

ENHANCING STUDENTS' VOCABULARY THROUGH FLASHCARD-BASED LEARNING STRATEGIES

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ABSTRACT

The findings of the study, instructional media is a contributing element in the vocabulary limitation among eighth grade students in Class A at SMPN 1 Mempawah. The researcher used flashcards as a teaching method to try to improve students' vocabulary in order to solve this problem. Reducing the vocabulary difficulties that the students were exhibiting during class was the aim of the investigation. With the use of two cycles of classroom action research that involved planning, acting, observing, and reflecting, the study produced better results. Thirty-two students participated in the study, and the main method of gathering data was observation. Notably, students participated in group discussions and then gave presentations of their results to the class during class activities. Furthermore, multiple-choice tests were used as post-discussion evaluations to show the students' progress on their learning path.

Keyword: Vocabulary, Flashcard-Based Learning Strategies, Classroom Action Research.

I. INTRODUCTION

Mastering English poses unique challenges compared to our native language due to substantial differences in structure, pronunciation, and vocabulary. According to Ur (2007), "a general definition of vocabulary is the words we teach in the other language" (p. 60). This definition implies that all words taught by instructors in a foreign language are intended for students to incorporate into sentences or everyday communication. Vocabulary, an essential element in language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—holds immense significance (Burns and Broman, 1975: 295; Zimmerman in Coody and Huckin, 1998: 5). It's the foundation for effective communication, be it in our first language or a foreign one like English. Without a robust vocabulary, expression and effective communication, both oral and written, are hindered. In learning a foreign language like English, prioritizing vocabulary becomes pivotal, serving as the cornerstone for mastering language skills. Consider speaking: constructing coherent sentences and expressing thoughts demand vocabulary. Similarly, in mastering English, the significance of vocabulary cannot be overstated. Notably, teaching English vocabulary demands a

structured approach. Harmer (1998: 154) advocates introducing concrete words initially, gradually advancing to abstract ones. This approach resonates with Haycraft's (1978: 45) emphasis on selecting words pertinent to students' surroundings or professions. Essentially, the complexity of English vocabulary, notably its divergence from Indonesian vocabularies in spelling, pronunciation, multiple meanings, and diverse word functions in sentences, complicates the teaching process. Ideally, elementary students should grasp pronunciation, spelling, meaning, and word usage, forming a comprehensive understanding of vocabulary.

When prompted to speak or write in English, the students remained silent, indicating a lack of interest in learning vocabulary in junior high school. The teacher highlighted the challenge of engaging students and emphasized the need for captivating teaching methods and various activities. To enhance students' understanding and participation, it's crucial to employ effective teaching media. In the case of Eighth Grade Students in Class A, difficulties in mastering vocabulary arose due to limited teaching media. The researcher aimed to address this by employing suitable teaching

materials to facilitate better vocabulary mastery.

The utilization of picture media in vocabulary teaching notably includes flashcards. This tool serves as a practical and effective aid, particularly in English vocabulary instruction. While no single definition encapsulates flashcards, experts provide relevant explanations. John Haycraft (1978: 102) describes flashcards as cards featuring printed or drawn words and/or pictures. These cards serve as a means for students to memorize essential information, spanning diverse subjects like math facts, sight words, foreign language vocabulary, and more. Flashcards leverage the visual sense of learners, offering pictorial representations that captivate their attention, enabling maximum absorption of information.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

With a focus on the Flash Card, this study used the Classroom Action Research (CAR) approach to address the urgent need to improve students' vocabulary acquisition through the integration of media. The research framework was supplied by CAR, which is well-known for its applicability in educational settings. It focused on a cyclic process that included acting, thinking back on the outcomes, and changing tactics. Students in the first grade at SMP N 1 Mempawah Hilir in Kalimantan Barat participated in the study. The 32-student A Class, which included both male and female students, was selected as the investigational classroom. The methodology serves to conduct the research systematically and validly, providing tools and techniques to address encountered research problems. Classroom action research aims to resolve classroom issues and effect improvements in educational settings. Ferrance (2000:1) defines classroom action research as a systematic examination of educational practices, using research techniques to drive immediate improvements without focusing on theory development.

