

Improving Students' Vocabulary Mastery Using Flash Cards

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Abstract

This paper discusses about improving students' vocabulary mastery using flash cards. The aims of the paper are: (1) to find out whether and to what extent the use of flash cards can improve students' vocabulary and (2) to describe the strengths and the weaknesses of using flash cards to teach vocabulary. The writer conducted a classroom action research from February to June at the second grade of SDN Bulakan 02, Sukoharjo in the academic year 2011/2012. This research was conducted in two cycles and carried out in four steps namely; planning the action, implementation/action, observation, and reflection. The data of the research were collected by using qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques. The result of the research shows that the use of Flash cards can improve the students' vocabulary mastery. It can be seen from the mean score of the test which improve from 56.5 in the pre test to 77.1 in the post test one and 83.7 in the post test two. Using flash cards could make the students pay attention to the lesson properly. It also improved students' participation in learning vocabulary. They were not shy anymore and highly motivated to join the teaching and learning process.

Key word: Vocabulary Mastery, Flash Card

Mastering English is not as easy as mastering our native language because English is completely different from Indonesian language that is from the system of structure, pronunciation, and vocabulary. From those aspects, vocabulary is one of the aspects playing an important role in the four English language skills, namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Burns and Broman (1975:

295) define vocabulary as the stock of words used by a person, class, or profession. Besides, Zimmerman (in Coady and Huckin, 1998: 5) defines vocabulary is central to language. It means that vocabulary is basic in language used to communicate with others in both first language or mother tongue and foreign language. Without vocabulary, no one cannot communicate effectively or express our ideas in both oral and written form even in first language and foreign language. Therefore, vocabulary must be known first in learning foreign language. It is the first aspect that can help the learners in mastering all of English skills. For example: in speaking skill, people cannot start to communicate if they do not have vocabulary. People need vocabulary to arrange sentence in order to express our idea. Without vocabulary, no one know what have to say. People need and use vocabulary to communicate in first language. Therefore, they also need vocabulary to learn a new language as foreign language that is English. However, the English vocabulary and our first language are different. Because of the differentiation, it is very important to learn English vocabulary in order to be able to master the language.

Harmer (1998: 154) says that a general principle in the past has been to teach more concrete words at lower levels and gradually become more abstract. Words like 'table', 'chair', 'chalk', etc. have figured in beginners' syllabuses because the things which the words represents are in the front of the students and thus easily explained. Furthermore, Haycraft (1978: 45) states that even at beginner's level, it is better to choose particular words connected with their work or profession example: in speaking skill, people cannot start to communicate if they do not have vocabulary. People need vocabulary to arrange sentence in order to express our idea. Without vocabulary, no one know what have to say. People need and use vocabulary to communicate in first language. Therefore, they also need vocabulary to learn a new language as foreign language that is English. However, the English vocabulary and our first language are different. Because of the differentiation, it is very important to learn English vocabulary in order to be able to master the language.

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From the students' factor, most of the second grade students in SD Negeri Bulakan 02 thought that English lesson was difficult. The difficulties were in pronunciation, spelling, memorizing and grasping word, and using the word. This condition became worse because they had less self-confidence.

Based on the result of observation, interview, and questionnaire above, the researcher proposes to use flashcards in teaching vocabulary. According to Haycraft (1997: 102), flash cards are cards on which words and/ or picture are printed and drawn. They should be big enough to be seen clearly by every student in the class. He also says that flash cards can be used for consolidating vocabulary, practicing structure and word order, or variety of games. with their work or profession

Flashcards are visual teaching aid. According to Brewster, et al. (1992: 89) visual support is very important to help convey meaning and to help pupils memorize new words. Moreover, Schmitt (1997:

212) says that new words can be learned by studying them with pictures of their meaning instead of definitions.

It means that flash cards are cards which are drawn or printed with word or picture of its meaning instead of definitions or both of them. They have ideal size in order to be able to see the whole students in the class and be easy to handle them. They were used in teaching and learning new words. They are to help students for consolidating vocabulary in both

pronunciation and spelling, understanding the meaning, memorizing new words, practicing structure and word order.

