

The Use of Flashcards to Promote Speaking Fluency in Primary School

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Abstract

This research is a qualitative case study exploring the use of flashcards to support English speaking practice in an Islamic boarding school with limited access to technology. Ten senior students from the IEC (Istiqlal English Club) participated in the study. Data were collected through classroom observations and semi-structured interviews, then analyzed thematically. The results revealed three main themes: (1) flashcards help students build sentence structures and improve grammar usage, (2) flashcards increase fluency, confidence, and willingness to speak, and (3) flashcards create a fun, interactive, and stress-free learning environment. While providing valuable insights, this study is limited by its small sample size and the context of a single study site. This research suggests that teachers in environments with limited technology can adopt simple learning routines using flashcards to encourage active speaking practice while providing structure and motivation for students.

Keywords: *Flashcard, Media, Motivation, Perception, Speaking*

INTRODUCTION

Speaking is a crucial skill in language learning because it involves the ability to pronounce words or sentences accurately to express thoughts, feelings, and ideas (Mulyati, 2018). According to Ridwan and Nurhaeni (2021) stated that speaking encompasses several components, such as mastery of structure (grammar), vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency, and comprehension. However, many students, both in formal schools and Islamic boarding schools, experience difficulty speaking English well and correctly, primarily because they are not native English speakers (Prameswari and Akhiriyah 2023).

English speaking skills are often considered one of the most challenging aspects for learners, especially in environments with limited access to technology. In Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), for example, students have fewer opportunities to practice speaking interactively because the learning process generally relies on traditional methods and simple resources. Yet, speaking skills are a core component of language learning, requiring not only vocabulary mastery but also grammatical understanding, fluency, and the confidence to communicate effectively (Ridwan & Nurhaeni, 2021; Zam Zam et al., 2021). Therefore, teachers in environments with limited technology need simple yet effective learning tools to support students' speaking practice.

One such media is Flashcard, it is effective in improving vocabulary mastery while creating a fun learning environment (Amiruddin & Razaq, 2022; Labibah, 2023). However, most of these studies focus on vocabulary development, while paying limited attention to how flashcards can improve students' speaking fluency, self-confidence, and motivation. This indicates a research gap that needs to be filled, particularly in the context of schools or Islamic

boarding schools with minimal technological facilities, where alternative strategies are urgently needed.

To overcome these challenges, teachers need to use a variety of effective learning methods and media to achieve learning objectives (Sabariyanto 2021). One medium proven to help students learn to speak and increase learning motivation is flashcards. Flashcards are visual media that can stimulate students' memory and make the learning process more enjoyable. Previous studies have shown that the use of flashcards, both printed and digital, can significantly improve students' vocabulary mastery (Komachali and Khodareza, 2012; Amiruddin and Razaq, 2022; Ashcroft, Cvitkovic, and Praver 2018) as well as create a more engaging and less monotonous classroom atmosphere (Labibah 2023).

Based on preliminary observations, researchers discovered a remarkable learning medium that plays a crucial role in Islamic boarding school education: flashcards. Teachers brought and implemented this medium as an alternative to technology, which is inaccessible in Islamic boarding schools. The use of flashcards has had a significant positive impact on students' speaking skills. Despite technological limitations, this simple medium creates an active, enjoyable learning environment and encourages students to practice speaking English.

The teacher brought these flashcards as a medium or a tool to help students practice asking and answering questions directly with their friends. Each card had a different colour that students had to practice based on the colour and read through the code printed on it. For example, a red card was used for a sentence such as "I give you a red card." For questions and negative sentences, patterns such as "Do I give you a red card?" and "No, you don't. You give me a blue card" were used. Meanwhile, for questions with question words, students were trained to answer using structures such as "What card do I give you?" and "You give me a red card." Through this activity, students not only read but also process sentence structure, think critically, and interact directly with classmates.

