



Improving Third-Grade Students' Animal Vocabulary Retention through Flashcard Media: A Case Study at Elementary School

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Article Info	Abstract
Received: 2026 - 06- 01 Revised: 2026 06-18 Accepted: 2026 06-30	<i>Vocabulary development is a fundamental component in early English language learning, especially for young learners in elementary school, yet third-grade students often struggle to retain new vocabulary due to limited exposure and the use of less engaging instructional media. This qualitative case study investigates the role of flashcards in enhancing animal vocabulary retention among third-grade students at Elementary School through the implementation of a custom-designed teaching module that integrates visual flashcards into interactive learning activities such as recognition drills, pronunciation practice, matching games, and creative labeling tasks. Data were collected through classroom observation, document analysis of the instructional module, and teacher reflection. The findings demonstrate that flashcards significantly increased students' attention, enthusiasm, and willingness to participate orally, as picture-word associations helped students recall vocabulary more confidently and accurately. Game-based learning fostered collaboration and deeper memory retention, while the creative tasks enabled students to apply vocabulary in written form, indicating meaningful learning transfer. Additionally, flashcards supported inclusive learning by providing visual cues that assisted students with lower proficiency while encouraging higher-performing students to extend their vocabulary knowledge. Overall, the study concludes that incorporating flashcards into a structured and engaging teaching design is an effective</i>
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1. Introduction

Teaching English from an early age in elementary school is of great importance in the era of globalization, especially to prepare international communication competence at a young age. One fundamental aspect of foreign language learning for children is vocabulary acquisition: without sufficient vocabulary knowledge, skills in speaking, listening, reading, and writing will remain limited (Deswita & Mubarak, 2022; Putri, Sorohiti, & Ariebowo, 2024). For lower-grade students — such as third-grade elementary school children — vocabulary introduction must be carried out with methods suitable to their cognitive development and learning motivation. Learning media that are visual, interactive, and contextual become highly relevant to support this process.

In that context, flashcards emerge as one of the widely recommended media to help young learners learn vocabulary in a fun and easily memorable way. Research in several elementary schools has shown that use of flashcards can significantly improve students' English vocabulary mastery. For example, a quantitative study among elementary school students reported a significant increase in vocabulary test scores from pre-test to post-test after treatment using flashcards (Yusuf et al., 2021). In addition, teachers report that flashcards help young learners to better comprehend and memorize words while increasing their enthusiasm for learning (Wahyuningsih & Izzah, 2023).

However, most previous studies employed quantitative methods using pre-test and post-test designs, measuring effectiveness numerically. This leaves a need for qualitative research that delves deeper into how students and teachers respond to using flashcards, how the implementation process works in real classroom settings, and what challenges and perceived benefits arise during usage. Qualitative research can provide insight into the teaching-learning context, classroom interaction, teacher and student perceptions — which is especially important if flashcards are applied through a specially prepared teaching module, not merely as additional media.

Within that framework, this study selects a case study approach at Elementary School in third grade to deeply explore the role of flashcards in supporting animal vocabulary retention. By using a teaching module that has been specifically prepared, this research aims to depict contextually how flashcards are implemented, how students respond, and to what extent this media helps in both short-term and mid-term word retention. The teaching module allows adaptation according to students' characteristics and material (animals), so that it can become a replicable learning model for other elementary schools.

This research is important because, besides providing empirical evidence about the effectiveness of flashcards in a real classroom context, it also offers practical recommendations for teachers on how to design and apply flashcards effectively

for early-grade students. The results of this study are expected to contribute to improving the quality of English teaching in Indonesian elementary schools, particularly in enhancing vocabulary retention and student engagement in foreign language learning. The objectives of this study are: (1) to describe the process of flashcard implementation in third-grade elementary classroom through a teaching module; (2) to explore the perceptions of students and teachers toward flashcard media; (3) to examine the impact of flashcards on the retention of animal vocabulary by students at Elementary School.

2. Literature Review

Flashcards as a Vocabulary Learning Media

Flashcards have long been used as a supportive media in language teaching, especially to help students recognize and memorize new vocabulary. Research indicates that flashcards can facilitate the association between images (pictures) and words, thereby aiding vocabulary retention among young learners (Yusuf, Akhmad, Kaaba, Habibie, & Ayuba, 2021). The visual-verbal pairing embedded in flashcard design is particularly aligned with dual coding theory, which suggests that learning is more effective when information is encoded through both verbal and non-verbal channels (Nasution & Rahim, 2022).

