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## Table of Contents

### Main Articles

- 1 **Guzyal Kassymova and Hatime Çiftçi**  
*The Effect of CLIL Training on Turkish EFL Pre-service Teachers' Self-efficacy Beliefs and Attitudes towards CLIL* 6
- 2 **Rui Lei and Joseph Levitan**  
*Motivating and demotivating factors of game-based learning approaches in Chinese college students' spoken English learning: A case study* 32
- 3 **Bridget Goodman and Laila Abdimanapova**  
*Alignment, Challenge, and Agency: EFL Teachers' Perspectives on Trilingual Education and Curriculum Reform in Kazakhstan* 73
- 4 **Trần Thị Ngọc Yến**  
*A Comparison of Wordlists and Flashcards as Vocabulary Instruction Techniques for EFL Learners* 103

### Book Reviews

- 1 **Bunga Ayu Wulandari**  
Book Review: *East Asian Perspectives on Silence in English Language Education*, by Jim King and Seiko Harumi (eds.), Multilingual Matters: Bristol, UK, 2020. pp. 892. 123
- 2 **Marilyn Lewis**  
Book Review: *Rejecting the marginalized status of minority languages: Educational projects pushing back against language endangerment*, by Ari Sherris and Susan D. Penfield (eds.), Multilingual Matters: Bristol, UK, 2019. pp. 168. 127



## A Comparison of Wordlists and Flashcards as Vocabulary Instruction Techniques for EFL Learners

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### **Abstract**

This study looks at the impacts of flash cards and word lists as vocabulary instructional techniques. During the treatment, six groups of EFL learners at three different English levels (beginners, elementary, and pre-intermediate) were taught with flash cards and another six groups were taught with word lists. Unlike previous studies, which investigated learners' retention of meaning only, this research examines learners' retention of both meaning and spelling. The results of this study indicate that flash cards have advantages over word lists for beginner EFL learners at primary school, and that word lists provide more benefits to older learners at the elementary and pre-

intermediate levels.

**Keywords:** Teaching vocabulary, flashcards, wordlists, vocabulary techniques, vocabulary retention

## 1. Introduction

For decades, linguists and language teaching practitioners believed that vocabulary instruction was secondary to grammar instruction. They assumed that once knowledge of grammar rules has been acquired, vocabulary will be learnt according to learners' needs. Advocators of autolingualism supposed that learners will learn vocabulary themselves and that the teaching instruction should focus on grammatical and phonological structures (Schmidt, 2001). However, researchers have recently started to reconsider the position of vocabulary instruction in language teaching. Lexical competence has been said to play an essential role in communication (Coady & Huckin, 1997; Thornbury, 2002). "*Without grammar, very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary, nothing can be conveyed*" (Wilkins, 1976, p. 111). In other words, if a learner's vocabulary is limited, it will be very difficult for the learner to express his/her intended meaning (Zhihong, 2000). Vocabulary instruction, therefore, has been considered an intrinsic part of language teaching (Qian, 1999; Zareva, Schwanenflugel & Nikolova, 2005; Coady & Huckin, 1997; Read, 2000; Richards & Renandya, 2002; Nation, 2005).

There is a large volume of published studies describing the techniques and activities for teaching vocabulary. Linguists have developed a so-called word-centred approach to language teaching (Thornbury, 2004), advocates of which usually support the use of language corpus in vocabulary instruction (Tribble & Jones, 1997). A few authors have attempted to classify vocabulary instruction activities into planned and unplanned activities (Seal, 1991; McDonald, 2008) and divide vocabulary learning activities into decontextualised, partially contextualised, and fully contextualised activities (Oxford & Scarcella, 1994). Other scholars have also proposed various types of exercises and tasks for practising vocabulary such as verbal glosses (Salehi &

Naserieh, 2013), matching, word-building, classifying, filling in crosswords, grids or diagrams, memory games, and using given lexical items to perform a specific task (Carter, 1998; DeCarrico, 2001; Nation, 2001; Scrivener, 2005).

