

EFL Learners' Perceptions on the Use of Flashcards in English Vocabulary Learning: A Lesson from Remote Schools

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Abstract

Learning English vocabulary is quite challenging for students especially for young learners. Meanwhile it is essential for young learners in mastering English language. Because of that, the researcher gives one of the most effective media used in teaching vocabulary, that is flashcard media. This research specifically investigates how students perceive on the use of flashcards and what benefits it brings to the student's vocabulary learning. In order to answer the research questions, this research employed a qualitative descriptive with case study type. In addition, the data were gained by both open-ended questionnaires that were shared to 20 students and phone interviewing 5 of them to gain insights into students' experiences and attitudes towards media flashcards for learning vocabulary. The results showed that most of the students had good perceptions of the use of English Flashcard. They thought that English flashcard helped them to train their English vocabulary mastery. Using English flashcard, the students easier to memorize new words and enjoy in learning English vocabulary. Therefore, the students did not face any challenges in learning English vocabulary using flashcard. These findings imply that the use of flashcards in vocabulary learning can effectively improve young learners' engagement, retention, and motivation. It means that, the students showed positive perceptions in learning English vocabulary using Flashcards. They also expect that the use of Flashcard can improve their ability in mastering English language.

Keywords: Flashcard; English vocabulary; Young learners; Students' perceptions

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INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary learning is the paramount part in foreign language as the principal to measure students' achievement in acquiring a new word that can be accentuated. (Nation, 2018) said that mastering vocabulary is essential for all language abilities (i.e., speaking, listening, reading, and writing) in both English as a second language (ESL) and English as a foreign language (EFL). If they don't have enough vocabulary or learning techniques, language learners may become frustrated (Chien, 2015). It means that the words are very needed, we cannot understand what someone speaks if we do not know the meaning of the words. Therefore, success in learning English requires vocabulary acquisition.

Most students in the EFL context in Indonesia face some problems in learning English vocabulary. (Krisnayanti & Winarta, 2021; Susanto, 2021) found that the students have problems in learning vocabulary in many aspects such as spelling, hard to memorize many

words, lack of experience in language learning, and the written form is entirely different from the spoken form in English. Similarly, students in Islamic Junior High School also faced some challenges and problems regarding learning vocabulary. They find the difficulties in memorizing new words and difficulty pronouncing new words because they still use the common ways in learning vocabulary.

To solve several problems above, flashcards are an effective way to learn vocabulary, it can be the alternative. Flashcards combining visual and textual cues, are widely recognized as effective for reinforcing memory through repetition and active recall (Dowling, A., 2019). It is a simple card with a word and picture on it. On the other hand (C. Lin et al., 2018; Rahmasari, 2016) said that one of the most popular visual aids for learning is the flashcard, which is a basic card with a picture or word on it. Studies conducted in various EFL contexts, showed the benefits of flashcards for students in improving their vocabulary retention. Particularly, when compared to more passive techniques like rote memory (Aba, 2019; Abbasian & Ghorbanpour, 2016). In line with Supriatin & Rizkilillah. (2018) proved that EFL students' ability to recognize and memorize new words are improved significantly by using flashcards. In sum, media flashcards are useful media to help students learn vocabulary. The teacher easily improves their student's vocabulary through pictures and students easily memorize that vocabulary. By using this media, the students are more active in the learning process because the media provide the picture.

Although many studies found the effectiveness of flashcard media in improving learning vocabulary, there is still lack of research that focuses specifically student's subjective experiences and perceptions, whether they view the use of flashcards positively or negatively, particularly in rural areas, where access to technology is still limited. Therefore, the teachers continue to use manual flashcards. This research seeks to fill that gap by exploring how students perceive the use of flashcards in vocabulary learning and what benefits they gain from using this media. Based on the rationales above, this study aims to explore the students' perceptions of using English flashcards for learning English vocabulary in a rural Junior High School. Specifically, this research addresses the following research questions: 1) *What are the students' perceptions of using flashcards in learning English vocabulary?* 2) *What are the benefits of using English flashcards for learning vocabulary?*

Literature Review

Language teachers frequently identify vocabulary as the trickiest area, even though it is typically regarded as the fundamental communication tool. In learning a language without mastery of vocabulary then nothing can be conveyed (Wilkins, D.A., 1972). Besides (Nation, 2018) said that lack of vocabulary is an obstacle in learning a language. Therefore, learning vocabulary is important for whoever wants to master a language. It would be great to start learning vocabulary acquisition from a young age.