In addition, the use of flashcards has also been reported to be effective in boosting students' interest and motivation. In a qualitative study involving elementary school students, many reported a preference for flashcards over traditional methods (such as copying words on the board), because their simple yet attractive design makes learning feel enjoyable (Zulkarnain, 2025). Furthermore, a media-development study in an Islamic elementary school context found that flashcards — when designed with attention to students' characteristics (visual appeal, simplicity, and attractiveness) — significantly enhanced vocabulary mastery (Nasution & Rahim, 2022).

Vocabulary Retention and Language Learning for Young Learners

Vocabulary retention is a crucial aspect of language learning, especially for young learners, because at early ages their cognitive and visual memory development is conducive to learning through visual and interactive media. Studies in foreign-language learning contexts suggest flashcards are especially suitable for young learners, as their visual and interactive nature supports both short-term and long-term memory storage. For example, in Vietnam, studies using flashcard-based techniques showed improvements in vocabulary retention among students and revealed positive attitudes and perceptions toward flashcard use in the learning process (Le & Luong, 2023).

Similarly, in the context of elementary education in Indonesia, quasi-experimental research demonstrated that using flashcards significantly improved vocabulary mastery compared to conventional methods, thereby supporting vocabulary retention (Fitriyani & Nulanda, 2022). These findings are consistent

with research by Putri, Sorohiti, and Ariebowo (2024), who also confirmed that the use of flashcards in elementary school English classes yielded significant improvements in vocabulary acquisition and retention among young learners.

Challenges and Perceptions of Teachers & Students Regarding Flashcards

Although many studies highlight the effectiveness of flashcards, qualitative investigations into teacher experiences reveal insights into both advantages and challenges. In a study on teaching vocabulary to young learners, researchers found that while flashcards help teachers introduce new vocabulary, create a more conducive classroom atmosphere, and increase student enthusiasm, there were also initial difficulties — for example, some pupils experienced confusion when first introduced to the cards, or required adjustments to ensure they genuinely understood the word rather than merely recognizing the picture (Widya, Andriani, & Sulastrri, 2021).

Experimental studies on young learners showed that the effectiveness of flashcards heavily depends on the media's design elements (color, clarity of images, relevance of material), as well as teaching methods — interactive and direct engagement tends to yield better outcomes than merely showing cards passively (Nasution & Rahim, 2022).

Factors Supporting the Effectiveness of Flashcards

Based on the literature, several factors influence the effectiveness of flashcards in vocabulary teaching. First, card design — attractive images, high color contrast, and clear representation of words help young learners associate vocabulary with visuals more effectively (Nasution & Rahim, 2022). Second, teacher-student interaction and class activities — flashcards are most effective when used in interactive activities (e.g., matching games, discussion, repeated drills), rather than as passive media (Widya, Andriani, & Sulastrri, 2021). Third, frequency and consistency — repeated exposure (regular review) strengthens vocabulary retention over the medium term, not just after one session (Yusuf et al., 2021). Fourth, student motivation and perception — when students find the learning media enjoyable and relevant, they tend to participate more actively, which positively impacts learning outcomes (Zulkarnain, 2025).

Relevance of Previous Studies to the Present Research

Many previous studies emphasize the effectiveness of flashcards for elementary learners, but fewer use a qualitative approach to explore the real experiences of teachers and students, particularly regarding flashcards as the main media integrated into a systematic teaching module. Qualitative work such as that by Widya, Andriani, and Sulastrri (2021) demonstrates that flashcards can make teaching more enjoyable and assist teachers — but also reveals challenges during classroom implementation. Recent research by Zulkarnain (2025) on students' perceptions of flashcards in vocabulary learning highlighted that students preferred flashcards over traditional methods, reinforcing the argument that flashcards are appropriate for young learners. Therefore, the current study —

focusing on third-grade elementary students at Elementary School with animal vocabulary material — is highly relevant for filling a gap in the literature by combining a custom teaching module, flashcards, and a qualitative case study approach to examine how media works in a real classroom context.