Among the techniques and activities for vocabulary instruction are flashcards and wordlists, the usefulness of which has been confirmed by numerous authors (Hulstijn, 2001; Nation, 2001; Meara, 1995; Thornbury, 2002; Shillaw, 1995; Yongqi, 2003; Mondria & Mondria-de Vries, 1994; Palka, 1988; Schmitt & Schmitt, 1995; Tan & Nicholson, 1997). However, much uncertainty still exists about the efficacy of these two techniques as compared to each other. While some researchers are in favour of flashcards (Mondria & Mondria-de Vries, 1994; Schmitt & Schmitt, 1995; Mohammadnejad, Nikdel & Oroujlou, 2012), several others have stated that learning through lists is more efficient and that more of the acquired vocabulary remains in the long-term memory (Nation, 2001; Hulstijn, 2001). Some others have also reported that the efficacies of these two techniques are not significantly different (Baleghizadeh & Ashoori, 2011; Sinaei & Asadi, 2014).

The lack of consensus has put language teachers in a dilemma. Given that flashcards consume more time and effort to make than wordlists, should language teachers utilise flashcards if they do not bring about significantly better results than wordlists? Furthermore, almost all previous research in this field used a post-test that only tested the ability to recognise the meaning of the learned vocabulary. Far too little attention has been paid to the learners' ability to say the words (pronunciation). It is, therefore, necessary to have more empirical investigations into the effects of flashcards and wordlists on EFL learners' ability to retain both word meaning and pronunciation.

This study investigates and compares the effectiveness of flashcards and wordlists in vocabulary instruction with the hope to provide language teachers with a basis for their choice between flashcards and wordlists, and to make an important contribution to the understanding of the efficacies of the two techniques in vocabulary teaching. It was conducted in the form of an experiment, which involved 12 groups of EFL students at three levels of education (primary school, secondary school and high school).

## **2. Literature review**

This section provides an overview of previous research on wordlist and flashcards in language teaching. It begins with the definitions of wordlist and flashcard, and then discusses their usefulness in vocabulary instruction. Finally, the literature on the efficacy of these two teaching techniques in English language teaching is presented.

### **2.1 Wordlists**

The term “wordlist” was originally used in reference to wordlists made by researchers for the purposes of designing syllabuses, developing language tests, analyzing texts, and teaching vocabulary in a specific field. Those wordlists include the “General Service List” (West, 1953), “University Word List” (Xue & Nation, 1984), “Academic Word List” (Coxhead, 2000), “Business Word List” (Konstantakis, 2007), “Science Word List” (Coxhead & Hirsh, 2007), “Medical Academic Word List” (Wang, Liang & Ge, 2008), “First 100 Spoken Collocations” (Shin & Nation, 2008), “AgroCorpus List” (Martínez, Beck, and Panza, 2009), “Basic Engineering List” (Ward, 2009), and “Phrasal Expressions List” (Martinez & Schmitt, 2012).

In the past several decades, the term “wordlist” has also been used to refer to the wordlists created by language teachers for teaching specific vocabulary in their language classrooms. These kinds of wordlists are defined as a sheet of paper that contains a list of target vocabulary. However, this teaching material can appear in various forms. For instance, some wordlists are comprised of a list of target vocabulary along with their L1 equivalences, while some others contain the target vocabulary along with their phonemic transcripts or L1 translation.

A number of researchers have emphasised the usefulness of wordlists in teaching vocabulary. For instance, Thornbury (2002) called for a reconsideration of the value of list learning, which had been given inadequate attention. He also proposed a few strategies for using wordlists in language teaching, such as matching sounds with the written forms on the list, ticking the English equivalences on a bilingual list, and making stories from a list of words. Along similar lines, other researchers hold that wordlists are one of the most effective ways of learning L2 vocabulary and that list

learning is even more efficient than context learning (Nation, 2001; Meara, 1995). Their research found that a large number of words could be learned from wordlists within a short time period (Yongi, 2003). Similarly, Laufer and Shmueli (1997), Hulstijn (2001), Bahrick and Phelps (1987) and Shillaw (1995) found that wordlists help learners retain the learned vocabulary in their long-term memory.

