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Vocabulary Enhancement Technique Using “Brain Bloom”, “Flash Card” and “4 Square” Methods

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Abstract

The ability to have a good command in English language will be a plus point to the students for their future endeavor. It was reported that graduates with well-versed communication skill in English language are more marketable and would be the most preferred main applicants that will be considered by the prospective employers for employability (Manjet & Julie, 2012). However, in a study of semester 1 students who are taking DUE 1012 Communicative English Course in Politeknik Port Dickson the ability to speak basic English language in classroom is a huge challenge and has become a burden to them. Their highest levels of fear towards the language are due to lack of skills and vocabulary in English language in which has resulted to a very low self-confident dilemma and they are afraid of making mistakes in front of others. As recommended in the research, teaching and learning of English language should be conducted in an active, creative, fun learning and less stressful environment in order to help the students to gain more interest and benefit. In this paper the usage of Vocabulary Enhancement Technique will be presented. The resources of teaching techniques and tools have been created and used in order to enhance student's range of vocabulary, confident level and interest in learning English language in Politeknik. Nevertheless, through the usage of this Vocabulary Enhancement Technique we can also see the difference in their DUE 1012 final result attainment which is higher compared to the other Civil Engineering classes.

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Key-word: - Vocabulary, Vocabulary Enhancement Technique, Flash card

1. Introduction

Lecturer initiative in producing teaching aids is extremely important so that students will be more confident to use English language and interested to take part actively in the classroom learning process. As stated by Maryam (2012), the major component of any language learning is vocabulary and it is the essence of a language. Laufer (1997) also agreed that vocabulary learning is the heart of language learning and language use. According to Nima and Kamran (2012), the problems in acquiring the language arise, when a poor knowledge of vocabulary obstructed reading process, which will become an obstacle in listening process, and serves as a stumbling block in effective communication.

The best techniques to enhance the student's vocabulary are through the usage of visual and vocabulary drilling. Why this two techniques? There are two main reasons why it is important to actually show what we are teaching ; first visuals refine the material being taught and secondly visuals make learning more permanent (Ghulam, 2015). Despite of only using visual to enhance student's vocabulary enrichment, associating and drilling technique should also be used because through drilling repetition and multiple exposures of vocabulary items in a variety of contexts (Stahl, 2005) will help learner to a discovery to not only know the word's definition and its logical relationship with other words, they also know how the word functions in different contexts (Stahl, 2001). That is why for this project a few Vocabulary Enhancement Technique activities been used are by combining 3 major key techniques of word association, visual, and word drilling technique.

Participants

The selected participants for this innovation projects were 21 semester 1 students of Civil Engineering department program of DKA1S2. Age group ranged 19 to 21 years old, consisting of 12 male and 8 female participants. Their language knowledge was mostly moderate to poor as according to their SPM results in which 10% of the students obtained grade A, 5% of the students gained grade B, 20% of the students received grade C+, with majority of the students 45% of them obtained grade D and grade E 20%. Besides that an interview and observation during classroom session also has been conducted to confirm the students proficiency level.

Implementation

This activities were conducted in groups, about three to four students only in a group. The teaching techniques and teaching tools produced for this project are to encourage students to be able to speak with more confidence using speech recognition corresponding to a flash card. The flash cards consist of images related to the present world current issues for example war, global warming, social issues, plastic surgery and etc. This current issues topic are related to their DUE 1012 Communicative English course.



Figure 1 The Flash Card

Part 1

To begin with, two sets of similar flash card were distributed to the students in each group. They were to view the flash card and analyse it. They were given only 2 minutes to do so. This is followed by a "brain bloom" activity. Students were to list down as many words that are related to the images that they see in the flash card and they were given only 5 minutes to do so. In average, each group managed to list down less than 10 words related to the flash card. Most of the listed words were similar among the other group members with only a few differences. The not similar words were then grouped and separated in a piece of paper. The purpose of the "brain bloom" activity was to help the students generate their prior knowledge related to the image that they see from flash card by associating any related words to the image.

In the following activity, there were five wording stations that have been arranged in the classroom. At each station a set of jumbled words were placed. The students were to go to each station to identify and collect the set of vocabulary best associated with the image of the flash card that they have. They were given 10 minutes to complete the task. Each station can only be visited by one group at a time. If they have completed their task and were going to the next station, they have to wait and communicate with the other group in order for station exchange. During this activity it can be seen that students were participating actively as they moved from one station to another and were discussing on which words that was were to the flash card image that they owned.



Figure 2 The Activity

Once, the given time was up, students were to go back to their respective places and were asked to calculate the total number of words that they have which included all the set of words that they had in the piece of paper derived from the "brain bloom" activity. The students were asked to check the words that they have. Students were asked to exclude any similar word available in the set of words that they have.

The final part for this activity was the enhancement of the new gained set of words that they managed to discover. Lecturer distributes the "four square" form to the students. Then, they were asked to choose 2-4 new words from the set of words that they have. Each group members were not allowed to choose the same words. In the first square of the "four square" form the students must give a definition to the word that they choose by using their own words. In the second square, students were to list other words that have the same meaning with the chosen words. This was by using the "brainstorming" method. In the third square, students were to construct sentence that best fit the meaning of the word and in the last square students were to illustrate their understanding by drawing related image that best describe the words.