3. Method

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design with a case study approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A case study is appropriate because it allows in-depth exploration of a particular case — namely, the implementation of flashcards using a teaching module in a single class (third-grade at Elementary School) — within its real-life context. According to standard methodological guidance, case study research aims to provide a comprehensive and holistic understanding of phenomena as they occur naturally, by gathering rich descriptive data (Yin, 2017).

Case Selection / Research Site

The “case” in this study is the third-grade English class at Elementary School where a custom teaching module using animal-vocabulary flashcards was implemented. The rationale for selecting this case is its relevance to the research objective: to explore how flashcards influence animal vocabulary retention among young learners in a real classroom setting. Drawing on guidance for case study selection, this study emphasizes depth over generalization; the goal is to understand the case in detail rather than make broad generalizations (Stake, 1995).

Data Sources and Collection Techniques

To capture multiple dimensions of the case, this study uses multiple sources of evidence. These include: (1) the teaching module document (the flashcard-based module) as a primary document data source; (2) classroom observation to note how flashcards are used in actual teaching, teacher–student interaction, and student engagement; (3) in-depth interviews or focus group discussions with the teacher and students to gather their perceptions, experiences, and reflections; and (4) field notes and reflective journal to record contextual details, nonverbal behaviours, classroom atmosphere, and the researcher’s observations during implementation. Using multiple data sources (triangulation) enhances the credibility and validity of findings in qualitative case studies (Sitorus, 2020).

Data Analysis

Data collected were analyzed through a process of thematic analysis involving coding, categorization, and synthesis of themes that emerge from interviews, observations, module content, and field notes. This approach allows identifying patterns, perceptions, and meanings associated with flashcard use and vocabulary retention. As typical in qualitative case study research, the analysis seeks to

produce a thick, descriptive narrative of the case rather than numerical measurements (Stake, 1995).

Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

To ensure trustworthiness of findings, the study employed data triangulation (combining module-document analysis, observations, interviews, and field notes), and where possible member checking (verifying interpretations with participants), consistent with qualitative case study methodology (Yin, 2017; Khairani & Manurung, 2019). Regarding ethics, informed consent was obtained from school authorities and teachers, and individual student identities were not disclosed in any reporting. Data were stored securely and participants retained the right to withdraw at any time.

4. Result

Student Engagement and Attention During Flashcard Activities

The implementation of flashcards in the third-grade classroom at Elementary School showed a highly positive response from students from the beginning of the lesson. When the teacher introduced the animal flashcards, students demonstrated strong curiosity and excitement, especially when recognizing familiar animals such as cat, dog, bird, and fish. The visual design of the flashcards helped students quickly connect the images with the English words, which created an enjoyable entry point into learning English vocabulary. The teacher noted that students were more focused and attentive compared to previous lessons conducted without media.

During the vocabulary recognition stage, students were able to repeat the pronunciation of the animal names confidently after the teacher's modeling. Most students could correctly articulate the targeted vocabulary after only a few repetitions. Even students who initially hesitated gradually gained confidence through peer-support interaction. The inclusion of animal sounds (meow, woof, etc.) made the pronunciation drill livelier and more helped reinforce memory through auditory cues, as observed by the teacher.

Memory Matching Game: Collaborative Vocabulary Retention

The collaborative matching game — Memory Matching Game — became the activity that generated the highest level of engagement. In small groups, students actively searched for correct pairs between word-cards and picture-cards. They helped each other identify the correct vocabulary and celebrated each successful match. This game fostered meaningful interaction and required students to recall vocabulary more independently, promoting deeper retention. Students were also encouraged to say the animal names aloud when they found the correct match, reinforcing pronunciation and memory simultaneously.

Creative Drawing and Labeling Task

The follow-up creative activity further strengthened learning outcomes. Students were asked to draw their favorite animals and label them using English. Most students successfully wrote the correct vocabulary under their drawings, demonstrating that they could recall at least three out of four animal names being taught. Some students added additional animals beyond the core vocabulary, indicating extended interest and prior knowledge activation. The teacher reported that students enjoyed expressing their creativity while still applying the target language learned that day.

