

Improving Fifth-Grade Students' Vocabulary Mastery Using Flashcards at SDN 23 Pangkalpinang

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Abstract

Flashcard is viewed as one of the interesting and effective teaching media to teach English in general and vocabulary in particular. To enrich students' vocabulary, flashcards can be used as a personal dictionary for students or as an instrument to play a game applied as a strategy that facilitates active and fun learning. This study aims to solve problems students often face in learning English vocabulary and proves the effectiveness of using **flashcards in increasing students' vocabulary** mastery. This study employed an action research design, in which a flashcard was employed as the media of team game tournament activities applied as the learning strategy of cooperative learning. This research involved 28 fifth graders at SDN 23 Pangkalpinang. The results show that flashcard use **increased students' vocabulary** mastery. The mean score obtained by the students in the pre-test is 53.2. It increased to 79.1 in the post-test of the first cycle and to 85.7 in the post-test of the second cycle.

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INTRODUCTION

Teaching vocabulary is a fairly difficult process for students and teachers because it requires stimulating ways developed by the teacher to ensure the students can receive the target language well. In Indonesia, for example, teaching English as a foreign **language is vital for the country's integration into the global community, economic development, individual empowerment, and cultural enrichment.** It is a skill that benefits individuals and **contributes to Indonesia's competitiveness and influence on the world stage.** Vocabulary is one of the language elements that must be considered to be comprehensive in language performance.

In the learning process at school, there are several problems that students often experience. Some of these problems are inadequate understanding of English vocabulary, unclear pronunciation of English vocabulary, and irregular grammatical writing. Low mastery of English was also found in one of the elementary schools, namely SDN 23 Pangkalpinang. This is based on identifying and diagnosing problems faced by a group of class 5A students at SDN 23 Pangkalpinang. This analysis found that around 60% of students understood English poorly. One of the suspected causes is a lack of mastery of English vocabulary.

Direct observations and interviews with students and English teachers were conducted to understand why class 5A students experience difficulties enriching English vocabulary. The results show that several factors contribute to this problem, including **students' low self-confidence** in using English, a lack of effective learning strategies implemented, and a lack of match between the learning methods and the level of basic education students take.

After understanding the root of the problem, consultations were carried out with educational experts, and literature studies were carried out to find the right solution to improve the English vocabulary mastery of class 5A students at SDN 23 Pangkalpinang. Based on literature studies and discussions with experts, flashcard media was combined with a cooperative learning model accompanied by the teams game tournament (TGT) **learning strategy as a solution, which is expected to improve students' understanding of English vocabulary.**

Several studies have discussed the use of flashcards in increasing students' vocabulary. **Atmaja and Sonia (2020) showed that flashcards improved students' vocabulary** as evidenced by increased student scores. The results of Farida, Isrina, and Apsari's (2019) study revealed that applying flashcards can increase student learning motivation. In addition, there was an increase in individual student scores, which proves that flashcards help students improve their vocabulary. Additionally, Arsana and Maharani (2021) found that the use of flashcards in elementary and high schools can increase student involvement so that students are not easily bored in learning English vocabulary. While these previous studies focused on using flashcards only, without considering their employment in specific learning methods, this classroom action research used flashcards as a media for team game tournaments (TGT) to increase **students' vocabulary** mastery.

Classroom action research examines learning activities through actions that teachers deliberately carry out to improve classroom learning quality. The main aim is to

solve real problems in the classroom and, simultaneously, look for scientific answers to why these problems can be solved with the actions taken (Sanjaya, 2015). Pardede (2017) accentuated that action research empowers teachers to design a study for detecting and solving the problems met in his or her classroom or school. It also offers the opportunity to assess a new curriculum program, test a new instructional strategy, examine a new medium, or evaluate an existing pedagogical method.

Based on the above background, this study was conducted to answer the following research question: Can flashcards use as a media of TGT applied as a learning strategy increase the fifth graders' English vocabulary mastery at SDN 23 Pangkalpinang?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Vocabulary Mastery

Vocabulary is an important component of language learning (Sari and Yana, 2019). A good command of vocabulary plays an important role in comprehension, self-expression, and effective communication. Dakhi and Fitria (2019) accentuated that without vocabulary, nothing can be done because it is the basis for communication. Vocabulary can be viewed as the main communication tool because it is what language users use to express their feelings, ideas, and opinions. In short, it is a manifestation of the human mind. Therefore, compared to other language aspects or components, vocabulary seems to be more useful and urgent to master.