Besides, flashcards are practical. It can be brought everywhere and every time. Using flash cards save time for the teacher in drawing on blackboard. It can be saved and used again in different context and for all ages.

From the background above, the problems in this study are as follow: “Can and to what extent the use of flash cards improve students' vocabulary at second grade of SDN Bulakan 02, Sukoharjo?” and “What are the strengths and weaknesses of using flash cards to teach vocabulary?”

2. Research Methods

The researcher used classroom action research as method in this research. Hopkins (1983: 1) says that classroom research is an act undertaken by teachers either to improve their own or a colleague's teaching or to test the assumptions of educational theory in practice. While Kemmis and McTaggart (in Nunan, 1992:17) argue that the three defining characteristics of action research are that it is carried out by practitioners (for our purposes, classroom teachers) rather than outside researchers; secondly, that it is collaborative; and thirdly, that it is aimed at changing things. Cohen and Manion (in Nunan, 1997: 18) offer a similar set of characteristics. They argue that action research is first and foremost situational, being concerned with the identification and solution of the problem in a specific context. They also identify collaboration as an important feature of this type of research, and state that the aim of the action research is to improve the current state of affairs within the educational context in which the research is being carried out.

From the above definitions, it can be summarized that action research is a systematic research done by teachers, researchers, principals, school counselors, administrator or other educational professionals to solve problems

have been identified in order to get better improvement.

The model of action research used in this research is the model which is developed by Kemmis and Mc Taggart (in Hopkins, 1993: 48). According to them, classroom action research is composed of cycle consisting of four steps namely: planning, action, observation, and reflection.

The researcher collected the group of data by using qualitative and quantitative method during the process of action research. The technique of collecting the data using qualitative method was conducted by observational and non-observational. They were observations, field notes, and photographs of teaching and learning process, interviews, questionnaires, documents, and test.

The qualitative data could be analyzed by using Miles and Huberman's way. According to Miles and Huberman (1992:16) the steps in analyzing the qualitative data are collecting the data, data reduction, data display, drawing conclusion and verification.

Meanwhile, the quantitative data were presented in the form of mean score. In analyzing the quantitative data, the researcher compared the mean score of the pre- test and post-test in order to know whether there is an improvement of students' vocabulary or not.

DISCUSSION

The implementation of using flash cards in teaching vocabulary could improve the students' writing ability. It also had some strengths and weaknesses during the implementation of using flash cards. Based on the teaching and learning process conducted in cycle 1 and cycle 2, the strengths could be identified during the implementation of using flash cards. They are the improvement of students' motivation, the improvement of students' vocabulary mastery, and the improvement of students' achievement.

By using flash cards in teaching English, The students' motivation in learning English improved. It could be seen from the change of the students' behavior in the lesson. The students looked so happy when the teacher entered the class. They were very curious with the flash cards that the teacher brought. They waited with full curiosity about what the teacher would do with the flash cards and what they would learn with the flash cards. They also enjoyed the lesson. Besides, by giving try out, support and compliment in every activity, the students became so active, enthusiastic and full of participation every time the teacher asked them to guess and answer the question. They were also brave and not shy anymore to pronounce words and to answer the teacher's questions. They competed in some activities raising their hands or shouting "*Aku, Bu*" in order to be chosen by the teacher in doing task from the teacher and offering themselves to answer the teacher's questions. Moreover, the naughty students stopped disturbing other students, chatting and playing with others in lesson, and playing with their toys. All those conditions were very different from the conditions before the implementation of using flash cards.

Based on the explanation above, it can be concluded that the use of flash cards in teaching vocabulary improve the students' motivation.

Besides, the students could learn vocabulary easily. The students could pronounce the words as the written form on the flash cards. The progress was caused by drilling activity in the process of teaching and learning vocabulary where the students imitated the teacher as the model in pronouncing words. Besides, by showing flash cards which was combined with word on it, giving list of vocabulary to the students, and asking them to read the vocabulary for many times, the students could write the spelling as they pronounced the words. They also could catch the meaning of words easily because there was only one object on each flash card and the object shown its meaning.

