Improving Students' Speaking Skills by Using Flashcards in Colombo High School Yogyakarta

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Abstract

This paper investigates the effectiveness of flashcards in improving students' ability to communicate orally. The study used classroom action research methods, pre-test, post-test, reflection evaluation, structured interviews, and classroom observation to collect qualitative and quantitative data. The results revealed significant benefits, including improving students' speaking proficiency, motivation, enjoyment, and participation. Interviews highlighted how flashcards facilitated students' articulation of ideas and experiences, increasing their interest, confidence, and understanding of English. Moreover, using flashcards led to heightened motivation and enjoyment among students, fostering eagerness to participate and interact with the material. The study employed various research procedures, such as pre-tests, post-tests, reflection tests, structured interviews, and classroom observations, to gather quantitative and qualitative data. Thematic analysis of qualitative data and quantitative analysis of speaking skills evaluations were conducted to assess the impact of flashcard usage. Significant development in students' speaking skills was observed throughout the study, with notable proficiency, scores, and confidence improvements. Students provided positive feedback on the efficacy of flashcard-based exercises, acknowledging improvements in their English-speaking confidence

Keywords: *Improving; Speaking Skills; Flashcard; Students' High School*

Introduction

Broadly defined, speaking skills are the foundation for successful communication in education. Successful oral communication requires the effective use of language in social exchanges that include spoken language and non-verbal components such as tone, emphasis, and intonation (Richards and Renandya., 2002, p. 204). The value of teaching speaking skills cannot be underestimated, and most EFL/ESL teachers only focus on having their students memorize dialogues or repeat exercises. English teachers must strategically incorporate activities and practices that advance students' English-speaking skills in the classroom. Without encouragement to do the opposite, ELLs often remain passive or provide short (one word or phrase) responses to oral language activities in the classroom (Soto-Hinman, 2011).

As we know, speaking can be one of the most challenging skills for language learners to master (Bueno, Madrid and Mclaren., 2006: 321). Even after spending many years learning English, learners still struggle to speak when required in everyday situations. Therefore, given the importance of promoting practical communication skills, educators around the world have endeavored to find inventive methods to improve students' speaking proficiency (Harmer 2001; Celce-Murcia 2001). Researchers have also explored the integration of interactive tools to actively engage students and foster their confidence in speaking (e.g., Thornbury 2005; Richards 2008). A currently popular approach is the utilization of flashcards. Flashcards are a flexible and engaging tool for language training, and allow for additional exposure to vocabulary, grammar rules, and conversational clues in a graphically appealing way.

Based on the author's observations, few studies have specifically investigated the role of visual aids such as flashcards in facilitating student engagement and overcoming speaking challenges in EFL contexts. Research using flashcards can provide "practical insights" into how teaching strategies can be improved (Hedge, 2000). Current research highlights the benefits of interactive student-centered approaches, such as flashcards, in promoting active participation and speaking fluency (Harmer 2001; Ur 2009). In response, this study was conducted to explore how the use of flashcards in Colombo High School Yogyakarta can improve students' speaking ability. Data were collected through pre-test, post-test, interviews, and observations, and analyzed using thematic analysis and statistical methods to evaluate the impact of flashcards on speaking proficiency.

Speaking Skills in Senior High School Students'

Speaking is a complex and important skill for senior high school students as they articulate thoughts and ideas effectively. At the senior high school level, students are expected to demonstrate proficiency in pronunciation grammar, fluency, and vocabulary. This is in line with the statement of Brown (2004) who identifies that speaking involves micro and macro skills. Micro skills include elements such as pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary, while macro skills involve coherence, interaction management, and understanding social context. These skills are essential for secondary school students to communicate effectively. Ur (1996) highlights common challenges in teaching speaking, including: inhibition due to fear of making mistakes, limited opportunities for practice, and reliance on traditional rote learning methods. These challenges often result in a lack of fluency and confidence among students.

This research underscores the need for effective speaking instruction that can overcome these challenges by fostering an engaging and supportive classroom environment. Techniques such as peer interaction, real-life communication scenarios, and scaffolding are particularly effective. Vygotsky's (1978) concept of scaffolding highlights the importance of providing guided support to help students gradually develop their speaking proficiency.

