



**EDUCATIONAL CARD GAMES:  
ONE WAY OF ASSISTING THE COMMUNICATION SKILLS  
DEVELOPMENT OF NURSING STUDENTS WHOSE FIRST  
LANGUAGE IS NOT ENGLISH**

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**ABSTRACT**

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Aim/Purpose	This study seeks to determine the impact of a card game intervention in improving the English verbal communication of nursing students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.
Background	Many international students studying in Australia experience setbacks in their university studies due to English language difficulties. This paper outlines how an educational card game designed can be played by nursing students from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds as an intervention for their English verbal communication development.
Methodology	<p>The study used a descriptive qualitative approach to analyse the learning experiences of forty-five (N=45) nursing students from CALD backgrounds undertaking their second semester at a metropolitan university in Victoria, Australia after being introduced to an educational card game developed by the first author. The card game was designed to explore the use of English pragmatic markers, which are words, phrases, or verbal cues that signal or emphasise the intentions of the speaker.</p> <p>Following the intervention, participants were queried in a survey about their experiences with English language speaking and how the game improved their verbal communication skills.</p>
Contribution	This paper provides knowledge about how a game can be designed to enhance the English verbal communication skills of nursing students from

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	CALD backgrounds which could help them in their clinical placements and their adjustment into Australian society.
Findings	Three intertwining themes that emerged from the data analysis were education content, skills development, and fun and creativity. These themes signify the importance of providing opportunities for learners to creatively practise the educational content in simulative contextualised situations within a safe, comfortable, and inclusive learning environment.
Recommendations for Practitioners	Educators still need to consider the importance of inclusivity of students from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds as part of successful integration into the culture of their host countries.
Recommendations for Researchers	The findings emphasise the need for educators and researchers to understand the challenges facing these students in relation to marginalisation and discrimination and how they can design an intervention that is engaging and inclusive.
Impact on Society	The findings also put forward the awareness of pragmatics as part of both English language learning and integration into the society of a host country as students learn how to express intention appropriately in various interactions. Furthermore, the themes presented in this paper suggest that not only should an educational game or an intervention contain relevant educational content and practical activities for skills development, but they must also be enjoyable by encouraging creativity and social interaction.
Future Research	The results of this study also open possible future studies that involves the adaptation of a digital version of the card game or possible implementation of the game in other health professional programs in universities and other educational institutes.
Keywords	card game, nursing, English language learning, ESL, Verbal communication skills

## INTRODUCTION

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This paper outlines the language difficulties nursing students experience while enrolled at an Australian metropolitan university. This was based on results from surveys answered by nursing students after playing an educational card game designed to improve their verbal communication skills needed for their mandatory clinical placements at various health care settings. About 77% of these students came from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds meaning that they were born overseas, have a parent born overseas or speak a variety of languages other than English. The Australian Bureau of Statistics categorise them mainly by country of birth, language spoken at home, English proficiency, or other characteristics (including year of arrival in Australia), parents' country of birth and religious affiliation.

Despite having passed the university's English language entry requirements, nursing students from CALD backgrounds still need to improve their speaking and listening proficiencies further. They continue to face challenges during placements because verbal communication is critical when engaging with patients, their caregivers, and other clinical staff. Nursing academics have expressed concern and raised the need to address this issue. This paper presents quotations expressed by nursing students of CALD backgrounds experiencing discrimination and difficulties in adjusting into life in Australia. Many of these students feel insecure about their English language competence compared

to their native English-speaking counterparts. The paper also provides quotes by these nursing students related to how they overcame their insecurity and improved their English proficiency.

This paper also exemplifies one solution which educational institutions can provide for students from CALD backgrounds regardless of discipline to assist them in improving their English verbal communication skills and adjustment in Australia. A workshop was conducted where nursing students played an educational card game, titled Mind You, designed by the first author, to facilitate the verbal communication development and enhancement of English as a Second Language (ESL) learners. As the students improve their verbal communication skills, they prepare themselves for engagement with patients, their families, doctors, nurses, and other health care personnel during their clinical placements.

## **BACKGROUND**

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Previous research on students from CALD backgrounds studying and living in Australia highlight several challenges they face while adjusting to life in Australia. These include language issues, adapting to a foreign education system, settlement, finance, and health challenges (Cayetano-Penman et al., 2021). Other potential stressors for these students include the requirements to study online and to complete clinical placements.

