USE OF MIND-MAPPING AND FLASHCARDS IN VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT AMONG YEAR 5 STUDENTS

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I dedicate this piece of work to my husband, Raunny Nair,

beloved children, Prashanth Nair, Krishanth Nair, Vishanth Nair,

my family and friends for their love, motivation and support.

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ABSTRACT

Vocabulary learning problems may be barriers to successful language learning. In view of that, teachers must find ways to improve students' vocabulary and second language proficiency. This study highlights the importance of learning vocabulary and the strategies used to teach vocabulary. The study was done to investigate the use of mind-mapping and flashcards in vocabulary development among Year 5 students. To facilitate this study, thirty Year 5 students of a national primary school were chosen the respondents. A quasi experimental design was carried out on two experimental groups. The study was administered for eight weeks during their English lessons. Each treatment lasted for one hour. Intervention was administered to both the experimental groups. A pre-test was given before the intervention followed by a post-test after the intervention to both the groups. The test scores were analysed using the SPSS and the responses from the teachers' interview was transcribed and analysed. The findings indicated that the intervention was successfully carried out and the results obtained were favourable. The students who were taught vocabulary using the mind-mapping method performed better than the students who were taught using the flashcards method. However, both group of students who were taught vocabulary using mind-mapping and flashcards showed positive effect. Thus, both methods have a positive effect on vocabulary development. The teachers' interview discloses that teachers are aware of the many strategies available in teaching vocabulary and mid-mapping and flashcards are also used for this purpose. It was also evident that teachers decide on the type of strategies to teach vocabulary, after taking into consideration students' proficiency level. Teachers shoulder great responsibility in students' vocabulary development. Therefore, teachers should take the initiative to ensure that vocabulary development is given importance and made meaningful through a myriad and mixture of teaching methods to cater to students' proficiency level, learning style and preference.

ABSTRAK

Masalah pembelajaran perbendaharaan kata mungkin menjadi halangan kepada pembelajaran bahasa. Sehubungan itu , guru-guru perlu mencari jalan untuk meningkatkan perbendaharaan kata pelajar. Kajian ini dilakukan untuk menyiasat penggunaan peta minda dan kad imbasan dalam pembangunan perbendaharaan kata di kalangan pelajar Tahun 5. Responden kajian ini adalah tiga puluh orang pelajar Tahun 5 dari sekolah rendah kebangsaan. Satu eksperimen kuasi telah dijalankan ke atas dua kumpulan eksperimen. Kajian ini telah dijalankan selama lapan minggu semasa waktu pelajaran Bahasa Inggeris selama satu jam setiap kali. . Satu pra - ujian telah diberikan sebelum diberi rawatan diikuti dengan ujian pos selepas rawatan diberi kepada kedua-dua kumpulan. Skor ujian dianalisis dengan menggunakan SPSS dan temuduga guru telah ditranskrip dan dianalisis. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa rawatan yang diberi telah berjaya dijalankan dan keputusan yang diperolehi adalah menggalakkan. Pelajar yang telah diajar perbendaharaan kata menggunakan kaedah peta minda memperolehi prestasi yang lebih baik daripada pelajar-pelajar yang diajar menggunakan kaedah kad imbasan . Walau bagaimanapun, kedua-dua kumpulan pelajar menunjukkan kesan positif. Oleh itu, kedua-dua kaedah yang digunakan mempunyai kesan positif kepada pembangunan perbendaharaan kata. Temuduga guru mendedahkan bahawa mereka tahu tentang pelbagai strategi yang terdapat dalam pengajaran perbendaharaan kata dan peta minda dan kad imbasan juga digunakan untuk tujuan ini. Guru memikul tanggungjawab yang besar dalam pembangunan perbendaharaan kata pelajar. Oleh itu, guru perlu mengambil inisiatif untuk memastikan bahawa pembangunan perbendaharaan kata diberi kepentingan dan dijadikan bermakna melalui gabungan pelbagai dan kaedah pengajaran untuk memenuhi tahap penguasaan pelajar , gaya dan keutamaan pembelajaran.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ESL   -   English as Second Language