While the practice of using this medium has shown promising results in the classroom, further research is needed to determine how students perceive the use of flashcards in speaking activities, particularly in the context of Islamic boarding schools with limited access to technology and unique learning environment. This activity provides enjoyable and meaningful practice, as students learn to speak using medium without feeling pressured. As Krisdiana (2021) points out, teachers must be creative and communicative facilitators in the learning process. This is further supported by Folse (2023) who emphasized that the use of flashcards in interactive activities, such as group work, pair discussions, or individual question-and-answer sessions, is highly effective in maintaining student engagement and motivation in speaking.

Therefore, the researcher conducted a qualitative study using a case study design focusing on Istiqlal English Club (IEC) students living and studying in an Islamic boarding school (*pesantren*) environment. This research specifically aimed to determine and describe students' perceptions of the use of flashcards in learning English speaking. Furthermore, this study also sought to explore students' motivation after participating in speaking activities using flashcards.

Research data was collected through direct classroom observations and in-depth semi-structured interviews. Through this technique, the researcher was able to capture not only students' verbal responses but also their behavior and interactions during the learning process. With this approach, this study sought to provide a comprehensive overview of how flashcards specifically colored flashcards designed to support sentence patterns and question-and-answer exercises can be effectively implemented to improve students' speaking skills.

Ultimately, this study seeks to address the gap in previous research, which has largely focused on vocabulary development. It explores how flashcards function not only as a medium for vocabulary enrichment but also as a means to improve students' grammar use,

fluency, self-confidence, and motivation in the context of Islamic boarding schools with limited access to technology.

METHODS

In this section, the researcher explains in detail how the research was conducted, including conceptual and operational definitions of the variables studied. A clear description of the research method is crucial because it allows readers to assess the appropriateness of the method used and the reliability and validity of the research results. Furthermore, a detailed explanation also allows other researchers to replicate the research if necessary. Given that each type of research uses a different methodological approach, this study specifically describes the method appropriate to the chosen qualitative case study design. The description of the research method includes: research design, participants and sampling procedures, sample size, data collection techniques, and data analysis.

Context and Site

This research was conducted at an Islamic boarding school (pesantren) in East Java, Indonesia, where English is taught as a compulsory subject alongside religious studies. The subjects were members of the Istiqlal English Club (IEC), a student-led extracurricular program designed to improve speaking and communication skills in English. IEC activities are held twice a week in the evenings after formal school hours, with each meeting lasting approximately 90 minutes. Based on previous learning, the students' English proficiency level is estimated to be lower-intermediate, with variations in grammar and vocabulary mastery, but most still have limited confidence in speaking.

Research procedure

Data collection was conducted over four weeks. Classroom observations were conducted during regular IEC sessions, focusing on how flashcards were introduced and used in speaking practice. Observation notes were taken regarding student participation, responses, and interactions with peers during the activities.

Next, semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten students to delve deeper into their perceptions and motivations. Interviews were conducted in a mix of English and Indonesian, adapting to the students' comfort level to ensure clarity of responses. Each interview lasted between 20 and 30 minutes, was audio-recorded with the participants' consent, and then transcribed verbatim. Observation notes and interview transcripts were then coded and analyzed thematically to identify emerging patterns and themes.

Research Design

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design. Case studies, particularly in the qualitative tradition, are appropriate for the primary purpose of understanding and interpreting a phenomenon, rather than for experimentation, hypothesis testing, or generalization to a broader population (McKinley and Rose 2019). This approach provides a unique perspective and understanding of the phenomenon and the sociocultural environment in which it occurs. Researchers use this approach to verbally describe how group members explain and perceive various perspectives within the context being studied.

Research participants and Sampling Procedures

This study involved ten students as subjects. They were selected because they were considered capable of representing their juniors. These ten students were seniors remaining at the Islamic boarding school, while the others had moved on to higher levels and were no longer living at the boarding school. The sampling technique used was purposive sampling, selecting participants based on specific considerations relevant to the research objectives.

