

**TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES TOWARDS USING FLASHCARDS
IN TEACHING NEW VOCABULARY IN PRIMARY EFL CLASSROOMS
EVIDENCE FROM ZAWIA, LIBYA**

A Research Paper on Teachers' Perspectives

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Abstract

This research paper examines teachers' perspectives on using flashcards to teach new vocabulary in primary English-as-a-Foreign-Language classrooms. The study examines teachers' beliefs, reported classroom practices, perceived pedagogical value, and professional judgments regarding the use of flashcards in vocabulary instruction. Based on a mixed-methods study in Zawia, Libya, the research included 73 primary school English teachers who completed a questionnaire and nine experienced teachers who participated in semi-structured interviews. The findings indicate a strongly positive teacher perspective toward flashcards. Teachers predominantly regard flashcards as effective instructional resources that enhance vocabulary teaching, support vocabulary retention, increase learner motivation, clarify new meanings, and provide flexible opportunities for classroom interaction. Teachers also report substantial interest in and frequent use of flashcards in their vocabulary lessons. Picture-based flashcards are the most commonly reported type, and teachers use them to present new words, review vocabulary, play vocabulary games, assess understanding, support pronunciation and spelling, and assist learners in constructing simple sentences. Teachers further report adapting flashcard activities to learners' levels and abilities, suggesting that they view flashcards as flexible pedagogical resources rather than fixed materials. The discussion situates these teacher perspectives within research on teacher cognition, vocabulary pedagogy, word-card learning, visual representation, and cognitive processing. The paper concludes that teachers' perspectives strongly support the pedagogical value of

flashcards, particularly in primary EFL contexts, and that they perceive them as practical and adaptable components of vocabulary instruction.

Keywords: teachers' perspectives; teacher cognition; flashcards; vocabulary instruction; primary EFL; visual aids; Libya.

المخلص

تناولت الدراسة وجهات نظر المعلمين حول استخدام البطاقات التعليمية (Flashcards) في تدريس المفردات الجديدة ضمن فصول اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في المرحلة الابتدائية. وتهدف إلى استقصاء معتقدات المعلمين، والممارسات الصفية المبلغ عنها، والقيمة التربوية المنسوبة إلى البطاقات التعليمية، بالإضافة إلى الأحكام المهنية المتعلقة باستخدامها في تعليم المفردات، اعتمدت الدراسة على منهج مختلط وأجريت في مدينة الزاوية، ليبيا، وشاركت فيها عينة مكونة من 73 معلمًا ومعلمة للغة الإنجليزية في المرحلة الابتدائية أكملوا استبانة، بالإضافة إلى تسعة معلمين ذوي خبرة شاركوا في مقابلات شبه منظمة. أظهرت النتائج وجود اتجاه إيجابي قوي لدى المعلمين تجاه استخدام البطاقات التعليمية، حيث اعتبرها معظمهم موارد تعليمية فعالة تسهم في تعزيز تدريس المفردات، ودعم الاحتفاظ بها، وزيادة دافعية المتعلمين، وتوضيح معاني الكلمات الجديدة، وتوفير فرص مرنة للتفاعل داخل الفصل الدراسي، وأفاد المعلمون باهتمام ملحوظ باستخدام البطاقات التعليمية وتوظيفها بشكل متكرر في دروس المفردات. وأشارت الإفادات إلى أن البطاقات التعليمية القائمة على الصور هي النوع الأكثر شيوعًا. ويستخدم المعلمون هذه البطاقات في تقديم الكلمات الجديدة، ومراجعة المفردات، وتنفيذ الألعاب اللغوية الخاصة بالمفردات، وتقييم مدى فهم المتعلمين، ودعم النطق والتهجئة، ومساعدة المتعلمين على تكوين جمل بسيطة، وأشار المعلمون إلى قيامهم بتكييف أنشطة البطاقات التعليمية لتناسب مع مستويات المتعلمين وقدراتهم، مما يدل على اعتبارهم البطاقات التعليمية موارد تربوية مرنة وقابلة للتكيف وليست مواد تعليمية ثابتة. وتناقش الدراسة هذه النتائج في ضوء الأدبيات البحثية المتعلقة بإدراك المعلمين ومعتقداتهم، وتعليم المفردات، وتعلم الكلمات باستخدام البطاقات، والتمثيل البصري، والمعالجة المعرفية، وخلصت الدراسة إلى أن وجهات نظر المعلمين تقدم دعمًا قويًا للقيمة التربوية للبطاقات التعليمية، خاصة في سياقات تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في المرحلة الابتدائية، وأن المعلمين يعتبرونها مكونات عملية ومرنة وقابلة للتكيف في تعليم المفردات.