Haycraft (1978: 102-106) distinguishes two types of flashcards: word flashcards, displaying printed words for sentence construction exercises, and picture flashcards, which aid in presenting, practicing, and reviewing vocabulary or serve as prompts for various activities, such as character illustrations or improvisation in dialogues. To ensure clarity, teachers may preview flashcards before using them in class activities. Colorful visuals on flashcards often pique students' interest. In essence, flashcards, comprising pictures and words, offer teachers a convenient means to instruct and aid student learning. With various sizes tailored to students' needs and vibrant colors facilitating memorization and comprehension, flashcards serve as engaging visual aids, enhancing student interest and understanding during the learning process.

McTaggart (1988) defines action research as a collective and introspective inquiry undertaken by participants in social settings to enhance (1) the rationality and justice of their own social or educational practices, and (2) the participants' comprehension of these practices and the contexts in which they are enacted. This collaborative approach involves various groups, such as teachers, students, parents, co-workers, or community members, all sharing a common concern and the drive to address it through critically examined actions. Action research is most effective when it is a collaborative effort, achieved through the thoughtful actions of individual group members, aiming to enhance the quality of actions taken within a social context. In essence, action research focuses on studying social situations to improve the quality of actions taken within those contexts. In an educational context, it is utilized to enhance students' achievements.

These procedural steps guide the action research process:

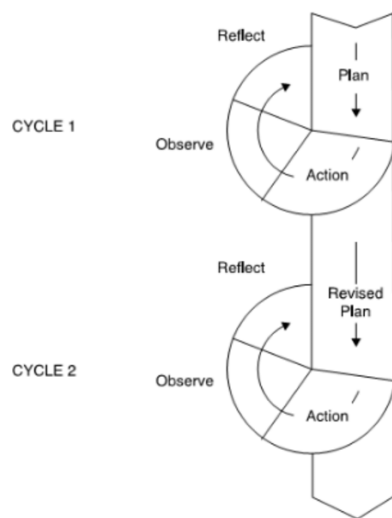


Figure 1. Action Research Protocol after Kemmis

The researcher utilized both qualitative and quantitative methods to gather information throughout the action research process. Qualitative data collection involved both observational and non-observational techniques, such as observations, field notes, photographs of teaching and learning sessions, and tests. To analyze qualitative data, the approach by Miles and Huberman (1992:16) was employed, encompassing steps like data collection, reduction, display, drawing conclusions, and verification. On the other hand, quantitative data were presented using mean scores. Analyzing this data involved comparing the mean scores from pre-tests and post-tests to determine whether improvements occurred or not.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Result

The study, conducted in a first-grade class at SMP N 01 Mempawah Hilir, aimed to improve students' vocabulary mastery by integrating Flashcards as a visual learning tool. Qualitative data collection involved field notes, observations, and documentation from 32 actively engaged students. Observations and field notes highlighted Flashcards' positive impact on students' vocabulary acquisition. Quantitative analysis focused on vocabulary test scores across two cycles—

each comprising planning, acting, observing, and reflecting stages. The findings indicated enhanced vocabulary acquisition and heightened engagement among students. In Cycle 1, vocabulary mastery challenges were observed. Lessons on "my favorite food" introduced students to related vocabulary using Flashcards and discussions. Despite engagement, some students encountered spelling and pronunciation difficulties, resulting in a mean score of 60. Reflections highlighted areas needing improvement, leading to Cycle 2. Cycle 2, held a week later, incorporated Cycle 1 insights, emphasizing pronunciation and spelling through interactive games and activities using Flashcards. Students exhibited improved behavior and participation, showcasing enhanced vocabulary skills. They could pronounce words accurately, spell better, and describe their favorite foods. The teaching-learning process became notably more effective, fostering greater student engagement and improved vocabulary mastery. The teacher and collaborator assessed students' vocabulary achievements using flashcards. Students obtained notably good scores, particularly in employing concrete nouns. The final cycle was deemed successful as it resulted in increased student achievement in vocabulary.