Sample size

The sample size for this study was 10 students. While this is a relatively small number, sample size is not a primary concern in a qualitative approach. The focus is on the depth of data and the meaning gained from appropriately selected participants. These 10 students were deemed sufficient to adequately and comprehensively represent the context and objectives of the study.

Data Collection

Data were collected through two main techniques: observation and interviews. Observations were conducted to obtain direct information about the learning process, particularly how students used flashcards during speaking practice. Furthermore, interviews were conducted to explore students' perceptions in more depth. The collected data were organized based on actual time, events, categories, or subcategories, and could be arranged chronologically or thematically. Data were analyzed interactively and continuously through three stages: data condensation, data presentation, and drawing and verifying conclusions (Miles and Huberman 1994).

Analysis

Data obtained from classroom observations and interviews were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach, referring to Miles and Huberman's (1994) interactive cycle, which includes three main stages: data condensation, data presentation, and drawing and verifying conclusions.

The analysis process began with coding the interview transcripts and observation notes. Each piece of data was given an initial code (open coding), then grouped into broader categories (axial coding), until main themes emerged (selective coding). For example, a student statement such as "Flashcards help me create sentences with tenses" was coded "grammar support," the statement "Now I'm more confident speaking English" was coded "confidence boost," and the statement "Learning is fun with flashcards" was coded "fun learning." From these codes, major themes emerged, such as "grammar support," "fluency and confidence enhancement," and "a fun and stress-free learning environment."

To assist with data organization, the researchers used Microsoft Excel to record and group codes, categories, and themes.

Trustworthiness

To ensure the validity and credibility of the research results, the following strategies were used:

1. Member Checking: Interview summaries were reconfirmed with the students to ensure the researcher's interpretations aligned with their experiences.
2. Peer Debriefing: The researcher discussed with a colleague with an English language background to review emerging codes, categories, and themes.
3. Audit Trail: All field notes, interview transcripts, codebooks, and analysis results were systematically stored so that the research process could be retraceable by other researchers if necessary.

Ethics

This research was conducted in accordance with ethical research principles. Prior to data collection, the researcher obtained official permission from the school and the Islamic boarding school committee, as the organizing authorities for the learning activities. Written parental consent was also obtained, while students provided student assent after receiving an explanation of the research's purpose, benefits, and procedures.

To maintain confidentiality and privacy, student identities are disguised, and no personal data or student work results are published publicly. All data, including interview transcripts, observation notes, and related documents, are securely stored on the researcher's personal, password-protected device. Data access is restricted to the researcher and supervisor, ensuring participant confidentiality throughout the study.

RESULTS

Thematic analysis of classroom observations and interviews revealed four interconnected themes related to students' perceptions and motivation in using flashcards for speaking practice.

Table 1. Thematic Analysis of Students' Perceptions and Motivations on the Use of Flashcards in Speaking Learning

Theme	Sub-Categories	Description	Sample Student Responses
1. Support for Grammar and Sentence Structure	• Mastery of tenses • Sentence building • Structural accuracy	Students value flashcards as a scaffolding tool that guides them in constructing sentences more systematically, especially when using different tenses. The colored cards and repeated	• S2: "Flashcards make it easier for us to know the correct tense." • S6: "We can more easily create sentences using tense." • S7: "My speaking has become more organized and grammatically