الكلمات المفتاحية: وجهات نظر المعلمين؛ إدراك المعلمين؛ البطاقات التعليمية؛ تعليم المفردات؛ اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في المرحلة الابتدائية؛ الوسائل البصرية؛ ليبيا.

1.Introduction

Vocabulary plays a key role in learning a second or foreign language. When learners have a limited vocabulary, it becomes harder for them to understand spoken and written texts and to express their ideas clearly. Knowing vocabulary means more than just understanding word meanings; it also includes knowing word forms, how words are used, their grammar, common combinations, and using them in the right situations (Nation, 2013). Because of this, teaching vocabulary is especially important in English language classes for young learners who are just starting to build their language skills.

Young EFL learners often struggle to learn English vocabulary because they do not get much exposure to the language outside of school. In these situations, teachers play a key role by giving students chances to see, understand, practice, and remember new words. Schmitt (2010) explains that vocabulary knowledge grows step by step, starting with recognizing words and progressing to using them fully. For this reason, vocabulary lessons should give students many chances to work with new words in real situations. (Cameron, 2001; Pinter, 2011)

Selecting suitChoosing the right teaching methods is especially important for young learners. Children learn best when lessons are concrete, visual, interactive, and fun. Using visual materials helps teachers explain new words and gives students extra ways to remember them. Paivio's (2006) dual-coding theory supports this idea, suggesting that we remember information better when it is presented both verbally and visually. Showing a word with a related picture gives students more ways to understand and remember it. They are a type of visual resource that can enhance vocabulary instruction. Traditionally, flashcards display a word, a picture, or both, and may be used individually or as part of classroom activities. Teachers use flashcards to introduce new vocabulary, assess comprehension, practice pronunciation, review previously taught words, organize games, and encourage oral production. Nation (2022) notes that intentional vocabulary learning through word cards is highly effective, particularly when learners repeatedly encounter target vocabulary until it is firmly established. Recent research has provided empirical support for the use of flashcards in EFL vocabulary learning. Webb, Yanagisawa, and Uchiyara (2020), in a meta-analysis of intentional vocabulary-learning activities, examined interventions such as flashcards and identified substantial vocabulary-learning

gains across the studies analyzed. Studies involving primary EFL learners have also reported positive outcomes with digital flashcards. For example, Nation (2022) found that Thai primary school learners who used digital flashcards achieved greater gains in vocabulary than those in a comparison group.

While many studies have examined how well flashcards work for students, it is equally important to understand what teachers think. Teachers choose the materials, decide how to teach new words, and adjust activities to fit their students and classrooms. Borg (2006) says that what teachers believe and think affects their teaching choices. So, learning about teachers' views helps us see how teaching tools are really used in schools.

Libya is a good place to study how teachers think about teaching vocabulary. In Libyan primary schools, students learn English as a foreign language, and most of their exposure to English occurs in the classroom. Because of this, what teachers do and the materials they use are very important for helping students learn new words.