The explanation above as Gerngross, et al. (2009: 6) say that flashcards are an essential means of conveying the meaning of new words and they help the children to memorize them more effectively. Besides, Gerngross and Puchta (2009: 15) state that the purpose of the flashcards is to introduce important new words visually. These suggestions for using them in the lesson are based on the following educational principles:

- a. Conveying the meaning of new words in the foreign language lesson should be carried out as visually as possible.
- b. Always apply the principle listening precedes speaking. The children should first of all become accustomed to the pronunciation and intonation of a word before they are asked to repeat it.

- c. When introducing new words use a combination of all the senses. Pictures, pronunciation and intonation and also motor-processing techniques complement each other and help to anchor a word in the long –term memory.
- d. The anchoring of the new words will be all the more long-lasting if the words are repeated often enough. No more than one to two minutes are needed for this. The flashcards are highly suited to such repetition stages.
- e. The achievement of the students increased. It could be seen by analyzing the students' mean score before the research and students mean score of each cycle. In the pre-test, the mean score was
- f. 56.5. In cycle one, the mean score of post-test one was 77.1, while in cycle two, the mean score of post test two was 83.7. The improvement
- g. of the students' achievement indicates that the students' vocabulary mastery improved. The improvement of the students' vocabulary mastery was in all vocabulary aspects, namely pronunciation, spelling, meaning, and word use. The improvement of vocabulary aspects can be seen in the tables below:

Table 1: The Improvement of Vocabulary Aspects after Cycle 1

Aspect	Meaning		Spelling		Pronunciation		Word use	
	Pre-test	Post-test 1	Pre-test	Post-test 1	Pre-test	Post-test 1	Pre-test	Post-test 1
Sum of the score	242	284	192	216	98	250	238	306
Sum of the students	34	34	34	34	34	34	34	34
Students' mean score	7.12	8.35	5.65	6.35	2.88	7.35	7.00	9.00

Table 2: The Improvement of Vocabulary Aspects after Cycle 2

Aspect	h. Meaning		Spelling		Pronunciation		Word use	
	Post-test 1	Post-test 2	Post-test 1	Post-test 2	Post-test 1	Post-test 2	Post-test 1	Post-test 2
Sum of the score	28	308	21	26	20	26	30	31
Sum of the students	34	34	34	34	34	34	34	34
Students' mean score	8.3	9.06	6.3	7.7	7.3	7.6	9.0	9.1

score	5	5	1	5	5	0	1
							2

In addition to the strengths, there were weaknesses found during the implementation of using flash cards. In the first meeting in cycle 1, the students had less attention to participate in the teaching learning process. They preferred to be good listeners, disturbing their friends, chatting with their friends, and playing with their toys. they were also so shy and afraid of making a chatting

4. Conclusion

From the explanation above, the researcher concludes that although some weaknesses arise during the implementation of using flash cards, the strengths of using flash cards in teaching vocabulary give benefits more rather than the disadvantages. It is indicated from the improvement of the students' motivation and achievement.

The improvement of the students' motivation could be seen from the change of the students' behavior in the lesson. The students looked so happy when the teacher entered the class. They were very curious with the flash cards that the teacher brought. They waited with full curiosity about what the teacher would do with the flash cards and what they would learn with the flash cards. They also enjoyed the lesson. Besides, the students became so active, enthusiastic and full of participation every time the teacher asked them to guess and answer the question. They were also brave and not shy anymore to pronounce words and to answer the teacher's questions. They competed in some activities by raising their hands or shouting "*Aku, Bu*" in order to be chosen by the teacher in doing task from the teacher and offering themselves to answer the teacher's questions. Moreover, the naughty students stopped disturbing other students, chatting and playing with others in lesson, and playing with their toys. All those conditions were very different from the conditions flash cards.

Teaching vocabulary by using flash cards can attract the students' interest. It also makes the students grasp and remember new vocabulary more easily. English teacher can also mix or combine flash cards with another technique like game or quiz to make students more attracted and to avoid the boredom. The combination also makes students controllable and decreases the noise.

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