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INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF RESEARCH ON LANGUAGE EDUCATION 2023

EMBRACING CHANGE:
EMANCIPATING THE LANDSCAPE OF RESEARCH IN LINGUISTIC, LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

13 - 14 MARCH 2023

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Table of Contents

No.	Title	Page Number
1.	Galaxy Tense A+: The Effectiveness of English Tenses Board Game Among Tertiary Students	6
2.	Graphic Design Website: Exploring Market Needs for Services	14
3.	Beyond What Eye Saw	21
4.	Creative Writing: Through Her Eyes - Tales of The Heart	28
5.	Let's Play Phonetic Charades	34
6.	A Visual Novel Game on Social Anxiety	40
7.	Skin Care with Fisha: New Media Content Creation for Basic Skincare Education	48
8.	e-Book of Poem Collections	55
9.	Toodles: Flashcards for Children	61
10.	Digital Flashcards (Tenses)	68
11.	Investigating Students' Concerns on The Development of Masterly!	74
12.	Googly Eyes: A Game to Improve English Usage Among Teenagers	80
13.	Providing Subtitles for Malaysian YouTuber	86
14.	Read and Play: Improving Adolescent's Reading Skills Through Video Games	91
15.	Thoughts by Her Soul Bookmark	99
16.	The Comedy of Errors Simplified: "Egeon's 18Th Reasons Why"	105
17.	Oliver Green: Improving Homonyms Understanding Through Comics	112
18.	PWSP: Phonetic Word Search Puzzle Book	117
19.	Floriography	121
20.	A Preliminary Study on The Young Adult's Perception of Learning English Using the Website: Swifties Read	126
21.	A Place for Poets: An Online Poetry Recitation Series	133
22.	Say It Right with Ya	140
23.	Don't Touch My No-No Square	150
24.	Templatify: An E-Book Collection of Ecards Templates	158
25.	Short Story: Disease Takes Happiness Away	164
26.	Dusted Lines: A Compilation of Self-Written Poems	170
27.	'What's Your Philosophy?' An Edutaining Card Game	177
28.	Be Cool, Not Cruel	185
29.	Grammar Made Fun with TikTok	192
30.	Interactive Journaling as A Mental Health Coping Strategy for Youths	201
31.	Learned – Spoken: Manglish	212
32.	Lost in the Labyrinth of My Mind	218
33.	Translation of Abqorie's Fardhu Ain Module for Smart Tahfiz & Transit Abqorie	225
34.	Poetry for Us: Expressing Feelings Through Creative Writing	231
35.	Lyacomms' Proofreading and Editing Service	238

No.	Title	Page Number
36.	The Effectiveness Of 'Master the Verbs' Instagram Flashcards Among Year Six Low Proficiency Level Students	244
37.	My Malay Fables	252
38.	Talking Story: eBooks to Improve Reading Comprehension Skills	259
39.	Exploring Creative Writing as A Tool to Enhance Mental Health	272
40.	Movie Moo	281
41.	English Pitstop	288
42.	Upin Ipin Reding Kit	294
43.	Seventy-Two Beats a Second	301
44.	Knowing Kristang	308
45.	Creatorslation: The Role of Technology in Translation Service	313
46.	Travel Guide as a Medium to Improve English Comprehensiveness	319
47.	Posterlance	328
48.	Crossfunetics	336
49.	The Effectiveness of Board Games to Promote Student Attention and Enjoyment in English Subject	342
50.	The Use of e-Books and Social Media in Introducing Malaysian Folklores Among Children	352
51.	Creepypodcast YouTube Channel	357
52.	Mastermind': English Board Game	363
53.	한국어 In Melayu!	369
54.	Triple P with Sang Kancil: Pronunciation, Phonetics, and Playbook	376
55.	"So, She Reads" Book Blog	383
56.	Abbyfication: A Grammar-Based Word Game	389
57.	Klick! A Content Writing Service	396
58.	The Love Levanter Podcast	403
59.	Let's Talk Feelings Podcast	409
60.	Grafixmoon: Poster Designing Service	415
61.	The Circle of Life	422
62.	Hops the Dwarf	430
63.	Malay Corner: Learning Malay Through Discord	435
64.	Movie: This and That	441
65.	Phone the Phonetics: Phonetic Flashcards	449
66.	And What If?	455
67.	Interrupted: Life in A Podcast	458
68.	@Phoneticisfun	463
69.	Culinary and Creative Writing: When Two Worlds Collide	468
70.	Talk in Senses	473
71.	Piano Pleasure Course	480
72.	Step by Step: A Motivational Instagram Account	486
73.	Figurative Language! An Educational Autobiography	492
74.	Of Power, Devotion and Betrayal: A Collection of Malaysian Princesses' Folklores	499
75.	Tell Me, How's Everything? An Anthology of Poems to Increase the Understanding of Figurative Language	505