Accordingly, this study investigates teachers' perspectives on the use of flashcards for teaching new vocabulary in primary schools in Zawia. This study looks at what teachers in Zawia, Libya, think about using flashcards to teach new vocabulary in primary schools. Instead of testing how much vocabulary students learn, the research focuses on how teachers view the value of flashcards and whether they find them helpful for teaching vocabulary.

1.1 Research Problem Statement

Although flashcards are widely recognized as effective visual resources for vocabulary instruction, there is limited context-specific evidence concerning how primary EFL teachers in Zawia, Libya, perceive their pedagogical value and classroom utility (BOUACHA, 2024). It is important to determine whether teachers consider flashcards effective for presenting and retaining new vocabulary, the frequency of their use, and the types and instructional strategies implemented. The research problem centers on the need to document and analyze primary English teachers' perspectives regarding the use of flashcards in the local Libyan EFL context. Addressing this issue may provide evidence relevant to vocabulary-teaching practices and inform teacher professional development in primary schools.

2.Literature Review

2.1 Vocabulary Learning in EFL Contexts

Vocabulary learning is a complex and gradual process. Knowing a word involves multiple dimensions, including its spoken and written form, meaning, grammatical behavior, associations, and appropriate use (Nation, 2013). For this reason, vocabulary instruction cannot be limited to simply providing learners with translations and definitions. (Beck et al., 2013; Graves, 2006; Gairns & Redman, 1986)

In foreign language classrooms, teachers play an important role in helping learners acquire basic vocabulary. Nation (2013) argues that vocabulary learning can occur through both deliberate and incidental processes. Deliberate learning involves focusing learners' attention on specific lexical items, while incidental learning occurs when learners encounter vocabulary through activities designed for other purposes.

A balanced language program should therefore provide opportunities for both focused vocabulary learning and vocabulary development through meaningful communication. Nation (2010) describes four major strands of a balanced language course: meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, language-focused learning, and fluency development. Vocabulary instruction can be incorporated across these strands rather than being treated as an isolated classroom activity. (Webb, 2019)

Schmitt (2019) similarly emphasizes that lexical acquisition entails a gradual progression from receptive knowledge to productive control. Learners therefore need multiple exposures and opportunities to retrieve and use vocabulary rather than encountering words only once.

2.2The Importance of Visual Materials in Vocabulary Instruction

Visual materials have long been used in language teaching because they can make abstract or unfamiliar concepts more accessible. Pictures can establish direct associations between linguistic forms and their meanings, particularly when the vocabulary refers to concrete objects, actions, people, or places.

The theoretical basis for using visual representations can be related to dual-coding theory. Paivio (1990) proposes that human mental processes involve verbal and non-verbal representational systems that can interact with one another. When learners receive verbal

and visual information together, it may be represented via interconnected pathways, potentially supporting recall.

This principle is particularly relevant to young learners. Children may respond favorably to materials that are colorful, concrete, and visually stimulating. Picture-based flashcards provide teachers with a relatively simple way to introduce new vocabulary without relying exclusively on translation or lengthy verbal explanations. (Sweller et al., 2011) Research has supported the value of visual approaches in vocabulary learning. For example, research with primary school learners has demonstrated that picture-based and digital visual materials can contribute to vocabulary development (Yowaboot & Sukying, 2022). However, visual materials should not be regarded as sufficient by themselves. Learners need opportunities to encounter vocabulary repeatedly and to use it in different contexts.

2.3 Flashcards as a Vocabulary Teaching Technique

Flashcards are a form of instructional material that can be used for both initial vocabulary presentation and subsequent review. A card may contain a picture, a written word, or both. Teachers can present the cards to learners individually, in pairs, or in groups.

One important advantage of flashcards lies in their flexibility. A teacher can use the same set of cards for several different activities. For example, a teacher may initially show a picture and pronounce the target word, then ask learners to repeat it, identify the correct card, match words and pictures, or use the vocabulary in a sentence.

