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Shuhratjon Mashrapovich Boykhanov
Foreign Languages Faculty,
Tashkent State University
named after Nizamiy,
Tashkent, Uzbekistan

Tursunoy Tojiboebva
English teacher Secondary
School #3 Karaskan Town,
Namangan, Uzbekistan

Dildora Sadriddinova
English teacher Namangan
State University Namangan,
Uzbekistan

Correspondence Author:
Shuhratjon Mashrapovich Boykhanov
Foreign Languages Faculty,
Tashkent State University
named after Nizamiy,
Tashkent, Uzbekistan

The effectiveness of flashcards to teach different language leveled students

Shuhratjon Mashrapovich Boykhanov, Tursunoy Tojiboebva and Dildora Sadriddinova

Abstract

Despite the fact that we are living in technological age, we cannot deny the advantages of simple flashcards. Hence we aim at using paper flashcards as in developing students' vocabulary and applying them in oral speech. Besides that it is a complex task for teachers to choose a suitable textbook, relevant teaching technique and aids to achieve desired outcomes and to design a new book, especially, for different level and language experience students. But creative teachers may overcome this problem by adapting activities from the available books. We made use of available and a quite interesting manual by Virginia Evans, Enterprise 1 Course book Beginner, Unit 3, Activity 2 and followed present, practice, product lesson stages as the according to Cross (1991: 11 -13). In order to implement four planning, acting, observing and reflecting steps of action research, we planned a lesson and adapted eight from easy to difficult activities. This issue has been studied for several times by scholars, namely Azabdaftari, B., & Mozaheb, M. A. (2012), Baleghizadeh, S., & Ashoori, A. (2011), Basoglu, E. B., & Akdemir, Ö. (2010) and many researchers. In connection with above mentioned works in our research we emphasized particularly teaching English via flashcards in different language level (who studied English at school and had particular language efficiency) and mixed language experience (learnt other foreign languages such as German and French at secondary education or other higher education establishments) in one course. Those students are evening class first-year-bachelor students who are studying at Namangan State University for earning second major. We employed qualitative and quantitative method to scrutinize our research and get results from mixed language experience class in the end. Results showed increasing number of actively participated students from Pretest 60%, Posttest1 80 % and Posttest2 85%. It means we managed to apply simple, but effective teaching aid, paper flashcards, change some negative students' learning attitude and motivation to positive. They improved their grammar and lexical competence, pronunciation and speaking skills through integrated activities by using flashcards.

Keywords: Action research, different language experience, motivation, paper flashcards, vocabulary

Introduction

A good command of any kind of language has special impression on listeners. Vocabulary is essential part of learning and teaching. Thanks to words learners acquire new knowledge understand each other. Teachers deliver knowledge to learners by using this vocabulary. But vocabulary learning and teaching are not quite easy task for both learners and teachers. Krashen justified comprehensibility, relevance; authenticity and sufficiency have good effect for students acquiring new vocabulary. Therefore teachers utilize different kinds of methods and techniques such as using grammar – translation methods, pictures, flashcards, authentic materials, video clips, computer technologies and word games so most of learners have positive results by the end of the lesson. In this article we are going to discuss about teaching vocabulary to mixed level students by using paper flashcards. Actually nowadays digital flashcards are being widely used in technologically well-equipped classrooms by teachers. In addition, smart students are improving their vocabulary by the help of mobile phones and laptops autonomously. No matter of this we focus on in our article effectiveness of using paper flashcards.

Definition

In *Wikipedia* a flashcard is explained with its definition, history and types as in the following:

flashcard or flashcard is a card bearing information on both sides, which is intended to be used as an aid in memorization. In Webster on-line dictionary it is defined as: “a card bearing words, numbers, or pictures that is briefly displayed (as by a teacher to a class) usually learning aid. According to the definition which is given on thoughtco.com: “Flashcards are a tried-and-true study tool. For making flashcards we need 3x5 index cards, highlighters in multiple colors, keyring, ribbon, vocabulary, hole puncher and a pencil”. If we generalize above mentioned definitions flashcards are a helpful mean of learning and teaching.

Types of flash cards

Generally it is known two types of flashcards: Paper and Digital Flashcards. We will define and give brief information about those types of flashcards as in the following.

