VOCABULARY FLASHCARD: A USEFUL TOOL FOR STUDENTS IN LEARNING ENGLISH VOCABULARY

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BRIEF OVERVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

What is a vocabulary flashcard?

A flashcard or flash card is a set of cards bearing information, as words or numbers, on either or both sides, used in classroom drills or in private study. One writes a question on a card and an answer overleaf. (Wikipedia's Definition). In relation to vocabulary, the simplest flashcard contains a word on one side of the card and its definition on the other side.

An example of a vocabulary flashcard

admire	[əd'maiə] – Verb **Khâm phục, thán phục, ngưỡng mộ** To admire **sb/sth for sth** : to regard sb/sth with respect *I admire him for his success in business* admiration (n) (U) admiring (a)

Ways to use vocabulary flash cards

You will need the following for a vocabulary flashcard set:

- A box
- Flash cards that fit in the box
- Two divider cards (to divide the cards).

o   Cards should be divided into three sections. Put *new words* in the first section, the second section should be *repeat section* and put the words you *know well* in the third section in alphabetical arrangement.

o   Learn new words every day. Then transfer the words to *repeat section.* Review the *repeat section* every three days. Each time you successfully recall a words, make a check mark (e.g. a tick) on the card. When the card has three check marks, transfer it to the third section. Then revise the word at least every two weeks. If there is a word you don't remember, put it back to the *repeat section.* (Cornelsen Verlag 2006)

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

•   How does the use of vocabulary flashcards affect students' vocabulary learning performance?

•   What are students' attitudes towards the use of vocabulary flashcards?

THE STUDY

Setting

This study was conducted with the second year students in two classes studying General English in the first semester of the 2012 – 2013 academic year at HNUE. Students study English for 15 weeks.

Participants

Eighty one non-English major students from two credit-based classes took part in the study. One class served as the treatment class that was incorporated vocabulary flashcards (Class A) and the remaining class was not implemented vocabulary flashcards (Class B). There were 41 students in Class A and 42 students in Class B.

Vocabulary flashcard implementation

Class A

The implementation of the vocabulary flashcards in class A was conducted in 10 weeks. Seventy two target words were chosen from module 11 to module 14 and related handouts that would be covered over 10-week period.

At the beginning of each week, the words chosen from the module for the week were presented to the students, to be recorded in their notebook. The student made the vocabulary flashcard set by themselves.

The implementation schedule also included activities for incorporating the vocabulary flashcard in to classroom activities. Each week, time was set aside for student to share information in their vocabulary flashcard with their classmates and to test each other on the flashcard words. The teacher divided the class into group of five to six students. One was appointed as the leader who played the role of the one who test others. The leaders were randomly changed each week. At the end of each week, the teacher collected the flashcards of some students and checked or oral test some students in front of the whole class.

Class B

Class B was not incorporated vocabulary flashcards. The teacher still listed out target words chosen for the week and required student to learn the words by themselves. However, no oral test was made for students each week and no activities for incorporating the target words were conducted.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

How does the use of vocabulary flashcard affect students' vocabulary learning performance?

A oral test were conducted in the 10th week. The oral test was aim to how many target words that students remembered. The teacher assigned five students to be the leader of a group of 8 to 9 students. The leader tested other group member and recorded their scores. All students of the two classes took part in the oral test. Class A used vocabulary flashcards but Class B used vocabulary lists.

Statistics of the oral tests were recorded as follows:

Correct words range (Unit : words)	<= 30	31 - 35	36 - 40	41 – 50	51 – 60	61 - 70	71 -72
Score (10 band score)	< = 4.2	4.3 – 4.9	5.0 – 5.6	5.7 – 7.0	7.1 – 8.4	8.5 – 9.6	9.7 – 10
Number of Students Class A	3	4	2	5	14	10	3
Number of Students Class B	6	5	12	9	7	3	0