		patterns help reinforce understanding of sentence structure.	correct.”
2. Fluency, Pronunciation, and Confidence	• Fluency improvement • Better pronunciation • Increased confidence • Reduced speaking anxiety	Flashcards encourage repeated practice, leading to smoother communication and clearer pronunciation. Students feel less hesitant and more confident speaking, even if they still make mistakes.	• S5: “Reading the text on the cards makes it easier for me to speak correctly.” • S8: “We can communicate more fluently and correctly.” • S9: “It helps me understand English and eliminates my fear of speaking.” • S1: “Now I have the courage to try speaking.”
3. Fun and Stress-Free Learning Environment	• More engaging and interactive • Less monotonous • Less learning pressure	Flashcards create a more lively and interactive classroom atmosphere than traditional methods. Students feel happier, more motivated, and less overwhelmed, making them more enthusiastic about learning.	• S1: “Flashcards are a new and more engaging method.” • S3: “I feel very motivated and happy.” • S6: “It seems easy for students to remember and learn.” • S10: “It was very difficult at first, but now I can speak more fluently.”
4. Continuous Motivation and Consistent Practice	• Long-term motivation • Repetition as reinforcement • Encourages critical thinking • Consistency in grammar practice	More than just providing immediate results, flashcards motivate students to continue practicing speaking and grammar. Repeated practice encourages critical thinking and trains them to pay attention to language accuracy in everyday communication.	• S2: “Flashcards teach me to think critically and speak correctly.” • S6: “Flashcards encourage me to practice correct grammar.” • S9: “I’m always forced to practice using correct English, I like that.” • S5: “I used to be lazy, but now I’m more comfortable with correct grammar.”

Source: Research respondent interviews, 2025

DISCUSSION

Based on the results of observations made by researchers, it shows that on average students are very enthusiastic and participate in speaking lessons that use flash cards to practice their speaking to be better and more structured. Judging from the way they study in class, many of them even feel happy and there is no pressure even though they will get a punishment from the teacher when they misuse grammar in their speaking practice using flash cards. To support the results of this research, researchers continued with in-depth interviews to determine student perceptions and motivation.

We can see that the impact of the effectiveness of flash cards greatly influences brain performance and student stimulation in learning English. According to Din and Wienke (2001) cited by (Komachali and Khodareza 2012) the flash card use approach is an effective training and learning method for high school teachers and students in chemistry study and also flash cards can be used to effectively help teachers teach, students learn. From all the answers given by the students above, it can be interpreted that the majority of senior students from IEC (Istiqlal English course) feel very motivated by this card-based learning. The level of student motivation in using flashcard media in learning speaking skills can be categorized as very high and gives very satisfactory results (Ridwan and Nurhaeni 2021). Below there will be two very important points to discuss from Haril's interview which has been explained in the table above.

1. Students' perceptions of the use of flashcards in improving speaking skills.

In the first point is about Students' perceptions in the use of flashcards in improving speaking skills. According to Qiong (2017) it was cited by (Andriyani 2019;Syahroni and Wahono 2024), perception in philosophy, psychology and cognitive science is the process of understanding or realizing information received through the senses. There are 3 questions that the researcher asked and will discuss it one by one. The first question is about; when compared with other methods of practicing speaking skills, do you feel flashcards are more effective or less effective? Why?

Previous researchers accepted several theories that using flashcard media in learning was an alternative to solve speaking skills problems in the learning process. Based on students' opinions, Student 3 said that learning using flashcards can make us easier to pronounce words. While it is robust by Student 8 that she felt effectiveness how to practice communicating correctly. And other students agree that it is apart helping those who are afraid to practice speaking. (Din and Wienke (2001) said that using flashcards is training and learning method that is suitable and effective for teachers and students and flash cards also can be used to effectively help teachers in teaching and students in learning. There is one student felt difficult at the first meeting, it was because of she were not habitual. Student 10 "Only a little, because I am not really know" In addition, even though it was initially difficult, some students

felt an improvement in speaking fluency through consistent use of flashcards (Labibah 2023).