Clinical placements are foundational components in most health care programs that provide opportunities of experiential learning for students to apply theory into practice in a live environment with real healthcare workers and patients. However, these placements can still impact on the psychological well-being of CALD students, including increased levels of anxiety and stress to meet family expectations, leading to lower quality of life and personal relationships.

The three barriers for students from CALD backgrounds were identified as:

- a) placement planning and preparation,
- b) teaching, assessment, and feedback, and
- c) cultural and language issues.

Of the many potential solutions put forward by the article, building language and practical approaches for communication are the areas determined as enablers for these students and therefore is the focus of this research.

### ***LANGUAGE DISCRIMINATION***

Cayetano-Penman et al. (2021) highlighted particularly how students enrolled in health science degree programs experience significant stress during integration in the host country due to factors related to finance, lack of familiarity with the education system of the host country, settlement, and language difficulties. Students of CALD backgrounds have expressed discrimination due to their insufficient command in English. They described how students are divided based on whether English is their mother tongue or not, thus feeling excluded and isolated in the host country. Below are quotes that are largely anecdotal and collated from students while they were studying their health science courses at a university.

“Language can be discriminating too. You are boxed into ‘people with English as a second language’. It occurs when individuals are seen or treated differently because of their primary or native language. Of course, it is illegal, but it still happens. This is very important in today’s competitive world. You cannot afford to be unfairly treated because of your accent, diction, syntax, vocabulary, sentence structure and/or choice of words. “

“It actually gave me a good headspace when I started off at the university as an international student. I need to improve my communication skills because difficulties in language are a

challenge. We could be discriminated upon. I'm glad to have come and attend the educational session.”

Many of these students emphasised the importance of high English proficiency as part of success in Australia.

“In the classroom, as an English language learner and not a native speaker, I tend to feel marginalised. Language can be a barrier for me, like passing up good grades in exams and papers. Poor English reduces opportunities for me; hence, I must try my best to improve in this area.”

Students have sought assistance on how to overcome their difficulties and integrate better into an Australian university and society. These students have attended sessions where they improved their command in English. Some students expressed optimism despite feeling disadvantaged due of their lack of English proficiency.

“Language awareness, assessment and improvement are the most important outcomes of the session. I was able to learn from other classmates how they express themselves. It could potentially impact on students’ perspectives and confidence on their language abilities and skills. Signals if you are good and where you can improve.”

The initiative showed a concrete way of improving English language skills.

“In bringing this to the fore, I had the opportunity to reflect on how I was with the language. I was able to compare my expression with others and there were opportunities for peer support. The session encouraged me to improve my English.”

The ability to speak English fluently will increase work readiness, confidence, and morale.

“I am very pleased that there is interest demonstrated for international students in this area (language proficiency) which is many times overlooked or neglected. If done regularly, it might help international students adjust better in university.”

“This type of educational sessions should be expanded for various reasons. It might help us quickly adapt to English because of different language patterns and structures.”

The pressure of starting a new life in another country is compounded by English difficulties as English is required in every aspect of life. This raises anxiety and tension.

“We also gained support, positive encouragement and made new friends.”

Expanding their languages abilities and assisting them in developing English proficiency could help them improve their academic performance.

“After graduation from my nursing course, I will start work in the short time ahead. I just wanted to thank you for hosting this diagnostic/preparatory session in order for me to sharpen my English. I realise I need more training in the language so that I will not be disadvantaged at the workplace.”

These anecdotal quotes demonstrate the awareness of nursing students from CALD backgrounds of the importance of English in Australia not only to further their health science and nursing careers but for integration into Australian society. Furthermore, some of these quotes expressed how interventions that allowed them to socially interact with their peers further enhanced their English communication skills and their relationships with each other. This suggests that meeting the language needs of students of CALD backgrounds regardless of discipline requires an intervention that provides opportunities for students to practise the language through social interaction.

## ***TRANSITION PROGRAMS AND INTERVENTIONS***

Penman et al. (2021) emphasised the need for transition programs for university students of CALD backgrounds in Australia so they can easily integrate into the local community during their studies. Penman et al. (2021) described how transition programs in universities do not provide much help for students to integrate into the society of the host country, progress academically, or improve their experience in studying at a university.