L2   -   Second Language Learners

KBSR   -   Kurikulum Baru Sekolah Rendah

UPSR   -   Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0   Introduction

In order to be able to communicate with someone, knowing words becomes very important. Learners need to acquire a number of different components of a language before they are able to learn a language. Apart from mastering the sentences and grammar structure of a particular language, learner's vocabulary knowledge is a central and a very important component in acquiring a second language. Lewis (1997) advocates that the acquisition of vocabulary plays a central role in learning a second language. This is further supported by Zimmerman(1997) that vocabulary is central to language and of critical importance to the typical language learner.

In fact, vocabulary makes the essence of a language and vocabulary learning is a fundamental part of language teaching. A study by Horwitz (1988) found that a substantial number of English as a second language (ESL) students either agreed or strongly agreed with the notion that the most essential element of learning a foreign language is learning the vocabulary as it is the first and foremost important step in language acquisition.

Although vocabulary as a major component of language learning has been the focus of numerous studies (e.g. Laufer, 1997), a number of researchers agree that there is very little research carried out in the field of vocabulary learning (Folse, 2004; Hunt and Beglar, 2005) and that the most effective means of vocabulary learning is still unclear (de Groot, 2006).

Another aspect widely mentioned in studies is the teacher's role in vocabulary development. For example, Mehta (2009) believes that in a classroom where students are not finding themselves comfortable with the second language, language learning can be made interactive and interesting with the introduction of appropriate vocabulary exercises. In addition, teachers should not assume that the words would be automatically acquired. A teacher, therefore, has to devise activities and give enough support to enable the second language (L2) learners to learn them and they should not be expected to be automatically acquired.

Learning is not only a cognitive development but is also of shared social practices and both of these are vital in classroom teaching (Walqui, 2003). Hence, learning opportunities are created when learners interact with each other and with the teacher while focusing on matters of shared interest. Vocabulary learning thus, should be a fundamental part of language teaching, and the onus is on the teachers, to play an effective role in creating such learning opportunities that focus on vocabulary development. There are various strategies and approaches which learners and teachers can employ to learn and teach vocabulary respectively.

This study aims to highlight vocabulary development as an integral part of language learning at primary school level (which at present has been neglected due to various constraints and concerns) and the role teachers need to play to develop the vocabulary level in their students. The study considers vocabulary acquisition as the foundation to learning a language that could lead to better proficiency of the target language. The term 'proficiency' here, refers to the ability of the learner to speak or perform both fluently and accurately, in the target

language - English. Thus, this study attempts to investigate the use of mind-mapping and flashcards among the many other strategies to improve vocabulary in the language classroom.

1.1   Background of Study

English is one of the important languages taught in many countries around the world. In Malaysia, English is taught as a core subject in the primary school and secondary school level in keeping with its status as a second language in the country. The primary English language syllabus, for instance, declares: "In keeping with the National Education Policy, English is taught as a second language in all government-assisted schools in the country at both the primary and secondary levels of schooling." (KPM, 1995)

English language is taught from Year 1 at the primary level of education until the end of the secondary level. Currently it is taught using the Integrated Primary School Curriculum (Kurikulum Baru Sekolah Rendah) and the Integrated Secondary School Curriculum (Kurikulum Baru Sekolah Menengah) where the syllabus is topic and skill based. According to the Integrated Curriculum for Primary Schools, listening, speaking, reading and writing form the core of the primary school English Syllabus. The English Language Curriculum for Primary Schools aims to equip pupils with these basic language skills to enable them to communicate effectively in a variety of contexts that is appropriate to the pupils' level of development. The lack of proficiency in a second language may hamper the learning processes among students. Due to different cultural background, complex grammar rules and unique pronunciation, both learning or acquiring and   teaching English as a second language   is a very challenging task.