The use of media in learning and teaching in the classroom is important, particularly for learning vocabulary. Teaching English vocabulary in the beginning level needs a suitable strategy to motivate and engage the students when learning (Yunita, 2024). By using media, the students may feel excited and joyful in the process of learning vocabulary. One of the strategies that make students easily understand the material and enjoy their study is flashcard media. Flashcard is one of the important media for learning vocabulary.

A flashcard is a card containing words and images written on it, according to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary. (Hornby, et al. 1974). Additionally, flash cards are a deck of

cards with a second language (L2) word written on one side and its description, translation, or synonym in the first language (L1) inscribed on the other side (Nakata, T. 2019). On the other hand, (Kupzyk et al., 2011) said that flashcards are media in the form of cards with text, symbols, or images that can be used to remind or direct pupils to do activities like visuals. Therefore, flashcard media is very useful for young learners to learn vocabulary. The students may learn visually, auditory, kinesthetically, and verbally.

Numerous studies have consistently supported the effectiveness of flashcards for vocabulary acquisition, especially among young learners. For example Supriatin & Rizkilillah. (2018) found that flashcards are effective in improving students' vocabulary for sixth grade students. Rachmadi et al. (2023) demonstrated that both digital and paper-based flashcards significantly improved young students' vocabulary outcomes. Similarly, Arsana & Maharani. (2021) reported that students in both elementary and high school levels show greater interest and engagement when using colorful flashcards, which made the learning process more interactive, and they did not get bored easily in learning vocabulary.

Combining these findings, it is clear that flashcards are not only effective because they are visual, but also flashcards actively engage students in the retrieval and reinforcement of new vocabulary. Flashcards provide a multi-sensory experience that maintain attention, boost motivation, and facilitate meaningful learning. Therefore, incorporating flashcards into vocabulary learning offers both practical and pedagogical advantages, making them a valuable medium in the language vocabulary learning.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This research approach is qualitative descriptive with case study design. A descriptive case study is used to explain a specific event in relation to its surroundings. It might be used to elaborate on a certain theme that a survey has uncovered (Yin, R.K., 2009). Besides (Hancock et al., 2021) stated that a case study is employed when examining and characterizing, for instance, an individual, a group of individuals, an institution, or an issue, procedure, phenomena, or event inside a specific organization. Therefore, this research uses qualitative descriptive case study research to explore the students view or perception regarding flashcard media in improving students' vocabulary learning. As the aims of this research is to explore and explain certain phenomena according to students' perceptions. Therefore, 20 students were sufficient to collect the data in order to answer the research question in this study. The participants were the 8th grade of SMP Al-Lathifiyah tinggar, East Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara, aged between 13 until 14 years old. The students have basic-intermediate level of English skills, by the result from the teachers' assessments. This information is important to understand the students' experience and perception in using flashcards for learning vocabulary.

Instruments and Data Collection Technique

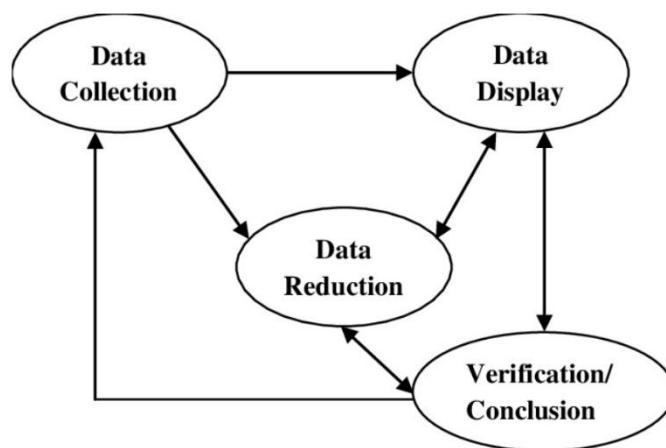
To get the data, the researcher used two instruments to collect the data. Those are open-ended questionnaires and structured interviews. Firstly, the instrument of open-ended questionnaire is adapted from Zumratul, F. (2019). Moreover, the questionnaire consisted of eight questions covering the topics such as the student's motivation, experience, interest, and the challenges when using the media. Before distributing the questionnaire, the instruments were validated through expert judgment, where my English education lecturer reviewed the

questions for clarity, relevance, and alignment with the research objectives. Then, the questionnaire was distributed to all 20 students. Secondly, the researchers did the interview to get deeper information from the students. The questions consisted of 6 questions that were given to 5 out of 20 students. The researcher selected 5 students from seventh grade students of A class of the SMP A1-Lathifiyah Tinggar, which were selected by their score in vocabulary. Moreover, questions in the interview consist of 6 questions which are based on categories of students' perception in using flashcards. Furthermore, triangulation between questionnaire and interview data was used to increase the trustworthiness of the findings by cross-verifying information from multiple sources.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using Miles & Huberman, (2014) includes three major phases such as data collection, data display, and conclusion or verification.