Penman et al. (2021) continued that current programs are short, inadequate, limited to only the orientation period and are only designed to a 'homogeneous group of international students' rather than tailored towards specific disciplines (Krause, 2006). Penman et al. (2021) highlighted how students of CALD backgrounds enrolled in health science courses face more difficult adjustment issues compared to other disciplines due to language differences, challenges in clinical placements, and unfamiliarity of the education and healthcare systems of the host country. Transition programs can be more helpful and supportive if they are conducted beyond the orientation period and through the students' first semester and designed towards a specific discipline (Cayetano-Penman et al., 2021).

As part of their study, Penman et al. (2021) developed an empowerment program for university students of CALD backgrounds in Australia in response to the limitations of transition programs in universities. Their evaluation led to four intertwining themes necessary for designing transition programs for universities students of CALD backgrounds:

### **Facilitating adjustment**

Penman et al. (2021) found that the participants were able to increase their confidence in their interactions with other students and faculty if they participated in a safe and friendly environment. This involves providing a space and learning environment that encourages positive behaviour, eases academic pressure, and increases the students' confidence in communicating with others. By providing a safe learning environment, students can relax and feel more comfortable as they practise the skill with their peers without fear of judgement.

### **Establishing relationships**

Penman et al. (2021) highlighted how the enjoyment of the program relates to participants being given opportunities to build relationships with their peers and university faculty in a new environment. This relationship building also enhances social and peer learning (Penman, et al., 2021).

### **Gaining new skills and knowledge**

Penman et al. (2021) also extended how the program allows students to gain self-management skills, which include time management, coping with stress, communicating, and allow them to seek help and guidance from peers or other available services. They illustrated how social interaction through peer learning allows the sharing of experiences between peers, which creates rapport between them.

### **Transforming beliefs and behavior**

Penman et al. (2021) emphasised how interaction between students and faculty have led to students changing their beliefs and behaviour. They described how students expressed how the program allowed them to feel more comfortable and motivated to 'participate as active learners' in a safe learning environment. Penman et al. (2021) highlighted how students tried different ways of communicating with each other, which involved speaking up and asking faculty members.

The four themes provide a framework for designing interventions to assist university students of CALD backgrounds in easily integrating into the host country. The themes are *Facilitating Adjustment*, creating a safe and comfortable learning environment; *Establishing Relationships*, providing opportunities for social interaction between peers; *Gaining New Skills and Knowledge*, allowing students to self-management skills, which allow students to become proactive in their learning; and *Transforming Beliefs*

*and Behaviour*, promoting active learning that allows students to experiment with different ways of communicating with their peers. For nursing students of CALD backgrounds to enhance their English communication skills, an intervention must be designed to encompass these four themes for students to practise as part of their preparation for their future careers in health science.

### ***PRAGMATICS***

Linguistic competence and communicative competence in second language acquisition have been differentiated. Gleason and Phillips (2023) described linguistic competence as the ability to formulate sentences that follow grammatical convention (p. 4), which includes the attainment of the phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics of the target language. Four linguistic skills are needed for the attainment of linguistic competence in a foreign language, which are *phonology*, *morphology*, *syntax*, and *semantics*, which is described as the ‘reference of words’ (Gass & Selinker, 2008, p. 12; Gleason & Phillips, 2023, pp. 7-9).

Gleason and Phillips (2023) emphasized how linguistic competence is not enough to communicate in a language and that communicative competence must also be attained (p. 10). They argued that one key element required for the attainment of communicative competence of the target language is pragmatics, which they described as the use of a language to express intention appropriately in any situation such as refusing, denying, or offering condolences, which in turn are based on social conventions (p. 10).

Kroeger (2023) described how meaning of a word or utterance is separated into two divisions:

- *semantics*, which refers to the ‘inherent meaning of words and sentences.’
- *pragmatics*, which refers to how meaning is derived from how words and sentences are used.

He also listed three different types of ‘linguistic units’ (Kroeger, 2023, p. 5): *word meaning*, *sentence meaning* and *utterance meaning*. Kroeger (2023, p. 5) differentiated sentence meaning and utterance meaning. He defined *sentence* as a ‘well-formed string of words’, and the *sentence meaning* as the ‘semantic content’ of the sentence. Whereas an utterance is a sentence produced within a specific context, therefore the *utterance meaning* as the semantic content of the sentence and the pragmatic meaning produced within the context in which the sentence is used.