However, several researchers have questioned the value of wordlists in language teaching. They argue that contexts are fundamental for learners to acquire the meaning of a word (Blachowicz & Fisher, 2000; Bogaards & Laufer, 2004). In other words, teachers need to provide their students with opportunities for meaningful practice rather than just rote memorization.

## ***2.2 Flashcards***

Flashcards have popularly been used in language classrooms as a technique for teaching not only vocabulary but also other aspects of language. The uses of flashcards include teaching sounds of the alphabet and helping poor readers improve word recognition (Culyer, 1988), teaching students to practice their vocabulary development (Ervin, 1988), teaching prepositions, articles, sentence structures, tenses, and phrasal verbs (Palka, 1988), and improving reading comprehension and reading speed (Tan & Nicholson, 1997). There are various types of flashcards but each of them usually contains a word, a phrase, a sentence or a simple picture on one side and L1 translation on the other side.

A few authors have examined the effectiveness of flashcards in vocabulary instruction. Mondria and Mondria-de Veris (1994), for instance, point out that flashcards assist learners to establish meaningful contexts, which in turn facilitates vocabulary acquisition. Other researchers such as Palka (1998), Schmitt & Schmitt (1995), and Tan and Nicholson (1997) also suggest that flashcards can help students to remember and use the taught vocabulary effectively. In the same vein, Rokni and Karimi (2013) demonstrated that flashcards, along with other visual aids, have a positive result on learners' vocabulary studies. Other authors have also noted that flashcards offer a variety of uses in different activities and games (Hill, 1990), thus can



be useful for both the teacher and the learner. Students can even use them when they study on their own (Mohammadnejad, Nikdel, Oroujlou, 2012).

### ***2.3 Wordlists vs. flashcards***

Previous research has compared the efficacy of flashcards and wordlists as techniques in teaching vocabulary. An example of this is the study carried out by Baleghizadeh and Ashoori (2011). They investigated the participants' responses to vocabulary instruction using flashcards and wordlists. In order to do this, they used 20 flashcards with a picture on one side and L1 translation on the other side. The wordlists contained 20 words in one column and their translations were on one side of the words. The experiment lasted for two days, during which one of the groups was taught with flashcards and the other group was taught with wordlists. After that, a post-test was administered to both groups to see which group had remembered more words. The results indicated that although the flashcard group did better than the wordlist group, the difference between them was not significant.

Similarly, Sinaei and Asadi (2014) found that flashcards produced higher results than wordlists but the flashcard group's performance was not significantly better than the wordlist group's performance. In this study, the two researchers explored the efficacy of flashcards and wordlists in teaching vocabulary to engineering professionals at both the elementary and intermediate levels of English. Before the treatment, an Academic Test of Vocabulary was administered to all groups. The same test was used as a post-test at the end of the course and as a delayed post-test 15 days after the course. The treatment consisted of seven sessions overall. The data showed that the flashcard group had a higher score on the post-tests but the difference was not significant.

Conversely, Mohammadnejad, Nikdel, Oroujlou (2012) reported significant differences in efficacy between flashcards and wordlists. Their research was carried out at a school in Iran with 36 participants whose ages ranged from 11 to 14. The participants were supposed to learn 60 words in their textbook. The flashcards they used contained pictures on one side and L1 translation on the other side. The wordlists had the words in one column and their respective L1 translations in another column. Each

of the sessions in the treatment included a pre-test of the target vocabulary for that session and an immediate post-test to determine the participants' short-term retention of the words. A pre-test and post-test were also administered before and after every two sessions and the last post-test was done after the treatment finished. The findings suggest that flashcards are more effective than wordlists in vocabulary instruction.

Several issues can be raised from the mentioned studies. First, much uncertainty still exists about the advantages of flashcards over wordlists, thus there needs to be more research into this issue. Second, only one of those studies explored the impact of the two techniques on learners at different English levels. Other researchers did not consider the participant groups' English ability. It is therefore necessary to conduct more research to see if one technique is better for a particular level but is less effective for other levels. Third, the previous researchers focused on learners' retention of word meaning but not word spelling. In all of the tests they used, the participants were asked to write down the L1 translations but were not asked to write the target words. This indicates a need to investigate and compare the effectiveness of the two techniques on learners' retention of word spelling before we can definitively claim the advantages of one technique over the other.