Figure 1. Component of data analysis from (Miles & Huberman, 2014)



Firstly, the researcher simplifies and categorizes the relevant data from the result of questionnaire and interview transcripts. This process consists of coding units and identifying the themes related to the students' perceptions in using flashcards in learning English vocabulary. The researchers categorized the data based on the themes such as experience, feeling, usage, attention, and motivation. Secondly, in the data display, the researcher organized and structured the data to suit the research objectives. Therefore, the interpretation could be very clear. In the last step, the findings were formulated based on the analyzed data and the data were cross-checked with relevant previous studies to ensure reliability and validity result.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Before presenting detailed results from the questionnaire and interview from students, the researcher summarized the general trends found from the result of the data. The following table highlights the key themes which were identified from the students' responses. This table displays the overall pattern of student's perceptions regarding the use of English flashcards for vocabulary learning.

Table 1. Themes of Student's Responses on Using Flashcards

Number	Theme	Description
1	Improving Vocabulary	Flashcards help the students in improving their vocabulary.
2	Enjoyable Learning	Learning vocabulary becomes more interactive and enjoyable.
3	Improved Motivation	Flashcards motivate the students in learning English vocabulary.
4	Strengthened Memory	Flashcards reinforce memory through visuals and repetition

Students' perception of using English flashcard media in learning vocabulary

In this section, researchers explain the student's perception of the flashcard media. These dialogs describe some insight related to the benefits of using English flashcards in improving the student's vocabulary, particularly for students in East Lombok. The aim of this research is to explore the students' perception of the use of English flashcards for learning vocabulary.

Improving students' vocabulary

One of the key findings in this thematic analysis was the use of Flashcard to improve the students' vocabulary, including helping them in increasing and memorizing new English vocabulary. This can be seen in the positive responses of the students based on the result of the questionnaire and interview. They claimed that English flashcard is an enrichment media to improve their vocabulary, as argued below:

"Yes, learning vocabulary using flashcards can improve my English vocabulary, because in flashcards there is a word that I will memorize, and it can improve my English vocabulary." (Informant 2).

"I think it improves because it makes me easier to memorize new vocabulary by looking at the picture along with the vocabulary on the flashcard. So that the vocabulary easily comes to my memory." (Informant 4)

The use of flashcards as a medium for teaching English vocabulary has proven to be an effective strategy, particularly according to Informants 2 and 4 in this study. They observed that flashcards helped students to better internalize and remember new vocabulary, especially when images were paired with the corresponding words. This combination of visual and textual cues facilitates easier recall, supporting the cognitive process of associating meaning with form. The effectiveness of flashcards in enhancing vocabulary acquisition is also supported by research. Aba (2019) highlighted that flashcards are not only adaptable to students' needs but also maintain learner interest and motivation, thanks to their colorful and structured format. Such engaging designs can make vocabulary learning enjoyable, thereby aiding in long-term retention.

Moreover, Syamsiyah and Ma'rifikatulloh (2023) reported similar findings, noting that students achieved higher test scores after learning with flashcards. They emphasized that flashcards are simple, fun, and effective tools for memory recall. These findings are particularly relevant in the context of rural education, where access to sophisticated learning tools may be limited. This research contributes to the growing body of evidence that flashcards

can significantly aid in vocabulary development even in under-resourced settings. However, the role of teachers remains crucial in maximizing the benefits of flashcard use. Effective vocabulary instruction requires teachers to be creative and adaptive, designing interactive and engaging learning environments that keep students motivated. When teachers actively foster a positive and stimulating atmosphere, students are more likely to enjoy the learning process and remain committed. Hence, while flashcards serve as a valuable pedagogical tool, their success is closely tied to how they are implemented by educators. Encouraging teachers to utilize such tools effectively can enhance the learning experience and result in meaningful vocabulary acquisition for students across various learning environments.

Enjoyable in learning vocabulary

Another finding in this research showed that students enjoyed and felt fun learning English vocabulary by using English Flashcards. As they argue from the previous questionnaires and interviews that have already been shared. They said that they feel happy when learning vocabulary by using flashcard media. The students feel more interested in learning; it makes them not bored in learning.