Deda (2013) linked pragmatics with culture and communication, which also involves the behaviour of the speakers of the target language that reflects the speaker’s cultural background and opinions towards gender, religion, politics, and ‘personal space’. Deda (2013) described how the learning of pragmatics leads to the attainment of pragmatic competence, which allows learners to react coherently and choose accurately the appropriate acts for the communicative situation. This also leads to the development of critical thinking and improve competence in grammar and function (Deda, 2013).

For nursing students to improve their command in English, they need to acquire linguistic competence and communicative competence in the language. Not only would students need to know the semantic meanings of individual words and phrases, but also their pragmatic meanings, which are based on the culture and behaviour of the speakers of the target language. Students can use this knowledge to react and respond appropriately towards a certain situation and develop rapport with the native speakers of the target language.

Students of CALD backgrounds enrolled in health science degree programs experience stress during integration in the host country including language difficulties and discrimination. They also acknowledged the importance of high proficiency in the local language not only would enhance their academic performance during their studies in Australia, but students can also engage with the local population and prepare them for their careers after graduation. Learning the pragmatics of a target language also allows students to recognise the different meanings of certain words and phrases based on the context or situation they are uttered in. One way for students of CALD backgrounds, regardless

of discipline, to enhance their communication skills in the local language is to provide a safe and comfortable environment for students to learn and practise the pragmatics through social learning.

## **METHODOLOGY**

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### ***RESEARCH DESIGN***

The study used a descriptive qualitative approach because it allowed us to evaluate the learning experience of the nursing students after participating in our workshop. The workshop was conducted with a total of 45 nursing students enrolled at an Australian metropolitan university where they played an educational card game designed to train learners in English as a second language (ESL) for approximately 60 minutes.

Being from CALD backgrounds, the students played the game to familiarise themselves with using English pragmatic markers in their speech. Ten of these students were native English speakers. The game enabled them to practice their verbal communication skills immediately before their placements.

To evaluate the students' learning experience, the students evaluated their engagement with the game by answering a survey after playing. The survey consisted of six questions for students to assess themselves regarding:

1. How did the game improve your English verbal communication skills, such as pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary?
2. How did the game impact on you?
3. How much has the game motivated you to have English conversations outside the classroom?
4. What aspects of the game did you like most?
5. What aspects of the game need improvement?
6. How would you apply this game in class or workplace?

All their answers from the 45 surveys were retyped, transcribed, and tabulated for easy comparison between answers. After transcribing the surveys, the segments of the students' answers that related to interesting occurrences that emerged from their answers were coded. These codes related to aspects about the game the students liked or disliked. Other codes related to the students' answers that related to how playing the game enhanced their verbal communication skills useful for nursing.

Thematic analysis was used to group these codes based on repeated occurrences into separate themes. The statements and phrases were reduced to codes and subsequently to themes. These themes inform about how well Mind You engaged nursing students in the learning of pragmatic markers. Several strategies were employed to ensure the trustworthiness of the work. The use of well-established methods, investigator triangulation, and provision of a full description of the research process, ensured credibility, dependability, and confirmability.

### ***ABOUT THE GAME***

The game the nursing students played was called Mind You. Mind You is an educational card game designed to train learners in English as a second language (ESL) to use pragmatic markers in communicative contexts through active learning and social constructivism. Social constructivism is where learning happens when students mentally construct their own knowledge with the information provided in front of them (Bada, 2015). Mind You was designed for English language learners to answer questions by mentally constructing their own information using the information presented on the cards before uttering it along with pragmatic markers.

Although there is no clear definition of a pragmatic marker, Brinton (2017) listed common characteristics include being phonologically short, uttered at the beginning or end of an utterance, having minimal effect on the grammar of the utterance, and having different interpersonal functions such as getting the attention of the listener or affirming their understanding of the discussion (p. 9).

Non-digital games like cards facilitate social interaction, tangibility, and flexibility (Rauch, 2017). Social interaction is generated when players sit physically close to each other, tangibility is created when players rearrange the cards in their hands and cards are flexible and easily modifiable to suit different rules, situations, and players.

The nursing students played the fourth iteration of Mind You, which consists of three decks: *pragmatic markers*, *topics*, and *situations*.

### Card decks



Figure 1. Sample pragmatic marker cards.