### **3. Research questions**

This study was carried out to determine whether flashcards have significant advantages over wordlists in helping EFL learners at three different English levels (beginners, elementary and pre-intermediate) to retain word meaning and sound. The following research questions were posed:

- a) Which technique better facilitates learners' retention of word meaning?
- b) Which technique better facilitates learners' retention of word spelling?
- c) Do the two techniques produce different results for learners at different levels of English?

### **4. Materials and method**

The participants in this study were chosen from a population of students at primary,

secondary and high schools in Vietnam. There were four groups of primary school students, four groups of secondary school students and four groups of high school students. Altogether, the 12 groups originally included 526 students. However, after the screening for their English level, we found that 23 students were not at the same English level as the rest of their group members. Therefore, the analysis did not include the results of these 23 students. The four primary school groups, hereafter named P1, P2, P3, and P4, respectively consisted of 43, 40, 40, and 42 students at the beginner level. The four secondary school groups, hereafter named S1, S2, S3 and S4, respectively consisted of 39, 41, 40, and 41 students at the elementary level. The four high school groups, hereafter named H1, H2, H3, and H4 respectively consisted of 45, 43, 45, 44 students at the pre-intermediate level. At the beginning of the experiment, the 165 primary school participants included 82 females and 83 males, aged from 8 to 9; the 161 secondary school participants included 78 females and 83 males, aged from 12 to 13; and the 177 high school participants included 86 females and 91 males, aged from 16 to 17. During the treatment, all of the students were following the usual English programs at their schools, where English is a required subject. None of them were following any other courses of English at other institutions or having any tutoring English lessons.

For the main English program, the primary school groups used the book named *English 3*; the secondary school groups used the book named *English 7*; and the high school group used the book named *English 10*. These books were designed and published by the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training.

Before the treatment, three English proficiency tests were used to ascertain the homogeneity of the participants in terms of language proficiency. For the primary groups, the Cambridge Young Learners Starters Test was used because children in the third grade were expected to achieve the pre-A1 level by the end of the school year. For the secondary school groups, the Cambridge Key English Test was used because the students were expected to reach level A2 by the time they finished secondary school. For the high school groups, the Cambridge Preliminary English Test was used since the students were expected to reach level B1 by the time they graduated high school. These

tests cover the four language skills: speaking, reading, listening, and writing with the speaking part conducted on a different day from the other parts.

In order to eliminate the possibility that some students might have known the target words before the treatment, three vocabulary tests were administered. These tests were comprised of words selected from the textbooks the students were using at school. Each test had two parts. Part 1 displayed the selected English words along with four choices of meaning or Vietnamese equivalences for each. The test takers were to choose the best option. Part 2 displayed the Vietnamese equivalence or translation of the selected English words along with the initial letter of the corresponding English word. The test takers were to write down the missing letters. The test for the primary school groups contained 30 words, the test for the secondary school groups contained 40, and the test for the high school groups contained 50 words. These tests were modified by reducing the number of words (only the words that none of the students knew either by meaning or spelling were kept) and used again as the post-test at the end of the experiment.

Based on the results of the vocabulary test, a set of target words were chosen for each of the levels. Respectively, 20 target words, 30 target words and 40 target words were chosen to be taught to the primary school groups, the secondary school groups and the high school groups. All of the words are content words. A set of flashcards and a set of wordlists were designed for each type of group (primary, secondary, high school). Each of the flashcards had a picture on one side and the Vietnamese equivalence on the other side. Each of the wordlists consisted of the target words in English along with their Vietnamese translations.