Communicative Language Teaching

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is known as a pedagogical method for language training (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is an established structure or paradigm of study that can be considered a theory, as described by Celce-Murcia in 2001. The basic principle underlying this idea is that the primary purpose of language is to facilitate efficient and successful communication. The main purpose of this is to assist learners in improving their communication skills (Hymes, 1971), which relates to their ability to speak well. Basically, the goal is to utilize real-life scenarios that require conversation.

CLT emphasizes on real-life interaction and communication. CLT encourages active participation and authentic use of language, making it an ideal framework for integrating flashcards into speaking activities. According to Richards (2008), CLT prioritizes fluency over accuracy and encourages a student-centered approach to learning.

Flashcards in Language Learning

Flashcards are visual aids that improve vocabulary acquisition, comprehension and memory. Their interactive nature encourages student engagement and allows for varied applications, such as vocabulary practice, sentence construction and role play. Cross (1992) describes flashcards as a simple yet effective tool for making abstract concepts more tangible. Baleghizadeh & Ashoori (2011) note that flashcards are particularly beneficial in improving speaking skills by helping students internalize vocabulary and grammatical structures.

Broughton et al. (2003: 218) define cue cards or flashcards as cards that display written or graphic information and are used by teachers to briefly prompt students to respond, either orally or in writing. Flashcards are an effective instrument for teaching vocabulary in language education. The learning media used in language classes can be categorized as learning materials that start from individual words and sentences to pictures.

Education researcher Dr. Thomas J. Duffy highlights this: "Flashcards are an effective tool for increasing student participation as they encourage active engagement and provide immediate feedback. The interactive nature of flashcards helps create a dynamic classroom environment where students are more likely to contribute and stay engaged" (Duffy, 2019). In addition, a study by C. S. Hsin and R. J. C. Wu (2017) found that "students who used flashcards in classroom activities showed higher levels of participation and interaction compared to traditional learning methods," which reinforces the value of flashcards in encouraging active student engagement.

One of the main benefits of incorporating flashcards into speaking activities is their ability to enhance the cognitive processes involved in language learning. Flashcards facilitate active recall, which is crucial for language retention and fluency. Richard E. Mayer, a cognitive psychologist, underscores this point by stating, "Flashcards are practical tools that support active recall and spaced repetition, which are essential for mastering new information. When integrated into speaking activities, they help students practice their vocabulary and improve their ability to organize and express their ideas" (Mayer, 2021). By using flashcards, students can repeatedly engage with important vocabulary and phrases, strengthening their ability to use these elements spontaneously in conversation.

Therefore, this study examines whether the use of flashcards can improve the speaking ability of senior high school students and to what extent flashcards contribute to student engagement. Three research questions were addressed in this study:

1. How does the use of flashcards in speaking activities at Colombo High School Yogyakarta affect students' ability to express their ideas confidently and coherently?
2. How did students' perceptions of the speaking task change when flashcards were introduced as a teaching tool at Colombo High School Yogyakarta, especially in terms of enjoyment and motivation?
3. How does the use of flashcards encourage active participation among students during speaking activities at Colombo High School Yogyakarta?

Method

Research Design

The research methodology used was classroom action research, also known as CAR. Classroom action research is designed to assist teachers in identifying and addressing problems that arise during classroom teaching and learning. Kemmis and McTaggart (2007) define classroom action research as a systematic approach to identifying and addressing problems that arise in the classroom. The main

objective is to improve the educational situation, benefiting teachers and students in learning and instruction. According to Pahaji (2013), Classroom Action Research (CAR) refers to research conducted by teachers in their classrooms to address specific problems. He also states that there are two categories of Classroom Action Research, namely Personal Classroom Action Research or Collaborative Classroom Action Research.

Koshy (2006, p.27) defines Classroom Action Research as a cyclical procedure that includes different stages: preparation, implementation, observation and assessment, and reflection. According to Latief (2009), the researcher should conduct an initial investigation to identify the problems in the classroom. In this study, the researcher implemented one cycle consisting of four meetings. Each cycle consists of an iterative process. After reaching a successful cycle, the researcher will stop the investigation. However, in case of failure in a cycle, the researcher should continue to reassess and modify the technique.

Conducting a preliminary investigation is essential to accurately identify the problems that need to be addressed in the classroom. According to Latief (2009), identifying problems through initial observations allows researchers to focus on areas that directly impact student learning. This ensures that the research is relevant and based on actual needs in the classroom, which is an important principle in action research. The planning stage of Classroom Action Research (CAR) is crucial for developing targeted interventions based on the problems that have been identified. According to Burns (2010), a well-structured plan will increase the likelihood of practical implementation and positive outcomes. This phase involves designing strategies that are aligned with educational theory and practical classroom dynamics, ensuring that interventions are feasible and tailored to students' specific needs. This strategic approach helps create a focused and actionable plan that can be effectively implemented in the classroom.