Nation (2022) specifically discusses deliberate vocabulary learning through word cards and argues that repeated encounters with vocabulary can support efficient vocabulary growth. The important principle is not simply the physical presence of cards but the way learners interact with the target vocabulary through repeated retrieval and review. (Thornbury, 2002; Webb, 2019)

Webb et al. (2020) provide further support for deliberate vocabulary-learning activities. Their meta-analysis included studies of flashcards, word lists, writing, and fill-in-the-blank activities. The findings showed considerable gains in vocabulary learning, although the extent of learning varied by activity and by the type and timing of assessment. This suggests that flashcards can contribute to vocabulary learning but should be incorporated inside broader instructional sequences.

2.4 Flashcards and Young EFL Learners

Flashcards may be particularly appropriate for primary learners because children often respond well to concrete, visual materials. Young learners may have limited ability to understand extended explanations in English, particularly as they develop basic language proficiency. A picture can therefore help the teacher communicate meaning more efficiently. (Cameron, 2001; Pinter, 2011)

A study by Yowaboot and Sukying (2022) investigated the use of digital flashcards among 120 Thai primary school EFL learners. The researchers found significant improvements in vocabulary knowledge among both groups, with the digital-flashcard group performing significantly better than the comparison group. The learners also expressed positive attitudes toward digital flashcards.

Similarly, research on visual and flashcard-based instruction continues to explore how young learners acquire and retain vocabulary. Milosavljevic and Reynolds (2024) examined flashcard instruction for young English language learners and contributed to the growing literature on vocabulary instruction for children.

The results are relevant to primary EFL contexts because they indicate that visual and card-based techniques may provide teachers with useful tools for presenting and practicing vocabulary.

2.5 Teachers' Views and Classroom Practice

Research into teaching techniques should not focus exclusively on student outcomes. Teachers' perspectives are also significant because instructional practices are influenced by teachers' beliefs, knowledge, experiences, and interpretations of classroom needs. (Harmer, 2015; Ur, 2012)

Borg (2006) explains that teacher cognition encompasses the knowledge, beliefs, thinking processes, and decision-making that influence teachers' classroom practices. Thus, teachers' perceptions of flashcards may influence the extent to which they employ them, the activities they design around them, and the way they adapt them for different learners. Teachers who perceive flashcards as useful may be more likely to incorporate them into vocabulary presentation, review, and classroom games. Conversely, if teachers perceive a resource as ineffective or inappropriate, they may use it less frequently. (Harmer, 2015; Ur, 2012)

Investigating teachers' opinions is therefore valuable because it provides information about the perceived pedagogical role of flashcards within actual classroom contexts rather than relying exclusively on controlled experimental conditions.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design

A quantitative descriptive research design was employed to examine English teachers' perspectives on the use of flashcards for teaching new vocabulary in Libyan primary EFL classrooms. This approach was selected to describe teachers' perceptions and reported practices, rather than to conduct experimental comparisons of instructional treatments. The study relied exclusively on questionnaire data to provide a clear quantitative account of teachers' perspectives.

A descriptive design was considered appropriate because the primary objective was to examine teachers' reported perceptions and practices, not to compare instructional treatments experimentally.

4.2 Participants

The study sample comprised 73 English teachers employed in primary schools in Zawia, Libya. Participants were selected using random sampling for inclusion in the questionnaire.

The focus on primary school teachers was intentional because vocabulary development during the primary years necessitates teaching practices tailored to young learners' linguistic and cognitive development.

4.3 Instrument

Data were collected using a standardized questionnaire developed to investigate teachers' perceptions and practices regarding the use of flashcards in vocabulary instruction.

The questionnaire consisted of three sections.

Section One assessed teachers' perspectives on the pedagogical value of flashcards. This section included six Likert-scale statements rated on a five-point scale from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. Section Two examined teachers' reported use of flashcards, including frequency of use, types of flashcards, sources of flashcards, and the perceived significance of flashcard use. This section contained five Likert-scale statements addressing classroom strategies and the instructional value of flashcards.