Paper flashcards

Haycraft (1978: 102-106) divided flashcards in to two types such as word flashcards and picture flashcards. Paper flashcards are one of the most effective tools to study vocabulary (Elgort, 2010). We can state several advantages of this type of teaching tool as in the following: first they are cheap, you can print out them easily or do yourself, and you make flashcards simply a word with its translation, or make creatively by adding definitions, pictures as mentioned by (Cross & James, 2001) They are portable (Nation, 1995, 2003, 2005) and motivate students to acquire knowledge autonomously. Finally Suppes and Crothers (1967) suggested that for elementary students about 20 cards, whereas for advanced students about 50 cards should be taught. Paper flash cards are cheap, simple and portable on the other hand they are time consuming particularly if we make them ourselves.

Digital flashcards

The term “digital” is related to number or computer technology. In *Wikipedia* different types of digital flash cards are mentioned, namely *Anki*, *Brainsscape*, *Cerego*, *Course Hero*, *Linguist*, *Memorise*, *Mnemosyne*, *Pimsleur Language Programs*, *Pleco Software*, *Quizlet*, *Supermemo*, *Synap*, *WaniKani* which we can utilize these software programs and applications on our computer and mobile phone. Certainly those applications’ advantages are recognized among users. For instance, we can see the word, its transcription, image, pronunciation and importantly it is given wide range examples in contexts as well as its translations in available languages multiple choice tests. However there are two most important factors to take into consideration before using these kinds of applications:

1. Availability of electricity;
2. Availability of computer technologies: laptops, computers, overhead projectors and smart screen boards at educational establishments and independent learners’ home;
3. Suitability of special requirements those applications to even available computers and mobile phones;
4. Computer literacy of both teachers and learners.
5. Flexibility of teachers to apply digital flashcards in different aged and different level of English proficiency.

Literature review

Joanne Budden in her article “Using flashcards with young learners” explained flashcards briefly, but substantially informatively by giving what they are, how they are and where are used. In addition to these, she suggested different activities, memory, identification and drilling activities intended to lower level young as well as adult learners. Robert John Ashcroft, Robert Cvitkovic and Max Praver investigated (2018) “The effect of using digital flashcards on L2 vocabulary learning compared to using paper flashcards, at different levels of English proficiency.” According to research, lower level students and vocabulary increased considerably higher than those intermediate students when they used *Quizlet* than ordinary paper flashcards. Next it is mentioned that intermediate students’ achievements are the same from both paper and digital flashcards. Whereas the paper flashcards are proved to be more beneficial advanced students’ than digital flashcards. Mobile learning vs. flashcards and effectiveness of flashcards were studied comparatively by several scholars such as: Basoglu and Akdemir (2010)^[2], Azabdaftari, B., & Mozaheb, M. A. (2012), Baleghizadeh, S., & Ashoori, A. (2011)^[1], Basoglu, E. B., & Akdemir, Ö. (2010)^[2], Baleghizadeh, S., & Ashoori, A. (2011)^[1] Stutz, H. (1992). Özer, Yağmur Ersoy & Zeynep Koçoğlu (2017)^[12], Nakata, T. (2008)^[8, 9]. Nugroho, Y. S., Nurkamto, J., & Sulistyowati, H. (2012), Printz, K., McLaughlin, T., & Band, M. (2006)^[14].

Research Methodology

We used classroom action research in this study. Kemmis (1983) in Hopkins (1993: p.44) state that action research is a form of selfreflective inquiry undertaken by participants in social (including educational) situation in order to improve the rationality and justice of (a) their own social or educational practices; (b) their understanding to these practices, and; (c) the situations in which the practices are carried out. It is most rationally empowering when undertaken by participants collaboratively, though it is often undertaken by individuals and sometimes in cooperation with outsiders. Meanwhile, the model of classroom action research in this study is model by Kemmis and Mc Taggart (in Burns, 1999: 32) who state that the model of action research is consist of four steps in a spiraling process. There are namely: a) Planning.; b) Acting. c) Observing) Reflecting. In this research we used qualitative and quantitative methods analysis to collect, to analyze data and to conclude according to results.

Instrument

We choose following 29 words; among those words are seven types of rooms and the names of the objects in those rooms from Enterprise 1 Course book Beginner by Virginia Evans (2007). We prepared colored markers and blank flashcards to use during the research.