The second question concerns flashcards that influence how students respond to or pronounce words during speaking practice. Student 5 felt that she was fluent in pronouncing words because she always practices reading the given text, and she found it easier to speak. In teaching, EFL teachers must maintain students' discipline in learning and keep them engaged in positive activities, such as group or partner discussions (Folse, 2023). Refers to Mulyati (2018), speaking abilities include the ability to articulate sounds or words for expression, as well as to convey thoughts, ideas, and feelings. It aligns with Student 6's statement that, because of flashcards, they were helped to ask and answer questions with correct pronunciation. Previous research explains that speaking involves articulating and expressing sounds. Move to Student 8. She said she was taught how to remember, respond, and apply speaking with correct pronunciation. Overall, flashcards are highly beneficial for students who want to improve their speaking skills. Additionally, flashcards reinforce not only speaking but also other important aspects of language learning, such as grammar and pronouns, which contribute to a more holistic improvement in speaking skills. The third question relates to the first research objective. Students' feeling about their speaking becomes easier or more fluent after learning and practicing using flashcards. Flashcard media can attract students' attention and students' mastery of language develops and students' speaking skills (Ramdhani 2022). According to Student 1, 3, 5 and 7 they realize that, Flashcards help simplify the learning process, thereby contributing to speaking fluency and flashcards taught how to read and how to speak correctly. It is extremely align with the previos study which mentioned about the effectiveness of flashcard in spekaing ability. Flashcards teach how to speak correctly, making speaking easier. Flashcards brings a positive effect during learning speaking skills. It can be categorized as very high and gives very satisfactory results (Ridwan and Nurhaeni 2021). While Student 8 and 9 felt that they can communicate more smoothly and correctly because we always practice and direclty in right situation. Constant practice with flashcards makes communication smoother and more correct and flashcards directly teach and practice their use in speaking.

2. Students' motivation after learning speaking using flashcards.

The second point is about students' motivation after learning to speak using flashcards. (Komachali and Khodareza 2012) said in the research that, this strategy is designed to motivate students and also make the learning process more enjoyable for students. In this part also conduct 3 questions that the researcher asked and will discuss it one by one. The first question is about; How do you feel about speaking lessons after using flashcards? Do you feel more motivated?

Based on the students opinions of Student 2, 3, 5 and 9 they believe that flashcards makes them more enthusiastic in improving my way of speaking which was not good before. They also felt really motivated and happy because learning is fun and can be put into practice straight away. Previous researches stated seem results but it was more to the vocabulary,

while this research is more in the learning process and speaking practice. By using flashcards in teaching English, the students looked so happy and it motivates them (Education n.d.). Students feel more motivated to constantly practice and improve their way of speaking. It refers to student 5 and 6 that they state they feel happy because many sentences that are repeated and easy for students to remember and learn. Repetition through flashcards helps understanding and makes students enjoy learning. (Ramdhani 2022) Flashcards are also considered to make learning more fun and the material is presented repeatedly so it is easy to understand. Flashcards help students be more enthusiastic about learning, especially to practice pronunciation and grammar. (Palka 1988) Flash card also used not only for teaching vocabulary but also for teaching propositions, articles, sentence structures, tenses, and phrasal verbs. It means learning using flashcards make students feel more understanding about grammar and structure. Although initially difficult, continued effort using flashcards increases students' speaking fluency and motivation.

The second question is about students' perceptions about the extent of influence of flashcards on their learning of speaking skills. Where in this part the researcher focuses on the students' perception of the use of flashcard in improving their ability in speaking, so how they practice their pronunciation, vocabularies, and grammar. Speaking includes several components that must be mastered: structural acquisition, vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency and understanding (Ridwan and Nurhaeni 2021). Speaking abilities must also be developed, and flash card media that can assist parents and teachers in stimulating many aspects of language development (Wani, Lubis, and Rizky 2023). Students' 3, 4 and 5 opinions show that flashcards helped overcome timidity, making the student brave enough to speak correctly, improved pronunciation and grammar in speaking and there was reluctance to use good grammar and the important thing is flashcards makes students comfortable in leaning. Other opinion stated by Student. 7, 8 stated that flashcards have transformed speaking from being slurred and irregular to more knowledgeable and grammatically correct. Overall, the responses suggest that flashcards have a strong and positive influence on students' speaking abilities. They help students become more confident, improve their pronunciation and grammar, make them more comfortable with proper grammar usage, and enable them to speak more fluently and accurately.