After the twelve groups were chosen, the English proficiency tests were administered. Each group took their test on two separate days: the reading, listening and writing parts on the first day, and the speaking part on the second. The results of the proficiency tests indicated that nine of the primary school students were above the beginner level; six of the secondary school students were lower than the elementary level; while eight of the high school students were below the pre-intermediate level. For this reason, although these 23 students still had the same treatment as their group

members, their results were not included in the data analysis. The remaining 503 students were then asked to complete the vocabulary tests. Their scores were then calculated. The results showed that some students had already known some words in the test, either by meaning or spelling. Therefore, only 20 words were chosen to teach to the primary school groups, 30 words were chosen to teach to the secondary school groups, and 40 words were chosen to teach to the high school groups.

The twelve groups then received the treatment. Half of the students (P1, P2, S1, S2, H1, H2), were taught the target vocabulary using flashcards, while the other half of the students (P3, P4, S3, S4, H3, H4) were taught using the wordlists. The treatment lasted for five weeks with one session of 20 minutes per week.

After the treatment, all groups sat the post-test.

## **5. Results**

The participants' retention of word meaning was measured by counting the number of correct L1 translations/correspondences that they had on the post-test (part 1 of the test) and their retention of word spelling was measured by counting the number of the correct target words they could write (part 2 of the test). For each of the three levels, comparisons between the groups (flashcard vs. wordlist) and between the word aspects (meaning and spelling) were made.

### ***5.1 The primary school groups***

Regarding the participants' performance on meaning, the data indicated that both flashcard groups did better on meaning retention than the wordlist groups (see Table 1). On average, the participants who were taught using flashcards could retain the meanings of 15 out of 20 words (P1) and 16 out of 20 words (P2) while the participants who were taught using wordlists could retain the meanings of only 12 words (P3) and 11 words (P4). Note that the best participants in the flashcard groups scored 19 while those in the wordlist groups scored only 15. The one-way ANOVA results showed that the groups' mean scores were significantly different,  $F(3, 163) = 132.42, p = 0.000$ . Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean scores for

group P1 (M = 15.81, SD = 1.56) and group P2 (M = 16.63, SD = 1.51) were significantly higher than the mean scores for group P3 (M = 12.08, SD = 1.40) and group P4 (M = 11.71, SD = 1.17). It can therefore be hypothesized that flashcards have a bigger impact on young learners' retention of word meaning.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Meaning Retention for the Primary Groups

		N	Range	Min	Max	Sum	Mean	Variance	SD	Skewness
FL	P1	43	7	12	19	680	15.81	2.44	1.56	-0.25
	P2	40	7	12	19	665	16.63	2.49	1.51	-0.73
WL	P3	40	5	10	15	483	12.08	1.97	1.40	0.15
	P4	44	5	9	14	492	11.71	1.38	1.17	-0.07

In regard with the participants' retention of spelling, it was found that the flashcard groups did better than the wordlist groups, but the differences were minimal (less than 0.5). A one-way ANOVA revealed that the mean scores for group P1 (M = 12.95, SD = 1.60) and group P2 (M = 13.00, SD = 1.43) were not significantly higher than the mean scores for group P3 (M = 12.65, SD = 1.23) and group P4 (M = 12.83, SD = 1.64).

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Spelling Retention for the Elementary Groups

		N	Range	Min	Max	Sum	Mean	Variance	SD	Skewness
FL	P1	43	6	10	16	557	12.95	2.57	1.60	-0.25
	P2	40	5	11	16	520	13.00	2.05	1.43	-0.27
WL	P3	40	5	11	16	506	12.65	1.52	1.23	0.78
	P4	44	8	10	18	539	12.83	2.68	1.64	0.78

A comparison between the participants' retention of meaning and their retention of spelling showed that the flashcard groups performed better on meaning than spelling while the wordlist groups performed slightly better on spelling than meaning. However, there was no significant difference for the wordlist groups' mean scores whereas a significant difference was found between the flashcard groups' mean scores on meaning and their mean scores on spelling.

Altogether, these results suggest that while flashcards and wordlists elicit similar

results in terms of helping young learners to retain word spelling, flashcards are a better choice for those teachers who want to focus on the meaning of the word.