Living-Room: sofa, fireplace, cushion, vase, carpet, table armchair

Dining-Room: dining-table, mirror

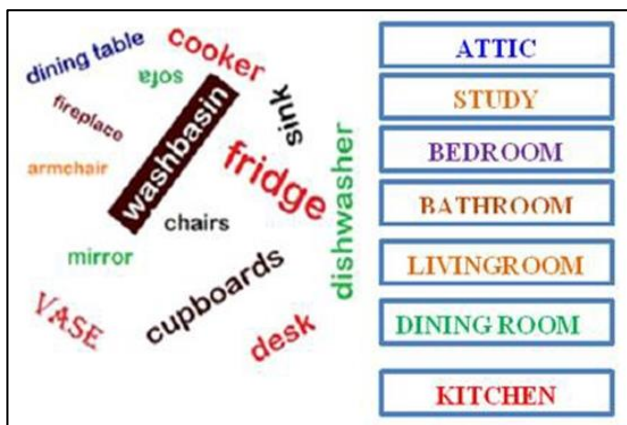
Kitchen: fridge, dishwasher, cupboards, curtains, windows, sink, cooker

Main Bedroom: double bed, pillows, rug, dressing table, wardrobe

bathroom: bath, washbasin, towel, shower, toilet
child’s bedroom: single bed, bedside cabinet
study: desk, bookcase, chair

Procedure

We followed present, practice, product lesson stages as the According to Cross (1991: 11 -13) Cross (1991: 11 -13). In order to implement four planning, acting, observing and reflecting steps of action research, we planned a lesson and adapted activity 2 enterprise 1 unit 3 by Virginia Evans following eight from easy to difficult activities: First, we introduced new vocabulary related to the kinds of rooms and objects with picture flashcards. Second, we prepared enough blank flashcards and colorful markers, and then distributed them to the students. Third, we explained students to write the types of the rooms such as a living room, a bedroom, a bathroom and a dining room with colored markers and asked students to stick them one by one horizontally on the right corner of the white board. Fourth, we again gave out blank flashcards and asked every student to write the name of only one object on it which is given in the vocabulary. Fifth, we asked students again to stick those flashcards on the white board in mixed or different order on purpose



Model 1: Flashcard order on the white board

Sixth, we guided to construct a sentence by using handmade flashcards according to the following speech pattern. There is /there arein the.....

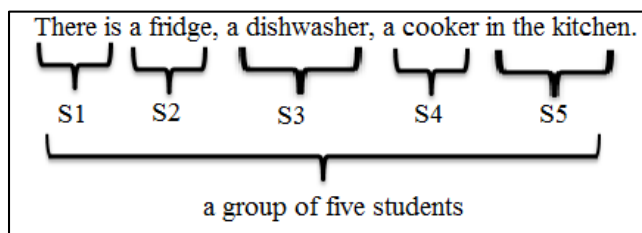
For example

There is a *dining table* in the *dining room*.

Seventh, we encouraged all students to work in small groups (5 students) and show one in order to get every student involved in the class

For example:

We began this task with an active and volunteer of group of five students as in the following.



Model 2: Mixed language leveled student group sample

The first participant stated “there is” then each student showed the suitable flashcard on the white board according to their choice. The last student said chosen “room” as above written “in the kitchen” in turn all students worked together to make full sentence.

Eight, we motivated students to construct as many full sentences as they can in order to have higher mark.

Setting and Participants

In this research we choose thirty bachelor’s degree evening class students whose specialties are social work In Namangan State University, Uzbekistan. Those students are with quite different language level and different age (from 19 to 40). Even some of the students among them learnt other foreign languages such as German and French at secondary education or other higher education establishments. It can be seen from the following table below students’ language experience and language levels.

Table 1: Students’ language experience and language levels

Language learnt	Language level	Number of students
English	A 1	7
English	A 2	10
French	A 2	5
German	A 2	8

Unfortunately as there are reasonable factors that it is not always impossible to provide a special language teacher according to students’ interest. First of all, students themselves choose foreign language as taking test before entering the university. Secondly, before appointing a special language teacher, a survey is always hold on students’ language experience and even their language learning interest in the first course by university administration. Although university administration considers students’ interests, we frequently come across such students’ complaints that they avoid speaking due to psychological (shyness) and linguistic factors (phonetic). Hence it is significantly hard work to focus their attention on learning English dramatically.

Results

We used activity 5 to encourage students to form a simple sentence according to speech pattern by using flashcards on the white board. Notwithstanding having preparatory stages, those English A1, German A2, French A2 students showed rather low percentage result. Just only 12 students out of 20, participated actively, felt themselves free and indicated following result each group as 62.5%, 50 % and 60 % respectively.