No.	Title	Page Number
76.	Oh, Lendu Youth	513
77.	Living the Hard Life	520
78.	Mirror, Mirror, on the Wall, Who Is the Best of Us All?	528
79.	Beyond the Crowded Space: The Use of Podcast in Improving Psychological Well-Being	535
80.	Samdil: Same Music, Different Language	541
81.	Bejalai: A YouTube Journey	547
82.	Mind Your Language	552
83.	Pop Music Podcast: A Bop or A Flop?	560
84.	Exploring The English Language Teachers' Beliefs And Practices In Implementing CEFR-Aligned Formative Assessment In Malaysian Primary Schools	570
85.	Pencapaian Ucapan Bayi Sejak Lahir Hingga Dua Belas Bulan	575
86.	Mengkaji Makna Bahasa Lukisan Kanak - Kanak Muda Usia 0-3 Tahun	585
87.	Penelitian Terhadap Kesediaan, Motivasi Dan Faktor Persekitaran Murid Bukan Penutur Natif Terhadap Pembelajaran Dan Pemudahcaraan Karangan Respon Terbuka Di Sekolah Antarabangsa Kuala Lumpur	599
88.	Pengaruh Bahasa Ibunda Dalam Kalangan Murid Bukan Melayu Tahun 5 Semasa Menulis Karangan: Satu Kajian Kes	610
89.	Meningkatkan Penguasaan Penulisan Karangan Naratif Murid Tahun 6 Menggunakan Kit Ikan Karang	619
90.	Pengaruh Dialek Kedah Terhadap Fonetik Dan Leksikal Kata Soal Pelajar Pismp: Satu Kajian Kes	633
91.	Tahap Pengetahuan Guru Pelatih Mempengaruhi Kekerapan Pelaksanaan Kemahiran Berfikir Aras Tinggi (Kbat) Dalam Pengajaran Dan Pembelajaran Subjek Bahasa Melayu	643

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CROSSFUNETICS

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ABSTRACT:

Crossfunetics is a collection of crossword puzzles for intermediate English speakers which fixate on phonetic spelling skills and pronunciation. This game-based learning method is devised with the goal to remediate second language learners' lack of English phonetics awareness that may affect intelligibility and communicative competence. The method entails compiling phonetic lessons, proofreading, editing materials and promoting them on social media, in addition to prototype assemblage. Feedback was gathered from UiTM Melaka Part 5 English for Professional Communication (LG) students via google form, and it can be concluded that the majority of them relished the puzzles for revision purposes. The intent is getting *Crossfunetics* to be obtained and circulated by UiTM for LG students across Malaysia.

Keywords: Phonetics, Crosswords, English, Revision, Pronunciation

1. INTRODUCTION

Malaysia's diverse population is well-known for housing numerous ethnic groups, including Malay, Chinese, Indian, Kadazandusun, Iban, and others; the presence of these races inevitably left their imprints on this country. Following that, multiple languages are spoken in order for races to communicate with one another. Aside from the national language, known as Bahasa Malaysia, the people utilize Malaysia's second language which is English either to communicate or as a learning language tool. Apart from being taught in all Malaysian schools, it is actively promoted at all educational levels, from primary to tertiary (Mohd Nor et. al, 2019). It may be difficult or simple for certain people to pronounce English words especially growing up in Malaysia. Here, mother tongue influence has grown to be one of the most significant speaking issues that students face (Adickalam & Yunus, 2022). It could happen due to multiple reasons such as zero practice, lack of learning interest and the diversity of cultures in Malaysia.