"In the use of flashcards, I can improve my ability to learn English vocabulary, because it makes me easier to memorize new vocabulary." (Student 7)

"My experience in learning English vocabulary using flashcards is very pleasant, and also I am interested in learning flashcards. Because by using flashcards I can find out interesting and exciting pictures, for example, the door which in English is door, which is given a picture by the teacher." (Informant 1)

The findings of this study align with previous research indicating that flashcards are effective tools in fostering student engagement and vocabulary retention. Andalas (2019) emphasized that flashcards not only assist students in memorizing vocabulary but also generate enthusiasm toward the lesson. The use of appealing illustrations or pictures—especially those that are colorful, fun, and large enough for the entire class to see—plays a significant role in maintaining students' attention. Visual elements enhance cognitive associations, allowing learners to link images with words, which facilitates quicker and more lasting recall.

Furthermore, Nugroho (2012) noted that flashcards contribute to a more active and interactive learning environment. When students are involved in enjoyable learning activities, they tend to become more motivated and invested in the educational process. This motivation leads them to use new words in meaningful contexts, thus strengthening their language acquisition skills over time. Joyful learning experiences—those that integrate games, movement, and creativity—are particularly effective in early language education.

Supporting these observations, Donasari et al. (2023) demonstrated that flashcard-based games and visual worksheets enhance vocabulary learning among young learners. The integration of images such as animals, fruits, and buildings makes the learning environment dynamic and enjoyable. These visuals stimulate curiosity and participation, especially when combined with interactive, game-like formats. The study reinforces the idea that incorporating engaging and playful visual learning strategies is especially beneficial for early childhood education.

Overall, the current study highlights the importance of using flashcards not just as static learning tools but as part of a larger strategy to maintain student interest and promote meaningful language use. Teachers are encouraged to implement visually rich, game-like methods to sustain high levels of engagement, ensuring that vocabulary instruction is both effective and enjoyable for young learners.

Benefits of using English flashcards for learning English vocabulary.

Motivation and Interest

Students' motivation is the key factor that affects whether they start a task at all, how much effort they put into it, and how long they stick with it. Communication skills development is only possible if pupils are motivated and given the chance to express who they are and connect with others.

The students revealed that using English Flashcards increases their interest in learning English vocabulary. Such claims by some students by answering a few questions.

"Learning vocabulary using flashcards is interesting because it is accompanied by pictures, and also I can learn while playing." (Student 10)

"Very interesting. Because when I learn vocabulary using flashcards I can see the picture, so if I don't know the meaning of the word, I can see the picture. So I know the meaning of the word and it makes it easy for me to memorize the vocabulary." (Informant 5)

To enhance student engagement and improve vocabulary learning outcomes, teachers should strive to create a more interactive and stimulating classroom environment. One effective strategy is the use of flashcards, which serve as an engaging and versatile teaching aid. Flashcards can capture students' attention through their colorful, entertaining, and clearly visible illustrations, making the learning process more enjoyable and accessible. When students are visually stimulated and emotionally invested in the learning material, they are more likely to retain new vocabulary effectively.

This approach is supported by the findings of Atmaja and Sonia (2020), who observed that the use of flashcards significantly aids students in vocabulary acquisition. The visual appeal and playful nature of flashcards not only make the learning atmosphere more dynamic but also reduce anxiety often associated with language learning. When students are happy and relaxed, their cognitive processing improves, allowing them to absorb and recall new words with greater ease.

Moreover, student feedback from this study suggests that flashcards enhance their motivation to learn English vocabulary. Feeling motivated is a key factor in sustaining consistent language practice. Therefore, integrating flashcards into the classroom not only fosters a positive learning experience but also supports long-term vocabulary development and increased learner confidence.

"I am very motivated to learn English vocabulary using flashcards. Because the benefits I feel are very influential in improving my English vocabulary."

(Student 15)

"I think flashcards motivate me because they give me pleasure in learning English vocabulary. In addition, flashcards are also practical and easy to use as learning media. So, easy and practical flashcards motivate me in learning vocabulary and also the vocabulary I learn is easier for me to remember." (Informant 3)

The findings of this study reinforce the conclusions drawn by Chotimah (2021), who found that students demonstrate increased motivation when learning vocabulary through the use of flashcards. Motivation plays a central role in the learning process; when students are genuinely interested and enthusiastic, they are more likely to engage deeply with the material, retain information longer, and understand lessons more effectively. In the context of vocabulary acquisition, this sense of motivation becomes even more critical, especially for young learners who require stimulating and engaging methods to sustain their focus.

