
| **RESEARCH ARTICLE**

Investigation of the Effectiveness of Different Methods of Vocabulary Acquisition in the English Language Classroom: A Case of University of San Carlos, Philippines

Coroza, Michael

College of Teacher Education, Saint Columban College, Philippines, 2016, Philippines

Corresponding Author: Coroza, Michael, **E-mail:** corozam@gmail.com

| **ABSTRACT**

This study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of different methods of vocabulary acquisition in the English language classroom at the University of San Carlos in the Philippines. The sample size consisted of 90 students, who were divided into three groups: Group A received direct teaching of vocabulary, Group B used flashcards for vocabulary practice, and Group C utilized online vocabulary learning platforms. Data was collected through pre and post-tests to measure vocabulary acquisition, as well as student feedback surveys. The results showed that Group B, which used flashcards for vocabulary practice, had the highest improvement in vocabulary acquisition, followed by Group C, using online learning platforms. Group A, receiving direct teaching, showed the least improvement. Moreover, the student feedback surveys revealed that students in Group B and Group C found their respective methods more engaging and enjoyable compared to Group A. In conclusion, this study suggests that using flashcards for vocabulary practice and online vocabulary learning platforms can be more effective methods for vocabulary acquisition in the English language classroom, as they provide greater engagement and enjoyment for students. The findings of this study can provide valuable insights for English language teachers in designing effective vocabulary instruction strategies.

| **KEYWORDS**

Vocabulary acquisition, English language Teaching, online learning, Instruction strategies

| **ARTICLE INFORMATION**

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1. Introduction

The acquisition of a robust vocabulary is a cornerstone of language proficiency, acting as a critical determinant for effective communication, reading comprehension, academic success, and overall linguistic competence (Bulan, 2021). In the context of English language learning, especially within non-native settings like the Philippines, the methods employed to enhance vocabulary acquisition are of paramount importance. The University of San Carlos, a prominent institution in the Philippines, offers a diverse environment to explore various pedagogical strategies for vocabulary enhancement (Fekri, 2016). This study seeks to investigate the effectiveness of different methods of vocabulary acquisition employed within the English language classrooms at the University of San Carlos.

Vocabulary acquisition methods can broadly be categorized into implicit and explicit approaches. Implicit methods often involve incidental learning through extensive reading, multimedia exposure, and conversations, allowing learners to infer meanings and usages of new words through context (Metaxa, 2013). Meanwhile, explicit methods entail direct instruction, including techniques such as flashcards, word lists, and formalized teaching of word

meanings and usage. Each approach has its proponents and critics, with varying evidence supporting their efficacy across different learner demographics and educational settings.

Furthermore, contextual factors such as technological integration, cultural relevance, learner motivation, and instructional quality play significant roles in the process of vocabulary acquisition (Shao, 2012). Given the rapid globalization and the integration of digital tools in education, it becomes essential to re-evaluate traditional vocabulary teaching methods and assess newer, technology-enhanced practices.

The University of San Carlos, with its commitment to innovative teaching and diverse student body, provides an ideal case study to examine these dynamics. This investigation aims to compare and contrast the effectiveness of different vocabulary acquisition methods employed in undergraduate English programs at the university (Yilmaz, 2022). By analyzing both quantitative and qualitative data, including student performance metrics, teacher feedback, and learner perceptions, this study aspires to offer actionable insights and recommendations.

The findings of this research are expected to contribute significantly to the pedagogy of English language teaching, informing curriculum design, teaching methodology, and resource allocation, not only at the University of San Carlos but also in broader educational contexts in the Philippines and similar linguistic landscapes. Ultimately, the goal is to optimize vocabulary teaching strategies to enhance learner outcomes and foster higher levels of English language proficiency (Nazeer, 2023).

2. Literature Review

The study of vocabulary acquisition within the context of English Language Learning (ELL) has garnered substantial scholarly attention over the past decades. The diversity in pedagogy underscores the necessity of leveraging effective methods to enhance vocabulary retention and usage. This literature review synthesizes recent research on various strategies of vocabulary learning, focusing on their effectiveness and implications for the English Language Classroom.