### 5.2 The secondary school groups

In regard to meaning retention, the four groups had similar mean scores, which ranged from 21.93 to 23.12 (see Table 3). A one-way ANOVA indicated that the mean scores for group S1 (M = 22.95, SD = 2.36) and group S2 (M = 22.78, SD = 2.22) were not significantly different from the mean scores for group S3 (M = 21.93, SD = 1.93) and group S4 (M = 23.12, SD = 2.18). This suggests that flashcards do not have advantage over wordlists in helping learners at secondary schools to retain word meaning.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Meaning Retention for the Secondary School Groups

		N	Range	Min	Max	Sum	Mean	Variance	SD	Skewness
FL	S1	39	10	18	28	895	22.95	5.58	2.36	-0.04
	S2	41	10	16	26	934	22.78	4.93	2.22	-0.87
WL	S3	40	7	18	25	877	21.93	3.71	1.93	-0.15
	S4	41	10	17	27	948	23.12	4.76	2.18	-0.95

In regard to spelling, it is apparent from the data in Table 4 that the wordlist groups attained better results than the flashcard groups. Both of the flashcard groups achieved an average score of 18.67 (group S1) and 18.54 (group S2) whereas the wordlist groups achieved an average score of 21.70 (group S3) and 22.07 (group S4). The one-way ANOVA results showed that the groups' mean scores were significantly different,  $F(3, 157) = 25.09, p = 0.000$ . Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean scores for group S1 (M = 18.67, SD = 2.53) and group S2 (M = 18.54, SD = 2.28) were significantly lower than the mean scores for group S3 (M = 21.70, SD = 2.42) and group S4 (M = 22.07, SD = 2.41).

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics of Spelling Retention for the Secondary School Groups

		N	Range	Min	Max	Sum	Mean	Variance	SD	Skewness
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FL	S1	39	11	13	24	728	18.67	6.39	2.53	-0.16
	S2	41	9	14	23	760	18.54	5.20	2.28	-0.41
WL	S3	40	10	16	26	868	21.70	5.86	2.42	-0.71
	S4	41	12	17	29	905	22.07	5.82	2.41	0.39

### 5.3 The high school groups

As shown in Table 5, groups H1, H2, H3 and H4 respectively achieved an average score of 30.16, 31.86, 31.87 and 31.77 on the meaning retention task. The differences were not significant. Similarly, their scores on the spelling retention task were only very slightly different. Both types of groups had around 30 and 31 correct answers (see Table 6). Comparing the groups' results of the meaning retention task and their results of the spelling retention task, it was found that all four groups performed equally well on the two tasks. Altogether, these results indicate that the flashcard groups and wordlist groups did similarly well on the test. It is therefore likely that neither technique has advantage over the other in vocabulary instruction.

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics of Meaning Retention for the High School Groups

		N	Range	Min	Max	Sum	Mean	Variance	SD	Skewness
FL	S1	45	11	24	35	1357	30.16	8.27	2.88	-0.49
	S2	43	13	25	38	1370	31.86	8.36	2.89	-0.09
WL	S3	45	13	24	37	1434	31.87	6.53	2.55	-0.22
	S4	44	13	23	36	1398	31.77	6.83	2.61	-0.60

Table 6. Descriptive Statistics of Spelling Retention for the High School Groups

		N	Range	Min	Max	Sum	Mean	Variance	SD	Skewness
FL	S1	45	9	25	34	1358	30.18	3.47	1.86	-0.48
	S2	43	7	28	35	1355	31.51	2.40	1.55	-0.16
WL	S3	45	10	27	37	1383	30.73	2.97	1.72	1.33
	S4	44	12	25	37	1367	31.07	4.11	2.03	-0.06

## 6. Discussion

Previous studies comparing the impact of flashcards and wordlists as techniques in vocabulary instruction observed inconsistent results on whether either of them has



advantage over the other (Mohammadnejad, Nikdel & Oroujlou, 2012; Baleghizadeh, Ashoori, 2011; Sinaei & Asadi, 2014). As mentioned in the literature review, some researchers found that flashcards and wordlists have equal effects on EFL learners' word acquisition while others reported significant differences. The current study seeks to determine whether flashcards are significantly better than wordlists in vocabulary instruction to learners at three different levels of English: beginner, elementary and pre-intermediate.