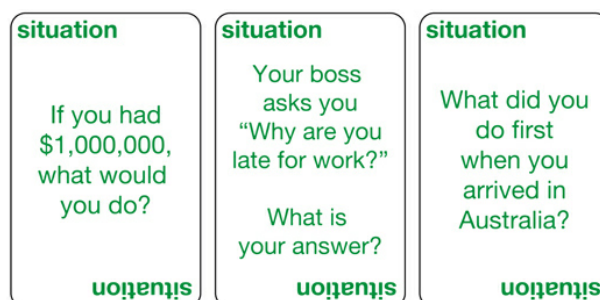
The *pragmatic marker* card deck contains 30 cards. Each card displays one pragmatic marker, which were based on a list of common English pragmatic markers by Brinton (1996) such as *mind you*, *well*, *you know*, *non*, and *okay* (p. 32). When students receive their cards, they immediately identify the individual pragmatic marker in its full spelling. As shown in Figure 1, each card also demonstrates how the pragmatic marker is used in two example sentences. Players can use these example sentences to familiarise themselves with the functions and positioning of the pragmatic marker within a sentence.



Figure 2. Sample topic cards.

The *topic* card deck contains 26 cards, where each card portrays a scenario through imagery and no textual description as shown in Figure 2. This allows the game to encourage players to construct sentences with pragmatic markers about topics based on their own interpretation of the imagery presented on the topic cards. Because the card game was originally designed for young university students of CALD backgrounds studying in Australia, the scenarios mostly depict an international student's experience of living in Australia and learning about the local culture including the cuisine, sports, and fauna. The topic cards also present fantastical topics for learners to create sentences about.





**Figure 3. Sample situation cards.**

The *situation* card deck contains 24 cards, where each card presents a hypothetical question fully in text as shown in Figure 3. Like the topic cards, the questions ask a mix of fantastical and realistic hypothetical situations. Within one round of the game, players must answer the question written on the situation card using one pragmatic marker card and one topic card in their hands. Further details on the rules are outlined below.

### Rules

The game rules were inspired by three classroom activities for learning pragmatics (Taguchi & Kim, 2018): *consciousness-raising tasks*, *receptive-skill tasks*, and *productive-skills tasks*. Upon receiving their pragmatic marker cards, learners identify the pragmatic markers as written on the cards in their full spelling like in *consciousness-raising tasks*. Like *receptive-skill tasks*, players use the sample sentences written on pragmatic markers cards as guidance on how the pragmatic markers are used in conversations. Like *productive-skills tasks*, they apply this knowledge about the pragmatic marker when they construct their own sentences. The rules also encouraged constructivism when learners construct their own information based on what is presented on the cards and they share the new information with other players.

1. Each player is dealt two pragmatic marker cards and two topic cards.
2. Place the situation card deck in the middle. For each round, draw one situation card from the deck and place it in the middle showing the hypothetical question.
3. Each player must play one pragmatic marker card and one topic card. They must say one sentence with their pragmatic marker about their topic. The sentence must answer the question written on the situation card.
4. After that, the next player does the same. After all players have said their sentences, all players must vote for their one favourite sentence said earlier. Players cannot vote for their own sentences.
5. The player whose sentence receives the most votes, scores one point.
6. Players get one new pragmatic marker card and one new topic card. Draw another situation card from the deck to start a new round and repeat the process.
7. The first player with 5 points wins.

### PROCEDURES

At the workshop, the nursing students played Mind You for approximately 60 minutes. Two observation sessions were held in two different scheduled classes. The first class had 17 students and the second class had 28 students. Because the two classes were scheduled on two different days thus the students were unable to be arranged to even the number of students in the two classes. The students were divided into groups of five to seven students with each group receiving one deck. Neither observation session was recorded on video.

Before the students commenced play, the rules of Mind You and how the students will learn about pragmatic markers from the game were demonstrated. While the students played the game, the facilitator circulated the room and monitored the gameplay of each group. Students were reminded to pick up one new pragmatic card and one new topic card after every round. They also could not reuse discarded cards unless they run out of unused pragmatic marker or topic cards. Students were encouraged to use the pragmatic markers in their sentences as naturally as they would in conversations. The scoring was guided by asking each group to vote for their favourite sentence uttered by other players.

After playing the game for one hour, the students evaluated their engagement with the game by answering a survey.