Numerous studies have compared direct instruction and incidental learning strategies. Direct instruction involves explicit teaching of vocabulary, typically with definitions, usage examples, and practice exercises. Khoshshima (2016) advocates for direct instruction, emphasizing its efficiency in quickly building a foundational vocabulary. Nonetheless, Alfadil (2020) argue that while direct instruction might be effective for initial acquisition, it may not always ensure long-term retention or the ability to use new words in varied contexts.

In contrast, incidental learning occurs through exposure to language in context, such as reading, listening to stories, or engaging in conversations. Derakhshan (2015) posits that a major advantage of incidental learning is its naturalistic approach, which aligns with his input hypothesis, which claims that language is acquired through exposure to comprehensible input. Studies like those by Motlagh (2020) support this, showing that students often learn a large amount of vocabulary indirectly through extensive reading.

The advent of technology has introduced a plethora of tools designed to enhance vocabulary acquisition. Apps like Duolingo, Memrise, and Anki employ spaced repetition systems (SRS) to reinforce memory (Alabsi, 2016). Research by Michael (2023) reveals that mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) significantly enhances vocabulary retention, especially when learners are provided with timely and repeated exposure.

Moreover, multimedia resources like videos, podcasts, and interactive games offer multimodal learning experiences that cater to different learning styles (Rezaei, 2013). These tools are particularly beneficial in university settings where diverse student backgrounds necessitate flexible approaches to vocabulary learning (Gao, 2023).

Collaborative learning, including group work and peer teaching, has shown promising results in vocabulary acquisition (Atasheneh, 2015). This method encourages active engagement and reinforces learning through social interactions. Studies such as the one conducted by Naeimi (2015) indicate that collaborative tasks can lead to deeper processing and retention of new vocabulary.

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) integrates vocabulary learning within meaningful communication and problem-solving activities. Perveen (2016) provides evidence that TBLT facilitates the practical use of language, promoting not just vocabulary acquisition but also overall communicative competence.

Contextual and theme-based vocabulary teaching aligns with the belief that language is best learned in context (Rezaei, 2014). Durongbhandhu (2021) posits that teaching words within specific themes or subject areas can improve retention and facilitate connections between new and existing knowledge. This approach resonates well with the integrated curriculum often employed in higher education.

Research specific to the Philippines highlights the unique challenges and opportunities in vocabulary acquisition within its multilingual context. Coşgun (2016) observed that the interplay of multiple languages (e.g., Tagalog, Cebuano, English) in the Philippines can influence the learning process. Studies by Soruç (2017) and Durongbhandhu (2021) underscore the importance of considering linguistic diversity when developing vocabulary instruction methods.

At the University of San Carlos, recent studies by local researchers such as Khoshshima (2016) emphasize the positive impacts of using local contexts and culturally relevant materials in vocabulary teaching. Their findings suggest that incorporating local idioms, expressions, and cultural references into vocabulary instruction can make learning more engaging and relevant for students.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a quasi-experimental design to investigate the effectiveness of various methods of vocabulary acquisition in the English language classroom at the University of San Carlos in the Philippines. Three distinct groups of students, each exposed to different vocabulary acquisition methods, constituted the backbone of this research. This design facilitated comparative analysis of pre-test and post-test scores to ascertain the relative efficacy of each method.

3.2 Participants

The sample comprised 90 undergraduate students enrolled in different English courses at the University of San Carlos. The students were randomly assigned to one of three groups, each consisting of 30 participants. Group A received direct teaching of vocabulary, Group B used flashcards for vocabulary practice, and Group C utilized online vocabulary learning platforms. Random allocation ensured that any pre-existing differences among the groups were minimized.

3.3 Vocabulary Acquisition Methods

Group A (Direct Teaching): This group experienced conventional instructor-led vocabulary lessons characterized by lecturing and explicit instruction. Lists of words were presented alongside definitions and example sentences. Students engaged in in-class activities such as reading passages and identifying vocabulary words from those texts.

Group B (Flashcards): This group practiced vocabulary using flashcards, which featured a word on one side and its definition, along with a sample sentence on the other. Students were encouraged to use both physical and digital flashcards, engaging in various activities like peer quizzes and self-assessment in both in-class and independent study settings.

Group C (Online Platforms): This group accessed vocabulary through online learning platforms specifically designed for language acquisition. These platforms offered interactive exercises, games, and spaced repetition algorithms to reinforce vocabulary learning. Students were able to log in from any location, offering both flexibility and extensive practice opportunities.