Factors influencing vocabulary mastery include age, language proficiency level, exposure frequency, learning context, motivation, and learning/teaching principles and strategies. Concerning the factor of age, research (e.g. Steinberg & Sciarini, 2006), shows that children are better able to memorize new vocabulary than adults. In terms of exposure frequency, various studies (Heidari-Shahreza & Tavakoli, 2016; Teng, 2022; Tsai & Tsai 2021) reveal the high importance of exposure to second or foreign language **vocabulary acquisition and retention. Concerning learning/teaching principles. Nunan's** (2003) four principles for teaching vocabulary are worth considering. One, the teacher should first focus on the most useful vocabulary—i.e., the ones that every English learner needs for listening, speaking, reading, or writing. Giving priority to teaching useful words before less useful ones gives learners the best return for their learning effort. Two, the teacher should consider how the learners should be taught and learned. Differentiating the way of treating high-frequency words from low-frequency words is essential, Three, the teacher should give attention to the high-frequency words by using them in most parts of a course and communication through listening, speaking, reading, and writing as well. Fourth, the teacher should encourage learners to reflect on and take responsibility for learning.

Learning Theories and Principles

Learning is a process that focuses on students' intellectual development and emphasizes students to build their understanding and knowledge. Learning is designed so that students can reach a higher level of thinking. Various experts and psychologists such as Piaget, Kohlberg, and Ericson tried to define learning theories

differently to help adherents of these learning theories (Jufri, 2013). In general, learning theories can be classified as behaviorist, cognitivist, and constructivist learning theories.

Learning is an important activity in human life and cannot be ignored because the learning process never stops. Students and teachers are two things that both have a big role in carrying out the learning process. According to Sulaiman and Akidah (2021), learning is not only about mastering every competency given at school or other educational institutions and getting grades but also about how students can overcome every problem by using the competencies obtained in the learning process. It is hoped that the learning process can guide students to understand and find solutions in solving problems through their competencies.

Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning is a learning model where students work together in small groups of 4-5 students and are selected heterogeneously by their teachers (Iswadi et al., 2013). **Cooperative learning seeks to maximize students' learning processes to improve their academic understanding in group or individual work and help fellow students. The term refers to a classroom technique in which students work in small groups and receive awards or recognition based on their group's performance in the teaching and learning process.**

Cooperative learning is a method or strategy teachers use to form small groups of students in the learning process, allowing students to improve their abilities and knowledge to the maximum. This learning technique can be combined with many teaching approaches (Solihatin and Raharjo, 2011). Cooperative learning techniques can motivate students to dig deeper into their knowledge, express their opinions **confidently, respect other people's views, and share ideas. In cooperative learning, students who have heterogeneous abilities gather in small groups. Heterogeneous groups here are based on student ability, gender, and genes. This aims to train students to work with people from different perceptions or backgrounds.**

Teams Games Tournament Strategy

The Teams Games Tournament (TGT), developed by David De Vries and Keath Edward in 1995, is a team game competition that can be used to facilitate the cooperative learning model. In TGT, students play games with other team members to gain additional points for their team's score. TGT can be used in a variety of subject matter, from exact sciences, social sciences, and languages from elementary to tertiary education levels (Al-Tabany, 2014). TGT implementation consists of four main components: teacher presentations, study groups, tournaments, and group introductions. The steps in implementing the TGT learning strategy are: (1) The teacher prepares question cards, student worksheets, and the tools or materials needed. (2) Students are divided into several groups (each group consists of 5 people). (3) **The teacher directs the game's rules and prepares the lesson.** (4) Students work in teams to ensure all team members have mastered the lesson. (5) **Finally, all students were given a quiz, and they couldn't help each other.** Various

studies (Nurlali, 2013; Marbun, 2017) reported that it is a useful technique to improve students' vocabulary.

Flashcard Learning Media

Flashcards are picture cards that contain photos or pictures accompanied by vocabulary information and how to read them (Iswari, 2017). Flashcard media can be a fun learning medium, especially if it is used in games **to stimulate students' absorption capacity**. Flashcard media has several advantages: (1) Easy to carry anywhere. (2) Practical in making and using it. (3) It is very interesting because it contains pictures so children can easily remember it (Ramadhanti et al., 2022).