The Primary School Evaluation Test, also known as *Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah* (commonly abbreviated as UPSR in Malay), is a national examination taken by all students in Malaysia at the end of their sixth year in primary school before they leave for secondary school. It is prepared and examined by the Malaysian Examinations Syndicate (Lembaga Peperiksaan Malaysia), an agency that constitutes the Ministry of Education. The English examination is divided into 2 papers, Paper 1 and Paper 2. Paper 1 contains 40 multiple choice questions which test the vocabulary level of students, using social expressions, grammar, punctuation, spelling and comprehension questions based on a liner and a non-linear text. Paper 2, has 3 subjective questions whereby students describe a picture in 5 sentences, transfer information from a text into a table and write a short paragraph on a choice made from the information in the given text and writing a guided essay based on three pictures. Therefore in order to get good grades, students need to perform well in both Paper 1 and Paper 2.

However, many students are not able to achieve high marks in the English Paper 2, as they are not often able to fulfill requirements in this area. Therefore, most Level 2 teachers lay their focus on improving students' writing skills for the Paper Two of the UPSR English Language paper instead of preparing by equipping students with adequate vocabulary for Paper 1 which will help them improve in the four basic skills in learning English which is listening, speaking, reading and writing skills.

Vocabulary size of L2 learners is vital as numerous studies indicate that learners would be able to read only after a threshold of proficiency has been achieved. Nation (1993) provided evidence that English language learners need to know approximately 2000 high-frequency word families (root word plus affixes) to understand 85% of most text. Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2002) suggest that a student's vocabulary should increase by 2,000-3,000 words a year. In addition, about 400 of those words should be taught directly. These studies

evidently indicate learners need to know 2000-3000 words to be able to comprehend what is read.

Second language (L2) learners are generally conscious of the fact that the limitations in their vocabulary knowledge affect their fluency both in spoken and written language. There are many techniques of making the students interested in what they learn especially in learning vocabulary. Brown (1994:48) says, "techniques are the specific activities manifested in the classroom that are consistent with a method and therefore in harmony with an approach as well."

Currently in Malaysian schools, students are taught vocabulary using various methods like word memorization, visuals, flashcards and relia. Traditional techniques of presenting new words in class or requiring students to memorize lists of vocabulary items seem old-fashioned in the context of current task-based language programs (Read, 2004). Thus, this study seeks to investigate the use of mind mapping and flashcards in student's vocabulary development while enhancing overall language learning experience.

This study discusses a project which conducted among thirty average proficiency Standard 5 pupils in a primary school in Johor Bahru, comparing the use of two strategies namely mind-mapping and flashcards. This study seeks to investigate which strategy used enhances students' vocabulary. Vocabulary items taught is based on the vocabulary list given in the Year 5 English Language Primary School Syllabus (Appendix C). Thus, this study particularly aims to seek to investigate the use of mind mapping and flashcards in students' vocabulary development in the English Language.

1.2   Statement of Problem

In the field of English language learning, there are many factors that has an effect on Malaysian students' English language proficiency. The main factors are students' learning styles, teachers' teaching styles, students' background and so on. As a study by Granowsky (2002) shows, many researchers have confirmed the important role vocabulary knowledge plays in students' reading comprehension, and therefore in their school success. Also, having limited vocabulary knowledge, students are not able to express and communicate well. Although vocabulary has been the subject of many studies, few researches have revealed the effective techniques of vocabulary teaching. So, it is of prime importance to attempt to find the most effective technique of vocabulary teaching. According to Allen (1983), all experienced language teachers confirm the important role of words and know that the lack of them leads to feeling of insecurity.

One of the most challenging aspects of language learning is the acquisition of vocabulary (Azadeh Asgari, 2010). Based on the monthly tests and examination analysis in the current primary school where research is carried out, it is evident that many students are weak in the English Language. Most learners especially learners from the average group and low achievers in my school, however, complain that they do not know the words, their meanings or they cannot remember the words they have learned. While the growth in vocabulary may appear to be spontaneous and natural in young children, it is important to keep in mind the complexity of learning vocabulary (Wolf-Nelson, 2002).