3.4 Data Collection

Data were collected using several instruments to ensure validity and comprehensive analysis:

Pre and Post-Tests: To measure vocabulary acquisition, all participants completed standardized vocabulary tests before and after the intervention. These tests assessed recognition, understanding, and appropriate use of vocabulary words.

Student Feedback Surveys: After the intervention, participants completed surveys designed to capture qualitative data on their engagement, enjoyment, and perceived effectiveness of the methods used.

3.5 Data Analysis

Quantitative data from the pre and post-tests were analyzed using statistical methods to determine the improvements in vocabulary acquisition across the three groups. Paired sample t-tests were conducted to compare the pre and post-test scores within each group, while ANOVA was used to compare the vocabulary gains between the groups. Qualitative data from the student feedback surveys were examined through thematic analysis to identify common themes regarding student experiences and perceptions.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the University of San Carlos' Institutional Review Board (IRB). Informed consent was secured from all participants, guaranteeing their understanding of the study's purpose, procedures and their right to withdraw at any time. Confidentiality was ensured by anonymizing survey responses and test results.

3.7 Limitations

While the study provided valuable insights, it was confined to a single institution, which might limit the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the relatively short duration of the study may not capture the long-term effects of each vocabulary acquisition method. Further research involving larger, more diverse samples and extended study periods is recommended to validate and expand upon these findings.

4. Findings

4.1 Analysis of the Pretest and Posttest for Different Methods of Vocabulary Acquisition

4.1.1 Overview

The study examined the effectiveness of three distinct methods for vocabulary acquisition among 90 students at the University of San Carlos in the Philippines. The students were divided into three groups:

Group A: Direct teaching of vocabulary

Group B: Flashcards for vocabulary practice

Group C: Online vocabulary learning platforms

To evaluate the effectiveness of each method, pretests and posttests were administered to all participants. The aim was to measure the improvement in vocabulary knowledge for each group over a defined period.

4.2 Pretest Analysis

4.2.1 Initial Vocabulary Knowledge

Pretest analysis was conducted to evaluate the initial vocabulary knowledge among the participants of the study. Three groups (Group A, Group B, and Group C) were assessed to establish a baseline prior to the commencement of the vocabulary acquisition intervention.

The mean scores of the pretest provided an insight into the initial vocabulary proficiency of the participants across the three groups. Here is a summary table showing the mean scores of each group:

Table 1a: Mean score of each group

Group	Mean Score (%)
A	32
B	30
C	31

Statistical analysis using ANOVA was conducted to determine if the differences in pretest scores among the groups were statistically significant. The p-value obtained from this analysis was greater than 0.05 ($p > 0.05$), indicating that there were no significant differences in the initial vocabulary knowledge among the three groups. This suggests that the groups were homogeneous at the starting point of the intervention.

Table 1b: Pretest Scores

Group	Mean Score (%)	Standard Deviation	p-value (ANOVA)
A	32	2.5	> 0.05
B	30	3.0	> 0.05
C	31	2.8	> 0.05

The pretest scores provided crucial information regarding the initial state of vocabulary knowledge among the participants. The close mean scores (32%, 30%, and 31% for Groups A, B, and C, respectively) reflect a comparable level of vocabulary proficiency. Additionally, the standard deviations indicate that the scores within each group were relatively concentrated around the mean, showing consistency in the participants' performance.

The p-value obtained from the ANOVA test ($p > 0.05$) confirmed that there were no significant statistical differences in the initial vocabulary knowledge among the groups. This homogeneous starting point is critical for ensuring that subsequent findings and comparisons can be attributed to the interventions applied rather than pre-existing differences among the groups.

The homogeneity of the groups allows for a more accurate assessment of the effectiveness of the different methods of vocabulary acquisition, as any observed differences in the post-intervention phase can be more confidently attributed to the type of instructional approach each group received. This sets a solid foundation for evaluating the impact of the interventions, ensuring that any advantages or improvements seen in subsequent tests are likely due to the instructional methods rather than initial disparities in vocabulary knowledge.

4.3 Posttest Analysis

4.3.1 Vocabulary Knowledge After Intervention

The effectiveness of different methods of vocabulary acquisition was assessed through a post-test administered after an intervention period. The data collected were subjected to multiple forms of analysis to understand the improvements made by the different groups.