One of the major findings of this research is that flashcards substantially facilitate the ability of young learners at the beginner level in retaining word meaning. This finding further supports those reached by Mohammadnejad, Nikdel, Oroujlou (2012) and confirms the hypothesis that flashcards lead to improved vocabulary learning (Mondria & Mondria-de Vries, 1994). This result can be explained by the fact that learners can categorize flashcards based on the difficulty level, topic, frequency, time order, use and so forth. This might have allowed the flashcard students to practice vocabulary extensively, and review frequently and selectively according to their needs and ability.

As for the wordlist groups, it is possible that they suffered a list effect caused by list learning, as proposed by Nakata (2008). Those participants might have been able to recall an item within the list but failed to do so when it was separated from the others. These learners, therefore, did worse on the test than the other participants who were taught with flashcards.

However, this study found that flashcards do not have advantage over wordlists for learners at higher levels of English (elementary and pre-intermediate). The data revealed that the participants at the secondary and high schools performed equally well whether taught with flashcards or wordlists. A possible explanation for these results might be that these older learners are perhaps not as attracted to pictures as younger learners are. Therefore, they will not benefit as much from flashcards as younger learners do.

With respect to the efficacy of the two techniques in facilitating learners' spelling retention, the present study found that at the pre-intermediate level, flashcards and

wordlists yield similar results. At the beginner level, flashcards are more beneficial than wordlists but the difference is minimal. Surprisingly, at the elementary level, wordlists are far more effective than flashcards. The results indicated that the wordlist groups at the secondary schools gained significantly higher scores than the flashcard groups. The reason for this is not clear but it may have something to do with the learners' learning styles and learning preferences.

One interesting finding that emerged from this study was that the participants tended to perform better on meaning retention than spelling retention. The results showed that for the flashcard groups at primary school and secondary school, the mean scores for meaning were significantly higher than the mean scores for spelling, while for the flashcard groups at high school, the mean scores for meaning were similar to the mean scores for spelling. In regard to the wordlist groups, the participants at both secondary school and high school performed better on meaning than spelling; the participants at primary school performed just slightly worse on meaning, but the difference was marginal. It can therefore be assumed that acquiring the written form is probably more challenging to Vietnamese EFL learners.

## **7. Conclusion**

This study has identified the efficacy of flashcards and wordlists as techniques for vocabulary instruction. The most obvious finding to emerge from this study is that flashcards do not have advantage over wordlists for high school learners. Those who were taught with flashcards and those who were taught with wordlists did equally well on meaning and spelling retention. This finding suggests that English language teachers can freely choose between flashcards and wordlists for high school learners inasmuch as they yield similar results.

This research has also shown that for secondary school learners, wordlists bring greater benefits when it comes to spelling retention. Given that wordlists are cheaper and easier to make, and that flashcards produce similar effects on meaning retention, it is advisable that language teachers working with this age group use wordlists for vocabulary instruction.

Another major finding to emerge from this research was that for primary school learners, flashcards work more effectively than wordlists in terms of facilitating their ability to memorize both word meaning and spelling. One implication of this result is that English language teachers who are teaching young learners should consider using flashcards when possible since it would lead to better vocabulary learning. This finding also indicates the need to explore why young learners do not benefit from wordlists as much as older learners do. Further studies could focus on the role of motivation and vocabulary acquisition, as it could be hypothesized that wordlists, compared with flashcards, are less attractive to young learners.

Finally, since the results of this study indicated that learners in all three age groups tended to retain spelling less effectively than meaning, English language teachers may want to design more activities that focus their learners on the written form of the word so that they can have a thorough grasp of the vocabulary they learn.

To conclude, notwithstanding its limitations, this research confirms previous findings and extends our knowledge of the efficacy of flashcards and wordlists in vocabulary teaching. The findings indicate that flashcards are a better choice for primary school EFL learners, but wordlists are more beneficial for older learners.

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