Table 2: Pretest

Groups	Number of students participated	Number of students actively participated	Percentage
English A1	7	5	71%
German A2	8	4	50%
French A2	5	3	60%
Total	20	12	60%

We mixed English A2, English A1, German A2 and French A2 students on purpose and divided 30 students into six

groups so in each group 5 students with different language experience and different language level of English proficiency. In activity 7 students worked in small groups and gave considerably high results as in the following except Group 2.

Table 3: Posttest 1

Groups		Number of students actively participated	Percentage
Group 1	5	4	80%
Group 2	5	3	60%
Group 3	5	4	80%
Group 4	5	5	100%
Group 5	5	4	80%
Group 6	5	4	80%
Total	30	24	80%

We followed the next activity, this was Activity 8 and this time made English A1, German A2 and French A2 students work independently and speak as long as possible. As it can be seen from the table 2 the numbers and percentages are different in comparison Table 1. In other word five more students added as “active participant”.

Table 4: Posttest

Selected groups	Number of students participated	Number of students actively participated	Percentage
English A1	7	7	100%
German A2	8	6	75%
French A2	5	4	80%
Total	20	17	85%

Discussion

26 A1 and A2 English learners, even beginner level students who had learnt French and German, did all step by step easy to difficult activities very well. Consequently we assessed them according to their development and active participation. But during the eighth activity in posttest2 3 starter students participated rather passively by showing their unwillingness to construct no more than one sentence. We consider that students' such behavior was undoubtedly expected and natural situation because of their inabilities to do this activity more accurately and fluently than elementary ones. When we observed and asked one French A2 and two German A2 students about their passiveness, they answered that they were afraid of being laughed by other learners due to pronunciation mistakes. However this activity helped us to diagnose most of the starter students' behaviors and to identify active and passive learners among them as well as their attitudes to learning English.

As we have mentioned above it was challenging to reach expected results and have a successful lesson with mixed class immediately. For this reason we made use of different and leveled activities to generate students' interest, motivation. We had such activities during the lesson. Activities 2 and 3 “*Learning by doing*” as students themselves made flashcards with colored markers and stuck them to the white board. As Oller, J. & Ziahosseiny, S. (1970) made a conclusion that for current generation Latin alphabet is the problem even they have studied at school. So activities from 1 to 5 were intended to introduce new vocabularies, their meanings, prevent from spelling and pronunciations errors. In activities 6 - 8 we targeted on

upgrading learners' speaking skills steadily, cooperatively and individually. In this activities our focused on especially beginner students. Whereas A2 level English students participated as “generators” and “indirect correctors”. We did not almost pay attention to them some grammar or pronunciation mistakes while they were speaking. Instead occasionally we had A2 level English Students speak so other starter level students would not repeat their mistakes anymore.

Conclusion

It is fact that foreign textbooks are leveled and interesting. Activities are usually designed according to language level and included pre, while, post activities. However that does not mean not all available local and international textbooks' content are suitable for all learners. We think that they should be simplified or adapted. Students should be taught according to their interest and language experience. Otherwise this leads to language learning problem. Considering above all we have made the following conclusion.

We achieved

- To raise learners' attitudes, especially students' with different language experience (German and French) and starter English learners' attitudes towards language learning by step by step developing activity;
- To give motivation to students to work autonomously;
- To develop new There is/are grammar construction inductively;
- To teach students with ‘*differents*’ such as language experience, language level, age and characters cooperatively;
- To adapt the text book activity according to the student level;
- To identify students' strengths and weaknesses;
- To encourage students at first, to aware a word meaning and then to make a sentence by working individually after that in small groups, in the end, to produce monologue speech as extensively as possible to improve their speaking skill.
- To assess them as fairly as possible according to students' active participation;
- To have both visual and kinesthetic learners work at the same time.

Recommendation

This research is intentionally conducted. We would like to mention two reasons for doing it. The first, it is fact that nowadays most teachers and learners have their own laptops and mobile phones, but there is a question left unanswered whether they can use them effectively in their classrooms in time or not. The second reasons is, in mostly rural and even sometimes in urban areas are hindered by one of the above mentioned factors using effectively up to date technologies. In whatever way or manner, we recommend teachers to use at least available paper flashcards not only to improve students' vocabulary, but also language skills by applying different techniques.

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assistance the number of students' language level and language experience were available as they had taken a test before the lesson. Besides that it would be hard for us to observe, analyze and conclude all students' language development.

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