The mean scores of the groups on the vocabulary post-test are presented as follows:

Table 2: Post-test Mean Scores

Group	Post-test Mean Score (%)
A	50
B	70
C	65

4.3.2 Improvement Analysis

The percentage increase in mean scores relative to their pre-test scores provides insights into the effectiveness of the different methodologies employed:

Table 3: Improvement Analysis

Group	Pre-test Mean Score (%)	Post-test Mean Score (%)	Improvement (%)
A	32	50	18
B	30	70	40
C	31	65	34

An Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was performed to determine if the observed differences in vocabulary improvement among the groups were statistically significant. The results indicated a significant difference ($p < 0.05$) among the three groups.

Moreover, post-hoc analyses using the Tukey HSD test provided more granular insights. The key findings from the post-hoc analysis are as follows:

Both Group B (Contextual Learning Method) and Group C (Multimedia-Assisted Method) significantly outperformed Group A (Traditional Method).

Among the experimental groups, Group B's improvement was slightly but significantly better than Group C's, with the difference being statistically significant ($p < 0.05$).

Table 4: ANOVA and Post-hoc Test Results

Comparison	Mean Difference	Standard Error	p-value
Group A vs. Group B	-20.00	3.25	< 0.05
Group A vs. Group C	-15.00	3.25	< 0.05
Group B vs. Group C	5.00	2.75	< 0.05

The post-test analysis reveals several important trends and insights:

The Contextual Learning Method (Group B) and Multimedia-Assisted Method (Group C) were more effective in enhancing vocabulary acquisition compared to the Traditional Method (Group A). Additionally, The higher mean scores and greater percentage improvements in Groups B and C highlight the advantages of more interactive and integrated approaches to vocabulary learning. This finding suggests that learning vocabulary in context may provide deeper understanding and retention compared to multimedia tools, which, while effective, may not provide the same depth of language exposure and use.

4.4 Student Feedback Analysis

4.4.1 Engagement and Enjoyment

In our investigation of vocabulary acquisition methods, we positioned student engagement and enjoyment as key variables for measuring the effectiveness of each method used in the English language classroom. To discern students' reactions and perceptions, surveys were conducted that sought qualitative data on their experiences. The feedback was categorized based on the three groups exposed to different vocabulary acquisition methods: traditional learning (Group A), flashcards (Group B), and online platforms (Group C).

Group A: Traditional Learning Methods

Feedback Type	Percentage
Somewhat Engaging	60%
Not Engaging	40%

A significant proportion of students found the traditional methods somewhat engaging, with 60% indicating a moderate level of engagement. However, a notable segment, 40%, did not find these methods engaging at all. This feedback suggests that while traditional methods hold some merits, they may lack the stimulation to fully captivate student interest, adversely impacting overall effectiveness.

Group B: Flashcards

Feedback Type	Percentage
Highly Engaging	90%
Not Engaging	10%

Students utilizing flashcards overwhelmingly reported higher levels of engagement and enjoyment, with 90% finding this method highly effective. The interactive and repetitive nature of flashcards seemingly appeals to student preferences, which often favor visual stimuli and the challenge of active recall.

Group C: Online Platforms

Feedback Type	Percentage
Engaging and Interactive	80%
Experience Technical Difficulties	20%

With 80% of students in Group C describing online platforms as engaging and interactive, these digital tools appear to deliver a highly stimulating learning environment. However, technical difficulties were noted by 20% of the respondents, pointing to operational challenges that can potentially disrupt learning experiences.

4.4.2 Comparative Student Feedback Summary

In summary, feedback from Group B and Group C indicates elevated levels of satisfaction and enjoyment compared to Group A. The findings underscore the importance of engagement, suggesting that methods incorporating interaction and visual elements (such as flashcards and online platforms) more effectively captivate student interest and foster a positive learning atmosphere. The data gleaned shows a pattern where the method's context significantly impacts student attitudes toward vocabulary acquisition.

Table 5: Comparative Student Feedback Summary

Group	Method	% Engaged	% Not Engaged	% High Enjoyment	% Technical Issues
A	Traditional	60%	40%	-	-
B	Flashcards	90%	10%	90%	-
C	Online Platforms	80%	-	80%	20%

The responses highlight a crucial aspect of pedagogic strategies: engagement and enjoyment directly influence students' acceptance and efficacy of learning methods. Traditional methods seem to fall short in sustaining student interest, unlike flashcards and online platforms which present interactive and visually stimulating experiences.

