

A NOTE ON TACHERS’ ROLES IN THE APPLICATION OF CARD GAMES IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING

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This paper is a preliminary report for the result of practice sessions for Japanese oral skills through playing card games. In the present study, extracurricular practice sessions were organized to offer university students in China with opportunities to practice Japanese, which they studied for their minor, while engaging in card games in a comfortable and friendly setting. This paper provides some notes and caveats when implementing game-based lessons, based on the experiences and reflections of the sessions, reserving for future research the analysis of students' performances and the practical and theoretical implications for foreign language pedagogy. In particular, this paper focuses on the roles of teachers in game-based classrooms.

Game-based language teaching (GBLT). The effectiveness of utilizing card games in language teaching and learning has been extensively discussed in past relevant literature [1, 2, 3, 4]. For instance, H.C.Sung & G.S.Ching (2012) examines the use of a card game to enhance students' competencies for the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC). The results indicate that integrating card games into language education can effectively enhance language competencies related to a proficiency test in adult learners.

Furthermore, game-based learning is reported to enhance the enjoyment of learning and to create a comfortable learning space [5] (although [5] discusses game-based learning in general).

Nevertheless, although numerous previous studies exist concerning the application of games in foreign language classrooms (and an even greater number on the use of games in education overall), the primary focus in the past studies appear to be the efficacy of GBLT in primary and secondary education [6]. Therefore, much work needs to be done to develop practical guidance and procedures specifically designed for college-level communicative or proficiency-based foreign language classrooms. This work aims to contribute to bridging that gap.

Japanese practice sessions through games. The Japanese practice sessions in this study were conducted as a satellite project of GameLab [7], conducted at a Sino-foreign university in China, where English is the medium of instruction, except foreign language courses. In the main sessions in the GameLab, students not only practiced English but also developed their 21 century skills, e.g., 4Cs (creativity, critical thinking, communication and collaboration; [8]), by engaging in card games and tabletop games [9].

The Japanese sessions comprised seven practice sessions and a total of 16 participants, including one research member learning Japanese from the GameLab. Between two and five individuals participated in each session. All student participants are native Mandarin Chinese speakers, while the participant who is also a research member is a native English speaker. With the exception of the first session, which was conducted as a trial, the proficiency levels of the participants were quite uniform; all were upper beginner learners of Japanese. The sessions were conducted by two facilitators for the initial session and one facilitator for the subsequent sessions. The meetings were video- and audio-recorded.

During each Japanese session, participants engaged in two to three games conducted in Japanese (For details of the design of the Japanese sessions and the games used in the sessions, see [10]). The Japanese practice sessions, unlike actual language classes, lack a segment focused on forms (vocabulary, grammar, expressions, etc.).

Roles of teachers. In educational environments, teachers are responsible for guiding students toward achieving learning objectives. In this section, two major issues regarding teachers’ roles are discussed.

First, effective time management is crucial for successful implementation of classes. Engaging in card games, encompassing the rules of play, participation, and the determination of winners and losers, entails a more intellectually demanding activity, eliciting diverse responses among participants. As such, it is frequently challenging to anticipate and regulate the duration of gameplay. If necessary, teachers should conclude a game before determining a winner, without adhering to the completion of the game. It is noteworthy that concentrating on game completion often prompts students to switch to their primary or more proficient language.

Next, scaffolding represents another essential function that teachers must perform [11, 12]. To enhance participant engagement, teachers offer resources such as sentence frames, pertinent language, or support in structuring their thoughts during gameplay. The significance of scaffolding is greater in game-based learning than in conventional language lessons, as, as noted above, gameplay is frequently more intricate than the exercises and activities found in traditional sessions [13].

Nonetheless, the current study underscores the importance of teachers adopting a more passive role, specifically by reducing intervention and allowing participants to confront the problems encountered during games. Teachers should recognize that obstacles are a crucial component of gaming, and addressing them—particularly those requiring collaboration—can serve as an additional objective alongside winning the game. Learners are more likely to progress when they independently confront and resolve problems, rather than when they receive direct guidance toward completing the game. In this context, scaffolding, when administered similarly to conventional regular language classes, undermines the full potential of game-based learning.

The immediacy of task completion in gameplay motivates learners, enhances student engagement, and provides great possibilities to perceive their performance and growth. Although game-based learning holds significant pedagogical potential, it demands substantial preparation and training for teachers. However, opportunities for such professional development for teachers remain relatively scarce in many educational contexts.

This paper provides a summary of game-based Japanese practice sessions conducted at a higher education institution in China, along with pertinent lessons and cautions regarding them. It is notable because what are typically regarded as advantages (e.g., the immediacy of task completion in gameplays, the enjoyment of activities) may lead to complications if sessions are executed correctly.

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