Considering that the population is multi-ethnic, there is no standardized version of English accent in Malaysia. The possibility of mispronouncing an English word is high, which could lead to misunderstanding for the native speaker; thus, Malaysian English speakers need to have decent pronunciation. Pronunciation errors are also common among Malaysian English speakers for majority of them speak a variety of English dialects collectively referred to as Malaysian English (MalE). Those who lack phonetics skills may struggle to learn standard English pronunciation, which is why practising how to properly pronounce a word correctly is much required to ensure one's intelligibility and communicative competence.

According to Seah and Salehuddin (2022), word knowledge is essential at all stages of language learning due to its key role in verbal communication. As one grows older, the transitional phase of learning and adapting a new language becomes a challenge as it might

conflict with their mother tongue. Language learners come from an array of backgrounds, which influences their English pronunciation. They may have low self-esteem as a result of peer pressure. Learners who have passed puberty could find it challenging to learn new words and terms (Seah & Salehuddin, 2022). In light of the ongoing COVID-19 outbreak in Malaysia, every learning institution has been forced to switch entirely to online instruction; as a result, the new speakers had less practise and verbal interactions with others. According to Darcy (2018), proper and standard pronunciation training enhances communication skills by fostering the growth of concise speaking talents, plus speaking with greater clarity facilitates understanding and requires less effort from listeners. This means that interaction and communication in English are crucial in honing pronunciation.

Following that, there are numerous language learning methods that one can practise on their own, including playing games. Educational games can influence students' perspectives and motivation. According to Ibrahim et al (2022), as cited in Hedri (2017), puzzles can assist individuals to learn English since they aid with vocabulary development, independent learning, confidence, and the recognition of letters and words. Crossword puzzles are one of the games that require players to think critically and in depth throughout to solve them. Learning through games allows modification of study habits and techniques while also increasing interest in the course material. (Motade & Deshpande, 2022, as cited in Crossman, 1983). A phonetics-based collection of crossword puzzles has been compiled to enable intermediate second language English speakers gradually revise and strengthen their phonetics skills. UiTM Melaka Part 5 English for Professional Communication (LG) students were chosen for this project considering that they have been exposed to phonetics since the first semester and are presumed to be familiar with pronunciation, in particular with regard to phonetics symbols.

4.3. Project Objective / Purpose

This project aims to provide students of English for Professional Communication (LG) with opportunities to gradually improve their phonetic spelling skills and pronunciation. In addition to playing the crossword puzzles, they will be able to refine their own pronunciation, especially of complex words. The objectives are as follow:

1. To publish 10 Instagram posts on phonetics lessons.
2. To post around 10-20 Instagram stories of phonetics related content.
3. To come up with an e-book prototype.

4.4. Entrepreneurial Opportunities

This online crossword puzzle collection is meant to accommodate those who have enrolled in English for Professional Communication (LG) to enhance their phonetic memories since they lack exercise opportunities. It differs from other exercise puzzles in that it has been tailored to a smaller group of targeted students and also serves as phonetics revision activities for them. Based on the needs of LG students at UiTM Melaka, UiTM could perceive this e-book as an opportunity for these students to improve and master their pronunciation skills; consequently, purchase the finalised product as practice and intervention for its students to ace the pronunciation subject. *Crossfunetics* can be converted into hardcopy if there is a high demand from UiTM. Overall, the marketability of this product appears to be promising.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Project Phases

Phase One: Planning and Scheduling

Crossfunetics was originally intended to be printed as a book and distributed to UiTM Melaka English for Professional Communication (LG) students before the decision was revised to produce a more defined project outcome. The Gantt Chart timeline is used to manage this project for 14 weeks. Amidst that, a variety of topics were chosen for the crossword puzzles, but they were narrowed down to Sociolinguistics, Presentation Skills, Creative Writing, and New Media Language pertinently for Part 4 and Part 5 students.