METHOD

This study employed action research design, which is defined by Mills (as cited in Cresswell, 2015, 579) as "systematic procedures done by teachers (or other individuals in an educational setting) to gather information about and subsequently improve the ways their particular educational setting operates their teaching, and their student learning." In the language education context, action research can be a great teaching tool to increase students' language skills, vocabulary, and grammar; stimulate analytical, critical, and creative thinking skills; and grow the learners' motivation (Pardede, 2019). This research uses classroom action research to improve learning quality and solve problems during the teaching and learning process. This research focuses on **increasing students' absorption capacity by applying cooperative learning models** accompanied by a team game tournament strategy using flashcard media.

This research was carried out in two cycles, each consisting of four stages: planning, action, observation, and reflection. In the planning stage, the materials needed for the research were prepared, including flashcard learning media and the team game tournament method. This research selected participants consisting of 28 students from class 5A at SDN 23 Pangkalpinang. In the action stage, a team game tournament method was applied using flashcards to teach vocabulary to students. The students were divided into four teams, and each team competed with each other to answer questions related to **the vocabulary on the flashcards. In the observation stage, students' performances were observed during the team game tournament. Students' scores, strengths, and weaknesses** are recorded in vocabulary learning using flashcards. In the reflection stage, reflection is carried out on the results of the actions taken in the previous stage. Then, an evaluation of the variables measured at the observation stage is carried out. If the results are satisfactory, the classroom action research should not be continued to the next cycle. However, if there are still unresolved problems, classroom action research must be continued to the next cycle with the same procedures as the previous cycle.

The data collection techniques used in this research were observation and tests to observe and explore the situation of places and subjects in classroom action research and student learning achievements. The test data is then processed to determine the **increase in students' absorption capacity through the cooperative learning model** in teaching activities in class 5A at SDN 23 Pangkalpinang.

The data analysis technique in this research uses quantitative and qualitative data analysis techniques. Student scores on the pretest conducted at the initial meeting and the evaluation results of every cycle after implementing the flashcard learning media were used to analyze quantitative data. The test consists of 20 questions with scores ranging from 0-100.

The results of data analysis are used to determine the differences before and after applying flashcard media in learning. In analyzing qualitative data, data collected descriptively from the beginning to the end of the research is then presented in the form of a description or explanation that describes the research. This research uses data analysis techniques by reducing the data, then displaying the data, and, at the end, obtaining conclusions.

Several indicators of success can be considered in this research: (1) There is an increase in student test scores in each cycle after implementing flashcard media in learning. Assessment is carried out based on the pretest results at the start of the research and evaluation at each cycle. (2) There was an increase in student participation and involvement during learning activities using flashcard media. Observations of student engagement during each classroom action research cycle noted an increase in participation. (3) Students show an increase in understanding English vocabulary after implementing flashcard media. Vocabulary comprehension is evaluated based on **students' recorded scores, strengths, and weaknesses in English vocabulary learning.** (4) There is a comprehensive reflection on the results of actions taken at each stage of the research cycle. Evaluating the variables measured at each observation stage helps **improve the next cycle's learning process.** (5) **There was significant problem-solving** in learning English vocabulary in class 5A at SDN 23 Pangkalpinang. The results of the actions can overcome the problems identified at the planning stage.

FINDINGS

Initial Condition of the Participants

Before implementing this classroom action research, observations were made regarding the learning methods that teachers usually use when teaching. Then, a test is **carried out to test students' understanding of** the English vocabulary that they have studied previously. From the results of student interviews after taking the test, most students could not recall the vocabulary the teacher taught them. This is the basis for the small score obtained by students from the pretest that has been carried out.

Table 1. *The Range of the Participants' Pretest Score*

No	Score Range	Frequency	Percentage	Category	Mean
1	≥ 75	3	10,7%	Very Good	53,2
2	70-74,9	7	25%	Good	
3	50-69,9	10	35,7%	Fair	
4	≤ 49,9	8	28,6%	Poor	
Total		28	100%		

The students' lack of understanding of vocabulary can be seen from the results of the pretest conducted 1 week before implementing the classroom action. Table 1 shows that only 10.7% of students got the very good category. Only 25% of students got the good category, 35.7% got the fair category, and 28.6% got the poor category. The average score obtained by class 5A students on the pretest was 53.2.