The results of interviews with ten students showed that the use of flashcards had a significant impact on increasing motivation to learn grammar in speaking. Based on student responses, some key themes can be identified as follows: The Effectiveness of Flashcards in Aiding Grammar Comprehension Most students feel that flashcards are an effective method in learning grammar. As pointed out by Student 1 and Student 5, flashcards help improve grammar comprehension through frequent repetition and contextualization. This shows that flashcards can be an effective tool in reinforcement learning and a good treatment for students to always stay happy in remembering by reapeatation. Labibah (2023) mentioned in an international journal that the use of English Vocabulary Flashcards could increase students' motivation to learn, creating a more enjoyable and less monotonous classroom atmosphere. And the last is motivation to always practice and speak using right grammar. Students such as Student 8 and Student 9 stated that flashcards encouraged them to keep practicing speaking using correct grammar. This motivation is also associated with positive feelings when seeing an increase in performance.

The results of this study indicate that the use of flashcards supports the development of students' speaking skills in several ways. First, flashcards help reduce students' cognitive load by providing structured stimuli, allowing them to focus more on sentence construction rather than simply memorizing vocabulary in isolation. Second, repeating sentence patterns (e.g., positive, negative, and interrogative forms) through flashcards provides opportunities for automation, thereby improving fluency and accuracy. Third, card-based activities create a safe and enjoyable learning environment, so students feel less stressed and more willing to participate actively. These findings confirm that flashcards function not only as a memorization aid but also as scaffolding, encouraging confidence and structured speaking practice.

Compared with previous research, this study's findings broaden the discussion on the pedagogical role of flashcards. Previous research has primarily focused on the effectiveness of flashcards in improving vocabulary mastery (Komachali & Khodareza, 2012; Amiruddin & Razaq, 2022; Labibah, 2023). Conversely, this study emphasizes that flashcards can be adapted to improve broader aspects of speaking, including grammar, fluency, and confidence. This contribution demonstrates the potential of flashcards as a multifunctional medium, not only for vocabulary memorization but also for communicative practice, particularly in the context of Islamic boarding schools with limited technological resources.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. It was conducted in only one location, the Istiqlal English Club (IEC) within a single Islamic boarding school (pesantren). The number of participants was limited to ten senior students, making the data less representative of the broader population. Furthermore, the learning activities were facilitated by a single teacher, so the results may have been influenced by individual teaching styles. The data collection period was also relatively short (four weeks), making it impossible to capture the long-term impact of flashcard use on students' speaking skills. Therefore, the results of this study cannot be broadly generalized to all Islamic boarding schools or other educational contexts.

Practically, this research suggests a simple classroom routine that teachers can readily adopt, even in resource-constrained environments. For example, a weekly speaking session could be structured as follows:

1. Warm-up (5 minutes): The teacher displays or distributes flashcards, and students are asked to construct positive, negative, and interrogative sentences.
2. Pairwork (10 minutes): Students practice question-and-answer sessions using flashcards, while one student records the answers.
3. Pair rotation (10 minutes): Partners are switched, and students repeat the exercise with new partners and different cards, creating variety and repetition.
4. Closing (5 minutes): The teacher asks several students to perform a short dialogue in front of the class to reinforce fluency and accuracy.

This routine is easily adaptable, requires no sophisticated technology, and can increase student engagement, motivation, and fluency. By integrating flashcards into communicative activities, teachers can provide structured, enjoyable speaking practice opportunities that simultaneously build student confidence.

CONCLUSION

This research confirms that the use of flashcards plays a crucial role in supporting students' speaking skills in environments with limited technology. Flashcards provide clear sentence structures, making it easier for students to practice, building confidence through safe and enjoyable practice, and improving language fluency through consistent use in communicative activities.

Practically, teachers can integrate simple flashcard-based routines into weekly lessons. For example, a short 10–15-minute question-and-answer session can provide meaningful opportunities for students to practice speaking in a more structured and confident manner.

For future research, it is recommended that the implementation of flashcards be tested at different grade levels or in other schools to determine whether similar findings emerge in broader educational contexts.

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