However, it is essential to consider that while digital platforms offer high engagement rates, technical issues can pose significant setbacks. To harness the full potential of these methodologies, it's imperative to ensure robust IT infrastructure and technical support.

5. Discussion

The findings from this study align with and expand upon previous research in the field of vocabulary acquisition in the English language classroom. Consistent with earlier studies, the data from the University of San Carlos confirm that active engagement and the use of varied, interactive methods can significantly enhance vocabulary learning outcomes.

Research conducted by Alabsi (2016) highlighted the importance of repeated exposure and active engagement in vocabulary learning. The results from Group B, which utilized flashcards for vocabulary practice, showed the highest vocabulary acquisition improvement, echoing Nation's findings. The repetitive nature and visual engagement offered by flashcards likely contributed to the higher retention rates, supporting the notion that active engagement and multimodal learning can lead to superior outcomes.

In contrast, while direct teaching of vocabulary (Group A) has its merits, it often lacks the interactive and engaging elements present in other methods. Previous studies, such as those by Bulan (2021), suggest that direct vocabulary instruction may not effectively cater to all learning styles and may lead to lower retention rates compared to more dynamic approaches. Our study corroborates this by revealing that Group A demonstrated the least improvement in vocabulary acquisition.

Online vocabulary learning, utilized by Group C, also showed significant improvements, albeit lower than flashcards. This is in line with recent studies by Metaxa (2013), which found that digital tools could provide personalized, self-paced learning opportunities. The enhanced engagement and accessibility via online platforms support the growing body of evidence that technology can be a potent tool in vocabulary acquisition.

The student feedback indicating higher engagement and enjoyment from Group B and Group C has important implications (Nazeer, 2023). Engagement is a critical factor in effective learning, and methods that cater to this, such as flashcards and online platforms, should be prioritized. Teachers might consider incorporating these tools into their vocabulary instruction strategies more prominently.

Moreover, our findings suggest that a hybrid approach could be beneficial. As highlighted by Shao (2012), combining traditional methods with innovative practices can cater to diverse learning preferences, leading to more comprehensive language acquisition. Integrating direct teaching with flashcards and online platforms could provide a balanced approach, leveraging the strengths of each method.

6. Conclusion

The primary aim of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of different methods of vocabulary acquisition in the English language classroom at the University of San Carlos, Philippines. The methods examined included direct teaching of vocabulary, flashcard practice, and online vocabulary learning platforms. The comparison was based on data collected from pre and post-tests measuring vocabulary acquisition among 90 participating students, as well as feedback obtained through student surveys.

The results clearly indicate that the use of flashcards (Group B) was the most effective method for vocabulary acquisition among the three approaches studied. This group demonstrated the highest improvement in vocabulary scores from pre to post-test, suggesting that the repetitive, visual, and easily accessible nature of flashcards significantly aids vocabulary retention. Group C, which employed online vocabulary learning platforms, also showed notable improvement, though not as pronounced as Group B. The interactive and often gamified features of online platforms likely contributed to these gains, providing a stimulating and engaging environment that promotes learning.

Conversely, Group A, which relied on direct vocabulary teaching, exhibited the least improvement. This indicates that traditional, direct instruction may not be as effective in engaging students and fostering vocabulary retention compared to more interactive and student-centered methods.

Moreover, the student feedback surveys revealed that both Groups B and C found their respective methods more engaging and enjoyable than Group A. This suggests that the level of student engagement and enjoyment can play a crucial role in the effectiveness of vocabulary acquisition methods.

In conclusion, this study suggests that integrating flashcards and online vocabulary learning platforms into the English language classroom can significantly enhance vocabulary acquisition, potentially leading to better educational outcomes. These methods appear to not only improve learning efficiency but also make the learning process more engaging and enjoyable for students. Consequently, English language teachers are encouraged to consider incorporating these techniques into their instructional strategies to optimize vocabulary teaching. The findings from this investigation provide valuable insights and practical recommendations that can help in designing more effective and student-friendly vocabulary instruction programs at the University of San Carlos and similar educational contexts.

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