Inclusive Participation and Teacher Reflection

Classroom observations also revealed notable improvements in students' confidence and willingness to participate orally. Students who were usually passive in English lessons became more involved in answering and asking questions related to the flashcards. In group work, they negotiated roles, supported one another, and demonstrated collaborative skills aligned with cooperative learning principles. Students with learning difficulties were provided simplified repetition tasks and visual support from peers, ensuring inclusion within the learning process. Based on the teacher's reflection and assessment results, the majority of students met the learning achievement indicators, successfully mentioning animal names during oral questioning, matching correct flashcard pairs during the game, and producing labeled drawings with minimal assistance.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that flashcards played a significant role in encouraging student focus and engagement during vocabulary learning activities. This aligns with previous research showing that flashcards facilitate better comprehension and memory performance in young learners because the combination of visual and verbal input helps stimulate attention and interest (Nasution & Rahim, 2022; Yusuf et al., 2021). The introduction of vocabulary through visual media has consistently been shown to increase students' focus and enthusiasm in English learning, particularly in the Indonesian elementary school context (Deswita & Mubarok, 2022).

Students' active participation during the Memory Matching Game demonstrates that vocabulary retention is strengthened when learning is conducted through play-based and collaborative experiences. The results of this study confirm the effectiveness of game-integrated flashcards as reported by previous studies, which found that interactive activities such as matching games promote stronger recall and long-term memory in vocabulary learning (Widya, Andriani, & Sulastri, 2021; Le & Luong, 2023). This is consistent with the view that enjoyment and active engagement are key drivers in children's vocabulary mastery (Zulkarnain, 2025).

Students' improvement in pronunciation and confidence also supports

findings from earlier research stating that flashcards are effective in helping students develop better pronunciation skills while simultaneously expanding vocabulary mastery (Putri, Sorohiti, & Ariebowo, 2024). The teacher's modeling, repetition, and peer support contributed to increased willingness among students to speak up, which corresponds with research highlighting the motivational benefits of flashcard-based learning (Wahyuningsih & Izzah, 2023).

Moreover, the creative drawing and labeling task showed that students were not only able to recognize but also produce vocabulary in written form, demonstrating meaningful vocabulary retention. This parallels existing research that emphasizes the value of multimodal learning — especially visual expression — in strengthening word associations and increasing students' ability to retain new vocabulary over time (Fitriyani & Nulanda, 2022). The present study also found that students with different learning abilities could still participate effectively when flashcards were used as the primary learning media, supporting the view that flashcards are adaptable and supportive of differentiation in diverse classrooms (Widya, Andriani, & Sulastri, 2021).

Finally, the overall positive perceptions from students and teacher reflections support recent studies indicating that flashcards increase motivation, reduce anxiety, and make vocabulary learning more enjoyable for children (Zulkarnain, 2025; Wahyuningsih & Izzah, 2023). This suggests that integrating flashcards into structured teaching modules, such as the one used in this study, may serve as an effective model for improving vocabulary instruction in elementary English language learning contexts. Combining visual, auditory, and kinesthetic components appears to contribute strongly to student success in vocabulary retention.

6. Conclusion

This qualitative case study concludes that the integration of flashcards in third-grade English learning at Elementary School plays a significant role in enhancing animal vocabulary retention among young learners. The teaching module enabled students to learn new vocabulary in a manner that is visually appealing, meaningful, and age-appropriate. Throughout the instructional phases, flashcards supported the processes of recognition, repetition, and recall, providing strong foundations for vocabulary acquisition as recommended in prior educational research (Yusuf et al., 2021; Fitriyani & Nulanda, 2022).

The use of interactive activities — particularly the Memory Matching Game — contributed to the development of deeper memory retention because students actively engaged with the words rather than memorizing them passively. By fostering play-based learning and encouraging collaboration between students, flashcards created a learning atmosphere that supported social interaction as well as language development (Le & Luong, 2023). Another essential finding is the improvement in student confidence and oral participation; students who were

previously hesitant became more active participants when learning involved visually stimulating media.

The creative drawing and labeling task further demonstrated that vocabulary learning extended beyond oral recognition to written production. Differentiated learning became possible through the flashcard-based approach: students with higher proficiency extended their learning, while students needing additional support benefited from repeated visual cues (Widya, Andriani, & Sulastri, 2021). Overall, this study confirms that flashcards are an effective and inclusive learning tool for helping young learners acquire and retain animal vocabulary in English. It is recommended that future research involve wider observation, direct student interviews, and the use of more varied vocabulary topics to deepen understanding of the long-term effects on retention.

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