The cyclical nature of CAR, which involves planning, action, observation and reflection, ensures that the research process is iterative and adaptive. Kemmis and McTaggart (2007) emphasize that this cyclical approach allows for continuous refinement of strategies based on ongoing observation and reflection, leading to continuous improvement in teaching and learning practices. By repeating cycles, research can address problems dynamically, adapting interventions as necessary to improve their effectiveness over time.
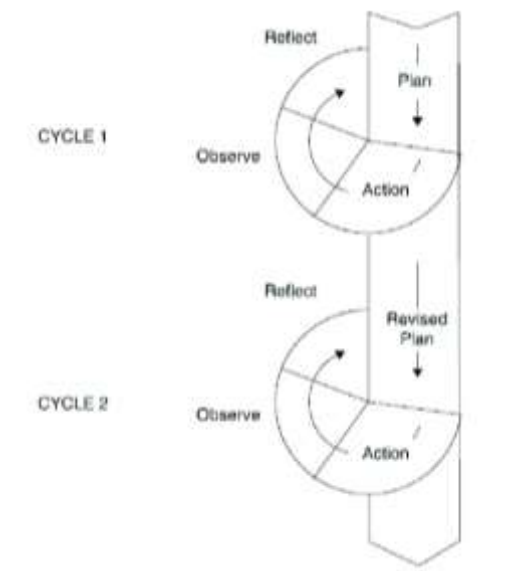

Figure 1. The cyclical AR model was based on Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) in Burns (2010: 9).

Therefore, the researcher applied the above procedures during the study. Initially, the researcher conducted an initial investigation to research and ascertain the problem. Next, the researcher devised a strategic approach to address the problem and implemented the plan. The next step was to observe and analyze the data. The final step is to reflect. The Classroom Action Research (CAR) method originated from the work of Kemmis and Mc. Taggart (1998).

This research was conducted at Colombo High School, with a focus on eleventh grade students. This choice was made based on several strategic and academic considerations. One of the main reasons for choosing eleventh graders was because of their varying English proficiency. By including students with varying levels of proficiency-from beginner to advanced-the study aimed to assess how flashcards can impact different levels of language proficiency. This variety allows for a more nuanced evaluation of the effectiveness of the intervention, providing a broader understanding of its applicability across different student profiles.

Data Collection and Analysis

The researcher collected data using observation, interviews, and testing. Observation was conducted during the teaching-learning process. Observations were made to collect data about the classroom environment, students, learning materials and teaching methods and to find out the extent to which the learning objectives were achieved. Next, the researchers conducted interviews involving English teachers and students. This was done to explore the process of teaching and learning English. The data collection technique used is a test. A pretest will be conducted as a preliminary activity to assess the students' English proficiency. The final assessment is the posttest, which is designed to determine the effectiveness of the researcher's proposed strategy in improving students' speaking ability. In the end, the results from the pre-test and post-test were compared.

The data collected during the study was analyzed using qualitative and quantitative methods. Qualitative analysis focused on examining changes in students' educational behavior as observed and recorded in their interview transcripts. Quantitative analysis was conducted on students' speaking scores before and after the study.

Findings and Discussion

At this step, the researchers collected data to determine the problems that exist in the classroom procedure to teach English, specifically in speaking. This was achieved by conducting observations and interviews in class XI IPS 1 at SMA Kolombo. The interviews were conducted on two distinct occasions. This study entailed doing the initial interview with the English teacher, followed by a subsequent interview with the students. The illustrated diagram is a comprehensive outline of the approach employed for the instruction and acquisition of the English language. These are the findings of the researcher's observations in the classroom during the teacher's implementation of the learning process.

I = Researcher
ET= English Teacher
S= Student

Observation
Wednesday/ February 12, 2024

The ET entered the classroom and greeted all students. Most pupils were still busy preparing their books and cleaning up their tables. The ET repeatedly greeted the Ss. All Ss responded. The ET

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inquired about how they were doing and called a roll. The ET began the session by asking students about what they learned in the previous session. All Ss remained silent. Nobody answered the ET's queries. Most of them forgot. She raised the same question again. Only a few girls seated in the front rows recalled and responded faintly. The ET discussed the prior topic briefly.