PIE CHART
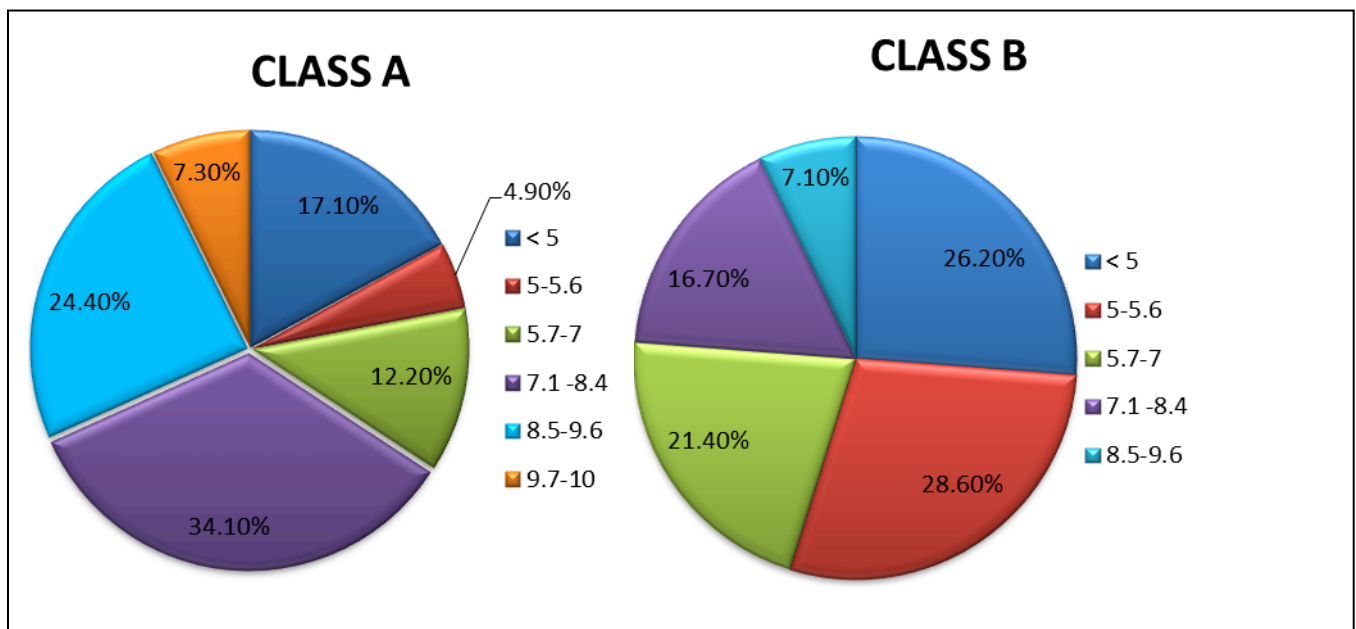
It can be seen in the above pie charts that only 17.1% of Class A's students were under average score while the figure of Class B was 26.2%. The majority of 65.8% of Class A gained good and excellent score (from 7.1 to 10). However, in Class B the majority of 53% gain average score from score 5.0 to 7.0. The above

figures reveal that the target word gain score of the treatment group or Class A is significant higher than class B. It therefore appears that the treatment group has shown greater improvement and better performance on target words than the remaining.

What are students' attitudes towards the use of vocabulary flashcards?

To discover the student's attitudes towards the use of vocabulary flashcards, interviews were conducted during the week following the vocabulary notebooks. The students were asked whether they found keeping vocabulary flashcards is useful or not, whether they continue to use the tool in learning English. They were also asked if they enjoy the implementation of vocabulary flashcards.

The students were overwhelmingly positive about the usefulness of vocabulary flashcards. However their positive remarks are coloured by a feeling that vocabulary flashcards are a tool for those students who genuinely want to learn English as quoted in Student A's comment: "*This vocabulary flashcards can be more useful for the ones who have a habit of studying regularly. It was difficult for me, but I can't deny that it is useful*"

In spite of their appreciation for the usefulnness and effectiveness of the vocabulary flashcards, the majority of the students admitted that they would not continue to use vocabulary notebooks if their teacher did not continue the implementation. A below comment illustrates this attitude:

"*As we are under discipline, we feel it compulsory to keep my vocabulary flashcards, and it affects our learning positively. If it was not compulsory, none of us would keep it. May be one or two of us would do*"

Students appeared to enjoy the vocabulary activities in class. Some related comments are given below:

"*As we regularly deal with one word with corresponding activities, we quickly learned and remembered the words*"

"*Vocabulary flashcards activities help us put the words in our brain, in the longer memory*"

DISCUSSION

In this study, it has been demonstrated that the use of vocabulary flashcard was effective in enhancing vocabulary development for students and the majority of students took part in the implementation had positive attitude to their use of vocabulary flashcard. However, it appears that student will only use vocabulary flashcards their teacher requires them to.

However, a disadvantage was found when vocabulary flashcards was conducted in class. It was the fact that the implementation requires a lot of time in class. This was a major concern because of institutional requirements regarding syllabus coverage. If time were not a concerning problem, the oral test would be done by the teacher to ensure that the score records were more accurate.