Based on the analysis of the English school based examination and UPSR examination in the current primary school where research is being carried out, many students are not performing well in the English Language as most of them could not achieve the demand of school that every student must at least get a grade 'C' or score more than 40 marks in their examination to pass this subject. It is an uphill task indeed to motivate students to learn the English Language and it

is a challenge for many teachers. For this reason, the main purpose of this study is to generally compare students' vocabulary learning strategies and to investigate which effective vocabulary learning strategies are used by average proficient students in order to further provide students with effective vocabulary learning strategies.

Meanwhile, this study aims to present a better language learning strategy mainly for average learners. An awareness of individual differences in learning makes ESL educators and curriculum designers more sensitive to their roles in teaching and learning. Furthermore, it also helps the students to develop techniques and tools to become more motivated and independent learners. This study addresses these shortcomings, and investigates the effectiveness of using mind-mapping and flashcards in acquiring vocabulary. Naturally, as an English Language teacher, this study would serve as a guideline for me and other English Language teachers to use alternative teaching strategies to overcome students' problems in vocabulary development.

1.3   Purpose of the Study

In line with the above, it is evident that effective strategies in teaching vocabulary should be developed to facilitate and improve vocabulary acquisition. The current study is conducted to investigate the use of mind mapping and flashcards to develop students' vocabulary. This study also aims to study teachers' perception on using mind-mapping and flashcards to improve vocabulary.

1.4   Research Objectives

The objectives of this particular study are to:

1. investigate the effects of the use of mind- mapping and flashcards on students' vocabulary development in the English Language.

2. identify the perception of teachers in using mind-mapping and flashcards to develop students' vocabulary in the English Language.

1.5   Research Questions

The research questions are:

1. Do the use of mind-mapping and flashcard enhance students' vocabulary development?

2. What are the perception of teachers' in using mind-mapping and flashcards for students' vocabulary development?

1.6   Significance of the Study

Vocabulary learning problems may be barriers to successful language learning. Thus, solving these problems may be of great help to both students and teachers. If we want to provide guidelines and solve vocabulary acquisition problems, it is necessary to discover those problems and perceive their nature.

In view of that, teachers must find ways to improve students' vocabulary and L2 proficiency. At the end of the day, the aim of most primary schools in

Malaysia is to ensure that their L2 students are equipped with sufficient vocabulary which enables them to master the four basic language skills being listening, speaking, reading and writing.

There are some contributions that this study may offer. The findings from this study are expected to benefit the teachers as well as students in taking advantage of using mind-mapping and flashcards, if it is proven to be effective in improving vocabulary. Besides, this current study provides a better understanding on using mind-mapping and flashcards to develop vocabulary and inspire a research area in investigating the effectiveness of these strategies. Therefore this study may be significant to teachers and students in order to develop and improve students' vocabulary.

1.7   Scope of the Study

This study involves Year 5 primary school students with average proficiency. They come from a school in the district of Johor Bahru , in the state of Johor.

Thirty students chosen for this research are from an average class and they consist of Malay and Indian boys and girls. The performance of these students, range from intermediate level to high intermediate level based on the marks in the previous year- end examination.

This study primarily investigates whether the use of mind-mapping or flashcards will help in developing vocabulary among Year 5 students. The vocabulary questions given uses the standard format of the Primary School Evaluation Test, known as "Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah (UPSR) provided by the Malaysian Examination Syndicate.

1.8   Conceptual Framework

Vocabulary is closely related to every communicative language teaching methods used in grammar, text, listening, writing and other language skills. The significance to master the principles and spirits of Communicative Approach is to help students to improve learning strategies and develop communicative consciousness which helps to broaden their vocabulary, enhance the vocabulary knowledge so that the ability to listen, speak, read and write will be developed and the communicative capability will be improved. The researcher will keep the communicative principle in mind during the vocabulary teaching.