The Enhancement of Students' Vocabulary Mastery: Throughout the study, there was an improvement in pronunciation, spelling, and comprehension of word meanings. Students were much assisted by flash cards in visualizing and remembering words. Through consistent practice, students' pronunciation and spelling difficulties were resolved, and their confidence in their language abilities grew.

The Enhancement of the Learning Environment: There were improvements made to the classroom atmosphere.

Students' interest and active engagement were encouraged by the use of Flash Cards, which brought life to the learning process. The learning process became more participatory as a result of the researcher and students' increased interactions. These results highlight how well Flash Cards work to improve student engagement in the classroom and vocabulary acquisition.

B. Discussion

Upon examining the research data encompassing documents, tests, and observations, a significant advancement in students' vocabulary mastery was evident due to the utilization of flashcards. This improvement underscores the efficacy of flashcards in enhancing students' linguistic proficiency. This finding resonates with Heinich's theory cited in Kasbolah (2001:3), asserting that employing flashcards effectively fosters active student engagement with language, encompassing listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. The incorporation of flashcard-based activities functions as a catalyst for students in mastering vocabulary, an integral facet of language skills.

The analysis of post-tests conducted in both Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 demonstrated a noticeable enhancement in students' vocabulary proficiency. Notably, during the learning sessions, students exhibited enthusiasm, laughter, and concentrated attention. The classroom atmosphere was conducive to learning, promoting active engagement among students. Their heightened responsiveness to the instructional material translated into a more positive learning experience and improved test performance.

These observations indicate a positive reception among students towards flashcard-based learning methods. Their favourable responses to acquiring vocabulary through flashcards contributed significantly to a more enjoyable learning

environment and notably bolstered their learning outcomes.

V. CONCLUSION

The data analysis and processing in this study conclusively affirm that the utilization of flashcards stands out as the most effective means to enhance students' vocabulary mastery and foster their interest within the learning environment at SMP N 01 Mempawah Hilir. The integration of flashcards has notably transformed the classroom atmosphere, making it more engaging and enjoyable for the students. During the lessons, a significant shift in student behaviour was observed. Their excitement and curiosity upon encountering the flashcards brought a heightened level of enthusiasm to the learning process. The interactive nature of flashcards kept them engaged and enthralled throughout the lessons. Whenever prompted to participate or answer questions related to the flashcards, students exhibited increased activity, enthusiasm, and involvement, contributing to a livelier classroom ambiance. The evident increase in test scores, soaring from a mean value of 60 to 80 following the implementation of flashcards, solidly confirms the effectiveness of this methodology in bolstering vocabulary teaching practices at SMP N 01 Mempawah Hilir.

Based on these findings, recommendations are extended to both students and English teachers. Students are encouraged to take an active role in their English learning journey, expanding their studies beyond the classroom and integrating English into their daily lives. For English instructors, there's a call to refine their teaching techniques, particularly in vocabulary instruction, by incorporating effective tools like flashcards. Combining flashcards with interactive elements such as games or quizzes not only sustains student interest but also allows for better classroom management and reduced distractions, creating a more

conducive learning environment that promotes enhanced vocabulary acquisition.

VI. SUGGESTION

1. For English Teachers:

The researcher strongly encourages English teachers to consider integrating flashcards into their teaching methods to enhance students' vocabulary mastery. Flashcards have proven to be an effective teaching medium in this study and could significantly benefit students in vocabulary acquisition.

2. For Future Researchers:

Building on this research's outcomes, future researchers are advised to explore more innovative techniques in their investigations. Incorporating vivid and engaging flashcards could be particularly beneficial. The preference exhibited by students for using flashcards to memorize vocabularies suggests that employing colourful and captivating flashcards could enhance the effectiveness of future research endeavours.

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