Report of the Actions Implementation

In the first cycle, students seemed enthusiastic to participate in the lesson. However, the learning strategies implemented are still less effective, making classroom conditions less conducive. Some students can understand the new vocabulary taught, but others do not.

Table 2. *The Range of the Participants' Posttest 1 Score*

No	Score Range	Frequency	Percentage	Category	Mean
1	≥ 75	20	71,4	Very Good	79,1
2	70-74,9	3	10,7	Good	
3	50-69,9	3	10,7	Fair	
4	≤ 49,9	2	7,2	Poor	
Total		28	100%		

Table 2 shows that 71.4% of students got the very good category. Each 10.7% of students got the good and fair category, and only 7.2% got the poor category. The average score obtained by class 5A students increased to 79.1. This proves that the application of flashcard teaching media in the first cycle has increased students' scores quite significantly compared to before the application of this teaching media. So, further action is needed with the second procurement cycle to obtain more significant results.

Cycle II

In the second cycle, there was a significant increase. Students looked very enthusiastic about listening to explanations and doing assignments in groups. Almost all students can understand the vocabulary taught.

Table 3. *The Range of the Participants' Posttest 2 Score*

No	Score Range	Frequency	Percentage	Category	Mean
1	≥ 75	23	82,1	Very Good	85,7
2	70-74,9	3	10,7	Good	
3	50-69,9	2	7,2	Fair	
4	≤ 49,9	0	0	Poor	
Total		28	100%		

Table 3 shows the results of student scores in the second cycle. From these results, 82.1% of students got the very good category, 10.7% got the good category, and 7.2%

got the fair category. There were no students who received the poor category. In addition, the average score obtained by students was 85.7. This value category has met the criteria for success in classroom action research. So, the action research ended in the second cycle.

DISCUSSION

The findings from this study provide strong evidence regarding the effectiveness **of using flashcards to increase students' vocabulary knowledge in Class 5A SDN 23 Pangkalpinang. As indicated by the pretest results, the participants' initial condition** revealed a concerning lack of vocabulary retention among students. Before the intervention, most students had difficulty remembering the vocabulary the teacher taught, so most students were in the fair and poor categories. The pretest mean score of 53.2 indicates the need for intervention to improve student vocabulary retention.

Flashcards in classroom action research significantly influence students' vocabulary knowledge. In the first cycle, although there was an increase compared to the pretest, the effectiveness of the learning strategy was still limited, causing a less conducive learning environment. However, there was a marked increase in the mean score to 79.1, indicating a positive impact of the flashcard intervention.

The second cycle showed a significant increase in students' vocabulary knowledge. Most students achieved scores in the very good category, with none falling into the poor category. The average score of 85.7 in the second cycle exceeds the threshold for success in classroom action research. These results indicate that flashcards significantly **improve students' vocabulary understanding and retention.**

The high percentage of students who achieved the very good category in posttest 2 shows the effectiveness of flashcards as a learning tool in facilitating vocabulary acquisition. Enthusiastic student participation, coupled with better understanding and retention of vocabulary, further supports the effectiveness of flashcards in improving learning outcomes.

The findings of this study underscore the importance of using innovative learning methods, such as flashcards, to overcome challenges in vocabulary acquisition among students. The significant improvements observed following the intervention highlight the potential for using interactive and visual learning aids in classroom instruction to improve student learning outcomes effectively.

CONCLUSION

This study showed that flashcard use **increased students' vocabulary knowledge in Class 5A SDN 23 Pangkalpinang.** The findings from the pretest showed a lack of vocabulary retention before the intervention. Yet, after implementing TGT using flashcards as the learning strategy, **there was a significant increase in students' vocabulary comprehension and retention.** The first cycle of the classroom action research **showed an increase in students' average score from 53.2** on the pretest to 79.1 in the first cycle, while the second cycle showed a further increase to 85.7.

Overall, the results of this study confirm that flashcards are an effective tool in **increasing students' vocabulary knowledge in class 5A at SDN 23 Pangkalpinang.** This

research provides a strong basis for continuing to develop interactive and visual-focused learning strategies to improve student learning outcomes in the future.

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