The English teacher first inquired about the subject of the prior meeting before moving on to the assignment she had assigned the pupils. While some had begun their homework in class, others were still in the process of finishing it. The boys seated in the rear rows were making noise while the ET assessed the Ss. They were occupied with little talk. His table had a youngster resting his head on it. Others appeared to be tired. Some were occupied with irrational activities, such as fiddling with their cellphones and making random drawings on books, among many other things. A few students are seated in the front row, watching intently while working on their assignments. while the pupils concentrate on doing their assignments. The ET rounds the classroom to ensure every student knows their responsibilities. She helps individuals who are unable to understand.

When the bell rang, not a single student had turned in their assignments. As a result, they went home with the assignment and picked it up the following day. ET greeted and said goodbye as the lesson came to an end.

Based on the observations and interviews, the researcher determined some problems that arose in the English learning process. These problems must be fixed in order to achieve English learning objectives.

Incorporation of Flashcards in Speaking Activities to Express Ideas

The results from the student interviews reflect a similar understanding of how flashcards contribute to improving speaking skills in language learning. Dr. Mayer's statement that "flashcards are a practical tool that supports active recall and spaced repetition, which are essential for mastering new information" underscores the critical benefits of using flashcards in an educational context. Her observation that flashcards enhance learning and retention resonates with the objectives of the student interviews, which aimed to evaluate the impact of flashcards on students' ability to express ideas clearly and effectively in English.

He emphasized that flashcards are very effective in language learning for vocabulary acquisition and grammar practice. This aspect of flashcards' usefulness is directly relevant to the student interviews, which focus on how incorporating flashcards into speaking activities affects students' speaking ability. These interviews aimed to thoroughly analyze how flashcards help students articulate and express their ideas better, reflecting expert views on their effectiveness in developing speaking skills. In addition, Mayer's comments on the versatility and simplicity of flashcards reinforce their role as an engaging and interactive tool in language practice. These characteristics of flashcards support their use in various speaking activities, which was the main theme of the student interviews. By exploring how these features contribute to improving students' speaking, the interviews align with experts' insights into the practical benefits of flashcards.

> *Researcher: Do you feel there is a change for the better when flashcards are used in the learning process?*

> *Student: Yes, because we have never learned to use flashcards, so when the miss teaches using this method, we are more interested and can bring out the stories we have experienced through the pictures we choose.*

This shows the impact of students being able to express their ideas by using flashcards in the learning process to acquire English proficiency. The students initially looked lazy when the teacher explained. They became serious and interested in the media used. This allows students to speak. Students also look more confident when speaking because they share exciting experiences. The activities carried out are also fun. This is also in line with Jane Smith, a leading expert in language education (2023), who states that incorporating media into speaking activities provides a dynamic platform for students to express ideas. It increases engagement, offers real-world context, and fosters practical communication skills. Smith emphasizes that whether through video clips, podcasts, or interactive presentations, media enriches language acquisition by adding depth, relevance, and opportunities for critical thinking, making the learning process more profound and memorable for students.

Flashcards as a Teaching Tool in Motivating and Enjoyment

Flashcards in the learning process have been shown to significantly increase students' motivation and enjoyment, aligning with Dr. John Hattie's expert opinion. Dr. Hattie notes that "flashcards are a valuable tool for enhancing motivation and enjoyment in learning. Their ability to provide immediate feedback and incorporate interactive elements helps to engage students and make the learning process more enjoyable" (Hattie, 2018). This observation reflects how flashcards create a more engaging and enjoyable learning environment.

Flashcards effectively boost students' motivation by making learning activities more interactive and dynamic. They offer immediate feedback, which helps students gauge their progress and stay engaged. As a result, students find the learning process more enjoyable and less monotonous. This interactive nature of flashcards prevents students from feeling bored or lazy, as the activities are designed to be both stimulating and rewarding. Moreover, flashcards provide students with opportunities to improve their speaking skills. Students can practice articulating their thoughts and sharing interesting experiences by incorporating flashcards into speaking exercises. This practical application helps build their confidence as they become more comfortable and proficient in expressing their ideas. The confidence boost is evident as students engage more actively and enthusiastically in their speaking activities.

Research: What changes in aspects did you feel in this learning process?

Student: Learning is more fun, I can speak English, such as stringing words together in speaking and essay.

Student: Here I can practice my speech more, and the class is also more interesting and fun.