Similarly, Lisa (2019) emphasizes that students who are exposed to vocabulary lessons using flashcards exhibit a higher level of motivation. This motivation not only initiates the learning process but also influences how much effort students are willing to put forth and how persistently they continue, even when the learning material becomes challenging. Flashcards, with their visual appeal and simplicity, make vocabulary learning more tangible and less intimidating for students.

Moreover, flashcards present a practical advantage for educators, especially in rural or under-resourced schools where access to digital tools or advanced teaching aids is limited. Flashcards are inexpensive, reusable, and easy to prepare, making them an accessible option for teachers. They allow educators to create an engaging and interactive classroom environment without requiring sophisticated technology. This accessibility empowers teachers to better support their students' vocabulary development using effective, research-backed methods. In summary, flashcards are not only effective in enhancing student motivation but also provide a valuable resource for teachers working in constrained educational settings. Their ability to foster interest, simplify complex vocabulary, and create a supportive learning environment makes them highly suitable for young learners and aligns with the goals of inclusive and engaging language instruction.

Strengthen Memory

The finding of this research was English Flashcards enhancing students' memory in memorizing English vocabulary. The students revealed that the use of flashcards reinforces their memory. They said that they can memorize the new vocabulary more than usual after using flashcard media, with the pictures in a card, it really helps them in memorizing the vocabulary. Like the student stated in the questionnaires.

"I think that when I learn vocabulary by using flashcards, I can memorize more new vocabulary and my memory becomes stronger because the words I see on the flashcards stick in my memory more than just reading the vocabulary in the book." (Student 9)

"Yes, it is very helpful, because not only the names are listed, but also accompanied by pictures that make my memory strong in memorizing new vocabulary." (Student 18)

Flashcards have proven to be highly effective tools for enhancing students' memory in learning and retaining English vocabulary. One of the key advantages of using flashcards lies in their ability to stick in students' memory more effectively than many other instructional media. This is largely due to the visual appeal and interactive nature of flashcards, which combine imagery, color, and concise text to create strong mental associations. The fun and engaging format not only makes learning more enjoyable but also aids in encoding information more deeply into students' long-term memory.

Meyer (2009) supports this view by asserting that flashcards are particularly beneficial for memorizing vocabulary words and their meanings. Through repeated exposure and visual

reinforcement, flashcards help students recall vocabulary more quickly and accurately, which is essential for language acquisition and usage. The structured repetition that flashcards allow encourages both recognition and active recall—two crucial components of memory retention.

Kurniati et al. (2023) further confirmed the effectiveness of flashcards by demonstrating a significant 15% increase in students' vocabulary test scores after using flashcards as a learning medium. This improvement was not only evident in quantitative test results but also reinforced by qualitative data from student interviews. Students reported greater engagement and attention during lessons that incorporated flashcards, attributing their improved retention and understanding of new vocabulary to this method.

Moreover, the visual and kinesthetic interaction involved in using flashcards stimulates multiple senses, enhancing cognitive processing and memory formation. As students engage with the content actively—by flipping cards, matching images with words, or participating in group activities—they reinforce vocabulary in a meaningful way. In summary, flashcards not only capture students' attention but also provide a dynamic and memorable learning experience that significantly improves vocabulary mastery and retention over time.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study underscore the significant benefits of using English flashcards as an instructional tool for vocabulary development. Students widely perceive flashcards as both effective and enjoyable, which contributes to a more positive and engaging learning experience. Flashcards enhance vocabulary acquisition by transforming the learning environment into an interactive and stimulating space where students feel motivated and interested. This active involvement helps reduce boredom and makes learning feel like a playful and rewarding activity rather than a monotonous task.

One of the key advantages of flashcards is their visual and repetitive nature, which supports memory retention. When students repeatedly see vocabulary words paired with relevant images, they form stronger mental associations, making it easier to recall these words later. This is particularly beneficial for young learners, who respond well to visual stimuli and hands-on learning methods. Additionally, when flashcards are incorporated into games or visual worksheets, they contribute to a joyful classroom atmosphere that further encourages active participation and collaborative learning.

For teachers—especially those in schools with limited access to technological resources—flashcards represent a practical, cost-effective, and versatile teaching aid. They require minimal preparation and can be easily adapted to suit various lesson objectives and learning styles. Teachers are encouraged to use flashcards creatively in classroom activities such as matching games, storytelling, and group competitions to maintain student engagement. English flashcards provide substantial benefits for vocabulary learning and can serve as a powerful medium for language instruction. For future research, it is recommended to explore the effectiveness of digital flashcards compared to traditional ones, particularly among different age groups and educational contexts. Expanding the study to include diverse student populations will also enhance understanding of the broader applicability of flashcards and contribute to refining best practices in vocabulary instruction.

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