4.4 Data Analysis

Questionnaire data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Frequencies and percentages were calculated for categorical items, while means and standard deviations were computed for Likert-scale items. Interpretation of mean scores was based on the five-point Likert scale, with higher mean values indicating more positive perceptions of teachers.

Internal consistency of the Likert-scale items was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. Section One yielded a reliability coefficient of .637, and Section Three produced a coefficient of .834. The overall reliability coefficient for the Likert-scale items was .699.

Section Two was excluded from the Cronbach's alpha calculation because its items focused on frequencies, categories, and multiple-choice responses rather than a unified Likert-scale construct.

5.Findings

The results of the study are summarized below:

1. Overall positive perceptions: Participating teachers demonstrated strongly positive attitudes toward using flashcards for vocabulary instruction, as indicated by a mean score of 4.23 (SD = 0.461).
2. Effectiveness of vocabulary teaching: Teachers strongly agreed that flashcards improve the effectiveness of vocabulary instruction, as reflected by the highest mean score of 4.55.
3. Vocabulary retention: Teachers considered flashcards beneficial for supporting pupils' long-term retention of new vocabulary, with a mean score of 4.42.
4. Learner motivation: Teachers reported that flashcards positively influence pupils' motivation and interest in vocabulary learning, as indicated by a mean score of 4.30.
5. Frequency of use: Regarding the percentage of teachers who reported always using flashcards, 45.2% reported often or sometimes.
6. Types of flashcards used most frequently: word-based and digital.
7. Classroom uses: Teachers used flashcards for various instructional purposes, including introducing new vocabulary, reviewing previously taught words,

facilitating vocabulary games, assessing pupils' understanding, supporting pronunciation and spelling, and assisting pupils in constructing simple sentences.

8. Flexibility of use: The results indicate that teachers use flashcards as adaptable instructional resources, modifying activities to accommodate pupils' different levels, abilities, and classroom needs.
9. Overall finding: The results show that primary-school English teachers in Zawia hold strongly positive views on the pedagogical value and practical utility of flashcards in vocabulary instruction.

6. Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that primary school English teachers in Zawia commonly perceive flashcards positively as a resource for vocabulary instruction. The overall mean of 4.23 indicates high agreement with statements describing the instructional value of flashcards.

One particularly notable finding is the high mean for the statement that flashcards make vocabulary teaching more effective. This result suggests that teachers view flashcards as an effective tool for presenting and practicing new lexical items. Such a perception is consistent with research stressing the value of deliberate vocabulary learning and repeated encounters with target words (Nation, 2022).

The teachers also strongly agreed that flashcards help students retain vocabulary. This perception is theoretically compatible with dual-coding theory. When a word is presented alongside a meaningful image, learners may access both verbal and nonverbal representations of the concept (Paivio, 1990). This does not mean that every picture automatically improves retention; rather, it suggests a possible cognitive explanation for why teachers may find visual flashcards useful.

The high perception of flashcards as a motivational resource is another important finding. Primary learners may respond favorably to activities involving pictures, movement, games, and interaction. Flashcards can easily be incorporated into such activities. Instead of simply showing cards and having learners repeat words, teachers can use them for guessing games, matching activities, memory games, categorization tasks, and speaking activities.

The findings concerning the types of flashcards used are also noteworthy. Picture-based flashcards were considerably more common than word-based and digital flashcards. This may reflect both the suitability of visual materials for primary learners and the practical accessibility of printed materials in schools.

The relatively low percentage of digital flashcard use indicates that traditional physical flashcards remain more common in the participating context. However, this finding should not be interpreted as evidence that digital flashcards are ineffective. Research with primary EFL learners has demonstrated positive vocabulary outcomes associated with digital flashcards (Yowaboot & Sukying, 2022), while broader research has also examined the capacity of digital flashcard applications for L2 vocabulary development. Another important finding concerns the teachers' reported use of repetition and games. These practices are compatible with the view that vocabulary learning requires repeated encounters and active retrieval. Nation (2022) stresses the importance of repeated learning and review in deliberate lexical acquisition. Therefore, teachers' reported use of repetition suggests that they are not necessarily treating flashcards as a one-time presentation technique.