Student: I have better pronunciations and know how to read this and that which previously I didn't know how to read. That's why I'm more enthusiastic about learning English.

Researcher: Do you think this learning process is fun?

Student: It's fun because English is my favorite subject, let alone a flashcard where we've never

learned how to use the media.

Student: Fun, we can try in the right time, not only writing and listening.

This shows that flashcards can generate motivation and make the class more fun so that students do not feel bored while learning to improve their English-speaking skills. The students initially looked confused before the teacher involved flashcards as learning media. Now they become excited and feel happy. This provides an excellent opportunity for students to increase their motivation to continue improving their English skills. The activities carried out are also fun and increase students' curiosity

during the learning process. This is also in line with the statement of Michael Johnson, a leading educational psychologist (2019), highlighting the effectiveness of flashcards as a teaching tool in motivating and increasing enjoyment for students. He asserts that flashcards engage students through interactive and visually stimulating content, encouraging active participation and enjoyment in learning. Dr. Johnson's research underscores the positive impact of incorporating flashcards into educational practice, emphasizing their role in fostering motivation, retention, and overall academic success.

Flashcards as a Tool to Encourage Student Participation

This section shows that using flashcards can increase students' activeness in the learning process and improve their speaking skills. The statement that using flashcards can significantly enhance students' activeness in the learning process and improve their speaking skills aligns closely with Dr. Thomas J. Duffy's expert opinion and supporting research. Dr. Duffy highlights that "flashcards are an effective tool for increasing student participation because they promote active engagement and provide immediate feedback," which creates a dynamic classroom environment where students are more likely to contribute and stay involved (Duffy, 2019).

This is reflected in the observation that students become more focused, ask questions about the rules, and reduce distractions, such as cell phones, when using flashcards. Furthermore, research by C. S. Hsin and R. J. C. Wu (2017) found that "students who used flashcards in classroom activities showed higher levels of participation and interaction compared to traditional learning methods," reinforcing the value of flashcards in promoting active student involvement and improving learning outcomes.

Researcher: What changes in aspects did you feel in this learning process?

Student: I feel more focused when I do what you ask me to do

Student: Feeling more courageous to try to speak English. and also feel more active during class because usually I just stay quiet, miss, because I don't understand if the teacher only explains the material without any media like the one miss uses

Student: The vocabulary is increased, and I know that there are other word choices, for example 'games' can be replaced by 'match'.

This shows that flashcards make students more active and more focused during the learning process in class. The students who usually tend to be silent and do not ask questions now start to ask often and focus more on their tasks. This provides good feedback for students to increase their activeness in the classroom and continue to improve their English language skills. The learning process went well so that students could complete their speaking tests in front of laptops and cellphones that researchers used to collect data. This is also in line with the statement of Emily Chen, an expert in language acquisition (2021), emphasizing the efficacy of flashcards as a tool to encourage student participation in speaking activities. Through systematic repetition and visual aids, flashcards provide scaffolding for language learners, increase confidence, and facilitate active engagement in oral communication. Dr. Chen's research highlights the role of flashcards in promoting the development of speaking skills and creating a supportive learning environment conducive to student interaction and participation.

The results of the students' speaking test conducted in Cycle 1 also highlighted the benefits of using flashcards. Since there was an improvement between the pre-test and the speaking test in Cycle 1, the collaborator and I agreed that the test was successful.

Table 1. Students' Speaking Score in Pre-Cycle

Category	Value range	Frequency	Percentage
Very good	80-100	2	7.6%
Good	70-79	8	30.7%
Sufficient	60-69	9	34.6%
Poor	50-59	7	26.9%
Very poor	0-49	0	0.0%

Table 2. Students' Speaking Score in Cycle 1

Category	Value range	Frequency	Percentage
Very good	80-100	6	23.0%
Good	70-79	13	50%
Sufficient	60-69	7	26.9%
Poor	50-59	0	0.0%
Very poor	0-49	0	0.0%

Table 3. Students' Speaking Score in Cycle 2

Category	Value range	Frequency	Percentage
Very good	80-100	18	62.2%
Good	70-79	13	30.7%
Sufficient	60-69	0	0.0%
Poor	50-59	0	0.0%
Very poor	0-49	0	0.0%

The application of flashcards in the speaking activities in Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 showed significant benefits that align with existing research on educational aids and language learning. The use of flashcards has proven to be an effective strategy for improving various aspects of English language learning, including students' speaking proficiency, motivation, enjoyment and participation.