## RESULTS

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The students' survey answers demonstrated their overall positive experience after playing Mind You. Many students admired how the game trained them to construct sentences with pragmatic markers based on their own interpretation of the imagery portrayed on the topic cards. They also enjoyed the variety of the sentences and narratives they can create in the game. Many of them anticipated future use of the game as icebreakers, during lunch breaks, and for extra speaking practice.

From the analysis of the survey answers, three themes were identified, which relate to how Mind You can engage nursing students in developing and enhancing their verbal communication skills prior to their clinical placements. The three themes are: *education content*, *skills development*, and *fun & creativity*. These themes also link to the four themes highlighted by Penman et al. (2021) for developing an empowerment program for university students of CALD backgrounds. Their evaluation led to necessary for consideration for designing transition programs for universities students of CALD backgrounds:

Students' descriptions were used to support these themes and students were designated with the letter (P) to mean 'participant' and a number (01-45).

### *EDUCATION CONTENT*

This theme relates to the theme of Gaining New Skills and Knowledge (Penman, et al., 2021) because this is related to how Mind You! facilitated the students' gaining awareness of pragmatic markers and their functions in social interaction. The *pragmatic marker* cards expose them the pragmatic markers, which students could use in their sentences.

From the surveys, various students described how the game helped them learn more about pragmatic markers. P07 expressed how the game "allowed them to think about how you use pragmatic markers". P08 commented how playing the game teaches them how to use the "correct way to use the words/terms in a sentence".

Various participants highlighted how playing the game created awareness into how native English-speakers naturally speak in everyday situations. P11 learnt "how other people respond in different situation", while P12 commented on how the game "gives me ideas to communicating in my daily life and at my workplace as well".

Other participants described the potential benefits of the game for English language learning. P03 described how the game "could help people who speak English as second language. How to construct sentences". P10 described "It is a good way for people with non-English speaking backgrounds to build their confidence in speaking English and their understanding." P18 would like to learn another language in the same way as Mind You. "I would love to take this and turn it into a game for the language I'm trying to learn".

The game also created awareness of pragmatic markers among the native English-speaking students. Despite being a native English speaker, P10 commented “This game made me aware of what pragmatic word/terms are. It was fun to come up with scenarios.” Moreover, participant P17 added that the initiative allowed him/her to “Give more consideration to non-English colleagues and friends who are learning or struggling with the language.”

### ***SKILLS DEVELOPMENT***

The next theme relates to the previously discussed theme of *Education content* as well as the theme of Gaining New Skills and Knowledge (Penman, et al., 2021) in that the card game encouraged the students to apply their linguistic knowledge of the English language in a practical activity.

Several participants described how the game trained them in applying their current linguistic skills in English including phonology, syntax, and vocabulary into constructing sentences with pragmatic markers. P02 commented how the game “helps to structure interesting sentences” and to “think more obscure sentence structure and use single words to structure dialogue”. P04 also elaborated on how the game trained him/her in sentence construction through constructivism: “I have to use what I have (words and images) to make a complete and meaningful sentence. It increases my thinking and (en)rich my language”. P05 also added, “It kind of improves my communication skills on those general leading or connection words”. P43 admired the game describing how “it was good linking both the images & words to construct sentences”.

Participants also highlighted how the game provided opportunities to practise using pragmatic markers. P06 described how although they are native English-speaking, playing the game allows them to understand how pragmatic markers affect their verbal communication. “I am a native English speaker. The game encouraged me to actively think about the use of pragmatic markers in speech”. P08 described how they can learn more about pragmatic markers by listening to each other’s sentences. “Making sentence and listening to the sentences other students come up with”. P11 highlighted that the game taught them “how to use proper sentence in daily conversation” and “know how other people responds in different situation”.

It is also worth highlighting that the participants alluded to the development of not only communication, language, or English skills. Several students spoke about honing of verbal (P21) and imaginative skills (P28), and speaking and listening skills (P33), while other participants mentioned promoting social and interpersonal skills (P14) and cultivating patient (P24) and co-worker skills (P24).

### ***FUN & CREATIVITY***

This theme relates to the game facilitating the students’ engagement and enjoyment in the verbal communication skills development. This also relates back to Penman et al.’s (2021) two themes of Facilitating Adjustment and Establishing Relationships as students gain new communication skills and develop pragmatic competence by experimenting with the different pragmatic markers and contexts as they socially interact with each other. Students’ comments in the surveys indicated how the enjoyment of the game was fostered by social interaction and rapport-building between students.