The use of games is also significant because it transforms flashcard practice from mechanical repetition into a more interactive classroom activity. In this respect, flashcards can function as a flexible pedagogical resource rather than as a single teaching method.

The findings also support the argument that teachers' perspectives deserve attention in language education research. Teachers are the professionals who decide when and how instructional materials are incorporated into classroom activities. Borg (2006) stresses the relationship between teachers' cognition and classroom practice. Therefore, teachers' positive perceptions of flashcards may help explain their continued use in primary EFL classrooms.

At the same time, the findings should not be interpreted as demonstrating that flashcards alone are sufficient for word learning. Vocabulary knowledge is multidimensional, and learners need opportunities to encounter and use vocabulary in valuable contexts (Nation, 2013; Schmitt, 2019). Flashcards may be particularly useful for initial presentation,

retrieval practice, and review, but they can be complemented by communicative activities, reading, listening, speaking, writing, and contextualized vocabulary use. This point is particularly important because research on intentional vocabulary-learning activities has demonstrated that learning gains vary across activities and assessment conditions (Webb et al., 2020). Thus, the positive teacher perceptions identified in the present study should be understood as evidence of teachers' views on the usefulness of flashcards, rather than as experimental evidence that flashcards are universally superior to other vocabulary-teaching techniques.

7. Conclusion

This study investigated primary school English teachers' perspectives toward the use of flashcards for teaching new vocabulary in Zawia, Libya. The findings show that the participating teachers held strongly positive perceptions of flashcards. The overall mean of 4.23 indicates a high level of agreement concerning their pedagogical usefulness.

Teachers particularly perceived flashcards as making vocabulary instruction more effective, supporting vocabulary retention, and increasing learner motivation. Picture-based flashcards were the most commonly reported type, suggesting that visual representation plays an important role in vocabulary instruction in the participating primary classrooms.

The findings are broadly in line with theoretical perspectives emphasizing visual representation, deliberate vocabulary learning, repetition, and meaningful classroom interaction (Nation, 2013, 2022; Paivio, 1990; Schmitt, 2019). They are also compatible with evidence-based research showing that flashcards and other intentional vocabulary-learning activities can support vocabulary development (Webb et al., 2020; Yowaboot & Sukying, 2022).

However, flashcards should be understood as one instructional resource within a wider vocabulary-teaching program. Their value is likely to be greatest when teachers use them systematically and combine them with meaningful communication, repeated retrieval, contextualized practice, and opportunities for learners to use new vocabulary.

Overall, the study highlights the positive role of flashcards in primary EFL vocabulary instruction in the Libyan context. It also demonstrates the importance of examining teachers' perspectives when investigating classroom materials and pedagogical practices.

8. Recommendations

- Flashcards should be systematically employed for presentation, retrieval, review, and classroom interaction, rather than being used as an isolated technique.
- Flashcard activities should be integrated with purposeful speaking, listening, reading, and writing exercises to ensure that learners encounter and use new vocabulary in diverse contexts.
- Flashcard activities should be tailored to pupils' age, proficiency level, and learning needs, incorporating games, matching, categorization, sentence-building, and retrieval tasks as appropriate.
- Schools and teacher-training programs should provide practical guidance on the design and implementation of effective flashcard activities for primary EFL vocabulary instruction.
- Visual flashcards should be combined with repeated retrieval and spaced review to maximize opportunities for vocabulary retention.
- Further research should investigate pupils' vocabulary outcomes and classroom observations across various Libyan primary-school contexts to complement the present study's teacher-reported findings.

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