The integration of flashcards into speaking activities has improved students' ability to express their ideas and experiences. The students reported that the flashcards were very interesting and useful, improving their ability to articulate thoughts in English. This is in line with previous research, such as Brown's, which supports the effectiveness of flashcards in matching macro and micro speaking skills. The structured arrangement of vocabulary and thematic content on flashcards facilitates coherent and rational expression, helping students to organize their communication in a logical and understandable manner.

The use of flashcards also increases motivation and enjoyment among students. The interactive and visually stimulating nature of flashcards makes the learning process more interesting and enjoyable. This finding is consistent with research that emphasizes the role of interactive resources in fostering motivation and creating a positive learning environment. Students' enthusiasm and active participation in speaking activities further reinforced the effectiveness of flashcards in enhancing the overall learning experience.

Flashcards serve as an effective tool to encourage student participation and interaction. The activities increased focus, reduced distractions and a greater willingness to ask questions and seek clarification. The collaborative nature of certain tasks, such as 'make-over' sessions, facilitated peer

learning and improved understanding of language structures. These results reflect previous research highlighting the importance of interactive and collaborative learning experiences in language acquisition.

In addition to improving macro skills, flashcards also had a positive impact on some micro skills in speaking, such as pronunciation and vocabulary acquisition. The visual aids provided by flashcards help students reproduce sounds accurately and improve pronunciation. The integration of visual representations of words improved their ability to remember and understand new vocabulary. These findings are in line with Brown's focus on vocabulary as a foundational skill for effective speaking. In addition, although not explicitly targeted, the flashcard activity indirectly improved grammatical accuracy by providing examples of correct language use.

Finally, the students found the use of flashcards a constructive approach to improving their speaking. They appreciated the feedback and corrections provided through the flashcard activities, which improved their understanding of pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar. The students also felt that this method increased their confidence in speaking English and helped them organize their thoughts more effectively. This positive feedback underscores the overall efficacy of flashcards in improving English speaking and highlights their value in language education.

In conclusion, these findings suggest that flashcards are a promising tool for improving English learning outcomes. By addressing key challenges and promoting engagement, motivation and participation, flashcards contribute to a dynamic and supportive learning environment. Continuous reflection and refinement of teaching practices will be essential to further optimize the effectiveness of flashcard-based instruction and achieve educational goals.

Conclusion

This study underscores the significant benefits of integrating flashcards into speaking exercises to improve various aspects of English language acquisition. The use of flashcards had a positive impact on students' speaking ability, motivation, enjoyment and engagement. Observations, interviews and analysis revealed that students found flashcards interesting and useful, leading to increased enthusiasm, confidence and a deeper understanding of the subject matter.

This study used a comprehensive approach, including pre-test, post-test, interviews, and classroom observations, to collect quantitative and qualitative data. This approach showed that flashcards had an important impact on macro skills such as speaking proficiency, coherence, appropriateness, and cohesiveness, as well as micro skills such as pronunciation, vocabulary acquisition, and grammatical accuracy. The observed improvements in students' speaking proficiency, as reflected in higher scores and fewer grammatical errors and vocabulary gaps, support the value of flashcard-based exercises. Positive feedback from the students further emphasized the role of flashcards in improving their confidence and speaking ability.

While acknowledging some limitations, such as data availability and time constraints, this study provides a solid foundation for understanding the benefits of using flashcards in language learning. The findings suggest some important implications for educational practice. For educators, integrating flashcards into speaking activities can increase student engagement and contribute to more effective language learning outcomes. Flashcards serve as a practical and versatile tool to reinforce key concepts, encourage active participation, and support macro and micro skills in language acquisition. Teachers are encouraged to consider incorporating flashcards into their instructional strategies to meet various learning needs and create a more interactive and supportive learning environment.

This study also suggests implications for future research. Further exploration is needed to optimize the use of flashcards, including the integration of digital tools or adaptation for diverse learning

contexts. Future research could investigate the long-term effects of flashcard-based instruction on language learning outcomes and examine how different types of flashcard content affect student engagement and proficiency. This research could lead to the development of better teaching strategies and a deeper understanding of the role of flashcards in improving language education.

Overall, this study provides valuable insights into the effectiveness of flashcards in improving English speaking. By addressing these areas, both educators and researchers can contribute to more effective and engaging language teaching, ultimately supporting better language learning outcomes.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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