P07 described how they were “able to build rapport with my peers”. P11 anticipated the game as a “fun activity in the middle of research class”, while P41 commented “It helped me to communicate with my classmates and share my thoughts”.

Various participants also commented how the game encouraged creativity in their sentence constructions. Examples include: P43 “It helps thinking using words in a fun way”, P13 “It allowed me to think creatively about the English language.” P41 described, “It was a fantastic game to relax and become stress free, while it also provides advantage of being able to think and bring something sensible and funny”. P33 described the game as a “group game”, good for ice-breaking and that it “improves communication and meeting new friends”.

## DISCUSSION

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Educators must consider these three themes when implementing similar programs to train university students of CALD backgrounds in verbal English communication with patients and hospital personnel. The program should provide opportunities for learners to practise the educational content in simulative contextualised situations amongst each other within a safe and comfortable environment. This training could encourage students to feel welcome among their native English-speaking peers.

As students practised the language, they familiarise themselves with how they can use the pragmatic markers in given situations. As they develop their verbal communication skill and pragmatic competence, not only can students build rapport and establish relationships with each other during the game, but they can develop the confidence needed to engage with the local community outside of the game.

### *LIMITATIONS OF STUDY*

Despite the overall learning and enjoyment, the students highlighted shortcomings of Mind You. Some students also highlighted that they would have wanted to play the game longer and multiple times to improve their verbal communication skills. Some also described how the competitive nature of the game could create anxiety between peers.

As highlighted previously, transition programs and interventions can be helpful when they are designed towards a specific discipline. However, Mind You was originally designed to train any university student from CALD backgrounds regardless of discipline. Many of the participants requested for the game to possibly be adapted for nursing purposes. Some requested for more relatable scenarios on the topic cards. One suggested “if more relatable diagrams could be included”.

The game’s scoring method received mixed opinions. While few students appreciated peers voting for their favourite sentences uttered by opponents, some did not understand how peer voting contributed to their verbal communication skills enhancement.

Many students also described running out of cards quickly and found the game sometimes repetitive. Approximately 14 students requested for more pictures or topic cards, situation cards or even pragmatic marker cards.

One nursing student commented how the game was more of a “mental exercise in spite of improving English”. The participant suggested to “add a card with sentences having blanks to be filled with different vocabulary words written over the cards”.

### *FUTURE DIRECTIONS*

Future directions of research include improving and extending the game to achieve greater application, flexibility, and relevance. Recommendations for the card game initiative included expanding the game to cover more health care concepts, medical and nursing terminology, and workplace-based scenarios, to hone communication skills with patients, caregivers, and health care professionals. This would address the current shortage of cards in the game. The authors wish to explore the development of a digital application (APP) version.

The card game will be applied to students enrolled in other health professional programs in universities and other educational institutes. A longitudinal study to follow up the durability is being proposed. A follow-up on the participants will be made to determine if in fact the students’ improvement is durable.

## CONCLUSIONS

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Currently, there are increasing proportions of CALD students within health science programs at universities creating challenges in delivering higher education. While much emphasis is generally placed on the transition to university focusing on academic success, relatively little attention is devoted to addressing cultural and language issues.

To assist nursing students in improving their English verbal communication skills, we present an educational card game as one possible intervention. The card game, Mind You, was introduced to motivate the participants to speak English, in- and outside the classroom. The aspects they liked most included the process of the game, how everyone gets to be involved, the learning and the fun element in participating. The evaluation of the game showed the importance of introducing pragmatic markers to students as part of their learning to developing confident verbal communication skills in different situational contexts.

This study offered valuable insights into how nursing students from CALD backgrounds might be assisted in enhancing their language and advancing verbal communication skills. It is consistent in providing an inclusive learning environment for students from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Students also recommended that the game be continued in future years.

Though constrained by small numbers and short time, the findings showed many beneficial outcomes gained in introducing the concept of pragmatic markers, and their impact on constructing sentences and meaning, as well as on the promotion of linguistic and communication skills. This allows peer and social learning among students where they could mentor and support each other, and potentially boost confidence and communicative competence. The *fun and creativity* outcome was a surprising yet important finding because language learning is maximised when students enjoy the learning process and when the activity is fun, challenging, comfortable, and interactive environment.

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