Phase Two: Creating Contents

The puzzles are based on shared content slides by lecturers of the respective subjects. They are curated as general questions after the subject topic. Next, is to design them using suitable template sizing since they will be promoted on a specific online platform.

Phase Three: Promoting

This project is advertised and promoted on Instagram, given that it is free and its contents can be accessed by all including the target audience, whom in return may spread contents of a fun way to revise phonetics. The said promotional method will likely become a new trend for learning phonetics to those who are interested.

2.2 Scheduling (Gantt Chart)

GANTT CHART

CROSSFUNETICS - PHONETICS CROSSWORD

WEEK / PLAN	W 1	W 2	W 3	W 4	W 5	W 6	W 7	W 8	W 9	W 10	W 11	W 12	W 13	W 14
Proposed at least 1 project to supervisor	✓													
Consult with supervisor to collect feedback	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Decided on methods used for the promotional purposes.		✓												
Decide on fixed final year project			✓											
Create a storyboard of the posts for the social media account to make the plan clearer.				✓										
Identify and refine proposal details.					✓									
Execution of the proposal.						✓								

Design poster and correct based on feedback.						✓								
Identify unforeseen outcomes (reviews).							✓							
Prototype submission (e-book version + blog + Instagram posts and stories)								✓						
Make amendments from feedback collected.								✓	✓	✓				
List out feedback from Instagram posts from multiple people											✓			
Submission of project portfolio												✓		
Preparation for poster presentation.												✓		
Poster presentation.													✓	✓

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

An online questionnaire was developed using Google Form as the instrument for collecting and analysing data from respondents. The results are displayed in Table 1 below.

NO	QUESTIONS	RESULTS		
		YES	MAYBE	NO
1.	Do you think it's difficult to solve the puzzle?	41.6%	41.6%	16.7%
2.	Do you enjoy playing the puzzles?	75%	16.7%	8.3%
3.	Please rate the puzzle difficulty level	EASY	MEDIUM	HARD
		0%	66.7%	33.3%
4.	Should the questions focus more on one topic or multiple?	MULTIPLE	ONLY ONE	
		41.7%	58.3%	

Table 1

Based on the survey, 41.7% of players regard *Crossfunetics* as challenging. While 41.7% of them had mixed feelings about its level of difficulty, the remaining 16.7% thought the puzzles

were not hard to solve. It is also shown that 75% of players enjoyed the puzzles, although 16.7% of them were uncertain of their preference and 8.3% declared to disfavour it.

66.7% of respondents rated the crossword puzzles as having a 'Medium' level of difficulty. The remainder (33.3%) rated it as tough and none view it as 'Easy' (0%). This is feasible since the puzzles can be tricky to solve for those who have not read or reviewed the subjects. 41.7% of respondents opted the puzzles to cover multiple topics, while 58.3% preferred that they cover only one.

Despite more than half of respondents chose a single theme, topic variation is necessary to build motivation and engagement for entertainment value. This is substantial as the puzzles serve as revision for learners to test their English phonetic spelling and pronunciation skills as they self-study. The project feedback offers pointers and insight on how *Crossfunetics* can be further developed.

4. LIMITATION

Even though this project initiative has the potential to take off in the field of phonetics education, it is not without constraints. Users are unable to submit completed crossword puzzles for immediate feedback; instead, they must manually check their answers using the QR codes provided, which will direct them to a blog containing answer keys. Future studies could further propel this game into the digital realm of language learning or one similar to Scrabble, with additional levels added to pique consumer interest.

5. CONCLUSION

From the above analysis and discussion of data, students can benefit from the medium of games in learning English phonetics, where they are more actively engaged. *Crossfunetics* offers plenty of chances for them to notice errors and correct their phonetic spellings and utterances, which will be beneficial for their future endeavours when proper pronunciation is required. Hence, it is suggested that educators integrate games into lesson plans to enable learners stay engaged and positive while adopting new learning strategies to assist with the subject at hand.

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