The conceptual framework for this study has Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) as the basis to vocabulary teaching. It is divided in two, one being strategies involved and the other is the perception of teachers using the two strategies involved. Two strategies employed in the teaching of vocabulary in this study are mind-mapping and flashcards to investigate which strategy used is effective in developing students' vocabulary. The conceptual framework is illustrated in Figure 1.

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┌─────────────────────────────────┐
│     VOCABULARY TEACHING          │
└─────────────────────────────────┘
                 │
                 ▼
        ┌──────────────────┐
        │   STRATEGIES     │
        │     USED         │
        └──────────────────┘
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MIND-MAPPING

*visually outlines information.

*Created around a single word
 or text.

*Represent words, ideas, and task.

*Related to a key central idea.

FLASHCARDS

*Provide visual link between

 L1 and target language.

*Motivating and eye-catching

*Create logical grouping of
 target words

*Can be taken everywhere

STUDENTS'
VOCABULARY KNOWLEDGE
 Develop vocabulary and improve the

 four basic language skills: listening, speaking,

reading and   writing skills.

TEACHERS' PERCEPTION

Teachers' perception in using mind-mapping

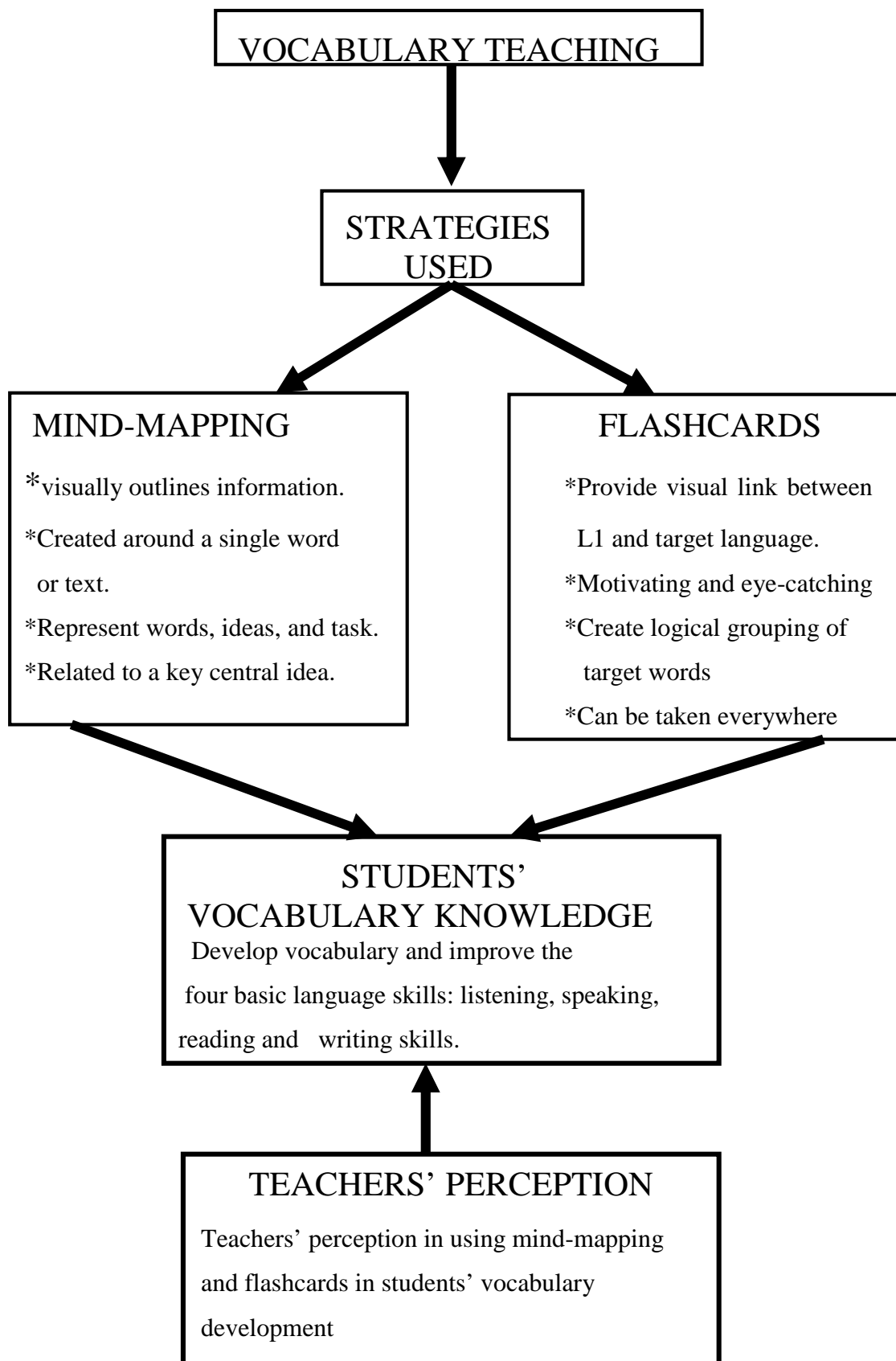and flashcards in students' vocabulary

development

Figure 1.1: Conceptual Framework of the study

1.9   Definition of Terms

The important terms used throughout this study are as follows:

Vocabulary

A person's vocabulary is the set of words they are familiar with in a language. Vocabulary usually grows and evolves with age, and serves as a useful and fundamental tool for communication and acquiring knowledge. Vocabulary, in the abstract, represents a set of words for a language or a set of words that its speakers might use (Hatch & Brown, 1995). A word as a "single unit of language" (Oxford Advanced Learner"s Dictionary 2000), conveys meaning on its own and is not part of any linguistic pattern that might change the word's meaning in connection with other words. Vocabulary words carry with them the ability to effectively listen, speak, read and write.

Vocabulary Teaching

