supports Garris et al. (2002) who stated that when learners are interested in and enjoy what they are doing, this makes them motivated learners. It is obvious that part of the motivation is derived from the game play. That all the students, players and observers alike found the game engaging means that the game features are indeed determinants of motivation as stated by Garris et al. (2002).

Furthermore, answers to Questions 2, 3 and 4 which looked at the learning outcomes derived from playing the game found that students understood what the role cards were meant to do and that the game play of *Snapticon* were designed as such to improve their oral discussion skills, help them think outside the box, as they felt that the game improved brainstorming skills, made them listen more to talk and contribute more. Their confidence was somehow boosted by the game as they had to be alert at all times. They also tended to respond more naturally in the game as being in game lowered the affective filter and their communication anxiety as the goal was to collect the most points..

It is also interesting to note that spontaneity in giving responses was not common with Asian students as Caplan and Stevens (2017) found that Asian students tend to keep their opinions to themselves. However, through this game, the players were so engaged that they forgot about their non-participant tendencies. This confirms Pivec et al. 's (2003) claim which says that as gameplay is both engaging and entertaining, learners are expected to not only improve their social behaviour but also elicit preferable behaviours as the results of psychological and cognitive involvement from playing the game. Speaking in group oral discussions allows learners to listen and learn from their group members' point of views which in turn helps them to monitor the speaking progress and improve their speaking competence (Surajwaran, 2019). In mixed-ability groupings, the more advanced learners can assist the lower ability learners while playing the game (Barton et al., 2018).

In terms of role cards, students loved that they were assigned roles, similar to RPG type games. The clear assignment of roles provided a clear structure of a discussion that students needed, and oftentimes forgot, during a discussion. Based on the findings, students appeared undecided as to which role was their favourite in the sense that many students named two roles in their responses. However, what is interesting is that the two main roles that frame the discussion such as *Initiator* and *Concluder*

were not as popular as *Disagreer* and *Moderator*. Students seem to like the more challenging roles and enjoyed playing a part that is perhaps different from or closer to their own personality.

Furthermore, it is due to the gameplay, with the *Sabotage* and *Ambush* cards that pushed the students out of their comfort zone. Students admitted that the game made them think outside the box and made them more creative in their answers. As stated earlier, one of the students (R16) was very specific in mentioning that *Snapticon* had improved the way opinions were given, the way the opinion was talked about, and the way the discussion was interrupted. This meant that during the game, when an opinion was given, the students were listening to what was being said, rather than forming their own ideas about what to say during their own turn, because the game necessitated that the players needed to be alert, due to the *Sabotage* and *Ambush* cards. Getting such responses from students means that students were able to evaluate the game play in terms of how the game characteristics assisted in the acquisition of the learning outcomes that were planned and they were even able to provide suggestions to make the game better for students who were not as proficient.

Since *Snapticon* is a collaborative game, these findings support Caspersz and Stasinsta's (2015) and Ariffin's (2021) findings that learners are able to enhance their language skills such as listening and speaking skills through these group discussions. Having the students engaged in a card game lesson also motivates the students to be interested in learning English in a fun way while working collaboratively with their peers. Language activities which have less teacher control allow the learners to be independent of their own success of language learning experience and are closely-linked with real-life events outside the classroom (Shanti & Jaafar, 2021).

All in all, the findings revealed that students were able to provide feedback on all the three elements Snapticon was built on, which are INPUT (*the instructional content and game play*), PROCESS (*User Judgement, User Behaviour and System Feedback*) and OUTCOME (*Learning Outcomes*) of *Snapticon.* They understood the rationale of the game, not necessarily the effective listening aspect, but they were aware that somehow the game play pushed them to be better communicators, which in turn became a motivating factor to continue to play the game.

6. Conclusion

To conclude, group discussion skills are not primarily about a speaker's ability to contribute his or her ideas to the discussion, it is also about being able to relate to other speakers' opinions and building upon them. This is an issue among many ESL learners that many ESL instructors face and find challenging to overcome. Therefore, this paper provides a possible solution through *Snapticon*, a game specifically designed to stimulate ESL learners' interactional skills in a group discussion setting.

Playing *Snapticon* multiple times can assist ESL learners to be more interactionally competent because of the way the game is designed. By having the role cards, this gives structure to the players. By having players play different roles each time, it develops their skill as a person who initiates or ends, or moderates and argues in a discussion, and players understand that these are the different ways they can engage in an oral discussion. The card game also develops the players' effective listening skills when the players are forced to build upon other players' contributions through the *Ambush* cards such as to give examples from their own experiences or tell anecdotes or argue against other players' opinions. This allows them to understand that in an oral discussion, speakers usually build their contributions based on the speakers before them. Effective listening skills are also further developed when players reuse words introduced through the *sabotage* cards, which train them to be more receptive towards what other players are saying. The more they reuse a word, the more points they will earn. This will not only indirectly make them interactionally competent in participating in a group oral discussion, but it indirectly broadens their vocabulary repertoire and increases creativity in using the words - it is all about reviewing and extending learning. All in all, *Snapticon* is a game that requires focus from its players. By being alert, the players are actively engaged in the game and by being engaged, they subsequently become more interactionally competent, which means their effective listening skills have been effectively stimulated.

It can also be concluded that since *Snapticon* is a game, its gamification aspect lowers ESL learners' affective filter. Simultaneously, the game also helps to lower their communication anxiety, especially when they are playing to win! In sum, effective listening skills can be gamified through

Snapticon card game and English instructors can use it as a teaching tool in class. As for ESL learners, on the other hand, the game can develop their skills indirectly in a fun and engaging way.

However, despite the benefits *Snapticon* may bring to both instructors and learners, the limitation of this study lies in the fact that the game was only piloted once.

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