Traditionally, the teaching of vocabulary above elementary levels was mostly incidental, limited to presenting new items as they appeared in reading or sometimes listening texts. Nowadays it is widely accepted that vocabulary teaching should be part of the syllabus, and taught in a well-planned and regular basis. Some authors, led by Lewis (1993) argue that vocabulary should be at the centre of language teaching. Goals of vocabulary teaching must be more than simply covering a certain number of words on a word list. Suitable teaching techniques must be used to help realise this global concept of what it means to know a lexical item and to give learner opportunities to use the items learnt and also helping them to speak, read and write effectively.

Mind-mapping

A mind map is a diagram used to visually outline information. It is often created around a single word or text, placed in the center, to which associated ideas, words and concepts are added. It is also a strategy used in learning vocabulary.

Flashcards

One strategy for learning vocabulary is the use of flash cards. A flash card is a card consisting of a word, a sentence, or a simple picture on it. It should be noted that the letters on it must be visible and large enough for everyone sitting in the front and the back of the classroom. Both sides of the flash card should be used in teaching vocabulary. On one side, the new word is written in L2 and perhaps with a picture beside it and on the other side is the translation. These flash cards can be made by both teachers and learners. Flashcards for language teaching or self-study have been used for years and are a useful tool for teachers and learners. They are cards with words, pictures or numbers printed on it that is briefly displayed as a learning device. They provide learners with a visual link between L1 and the target language. They are useful for memorizing vocabulary words and their definition which eventually leads to proper used of words.

1.10   Conclusion

Vocabulary being the backbone of any language needs to be taught effectively. Teachers need to identify effective strategies to develop L2 vocabulary for successful language learning. Teachers need to be able to select method or strategies deemed suitable and effective in teaching vocabulary as to

meet the demands of developing the basic language skills which otherwise encumbers the holistic learning of the English Language.

On the whole, this study investigate to the effectiveness of using mind-mapping and flashcards in developing students' vocabulary in the English Language and to explore teachers' perception of using mind-mapping and flashcards as a tool to improve students' vocabulary.

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