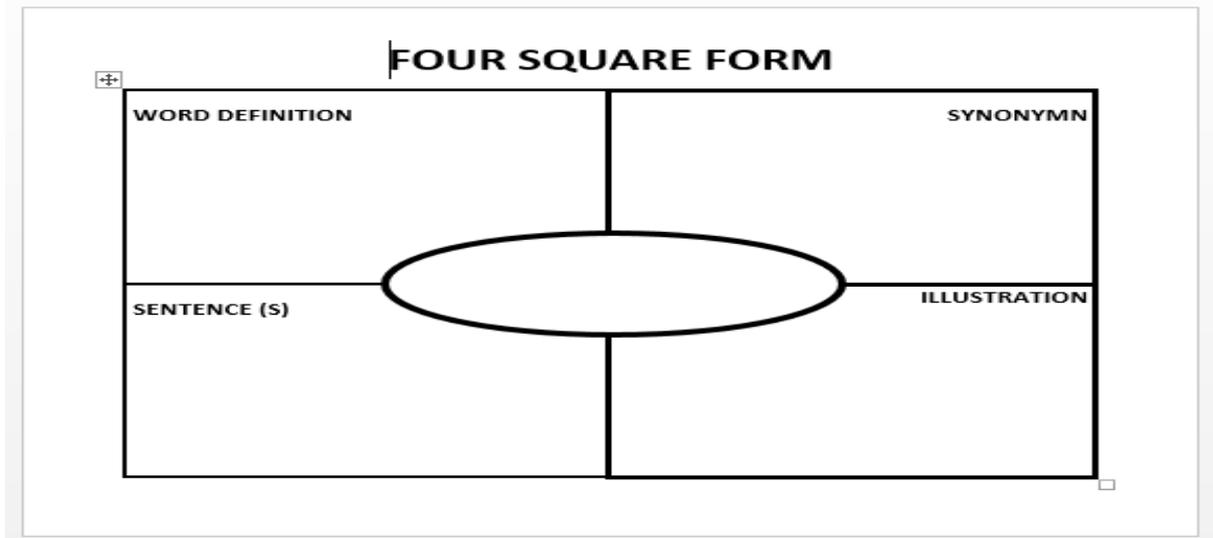


Figure 3 The “Four Square” Form

Lastly in their group they present their “four square” form and sharing information activity took place in front of the classroom for a better enhancement of vocabulary learned.

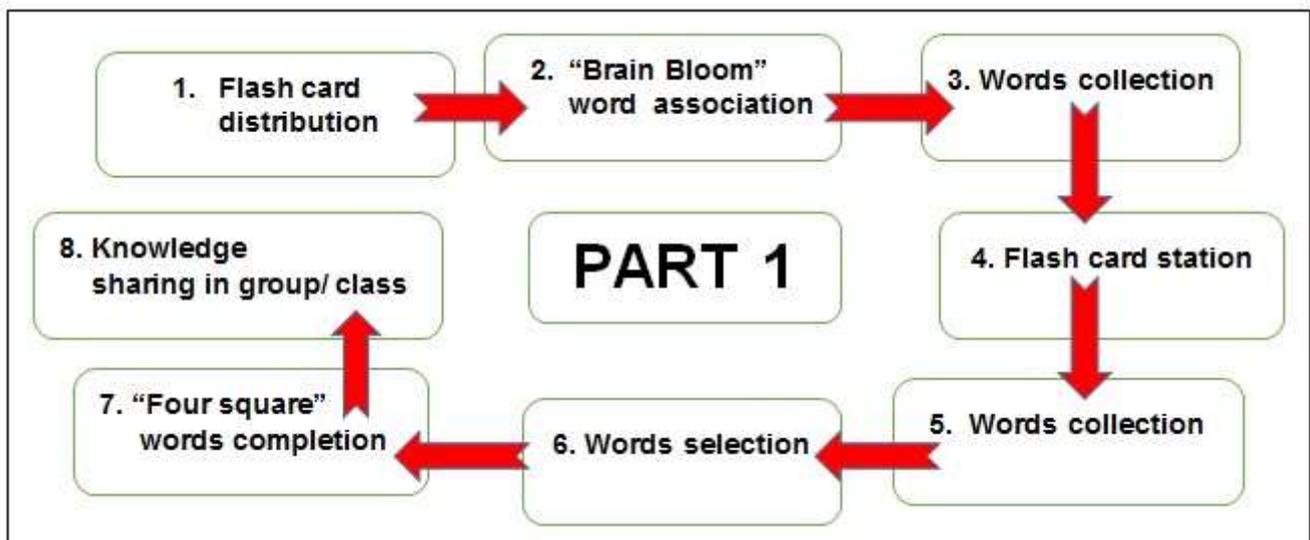


Figure 4 Vocabulary Enhancement Technique Part 1

Part 2

In the second part, at the next class session after the students carried out the activity of "four square", students were once again asked to review their “four square” forms and revise the words that they have encountered. After that, the students once again received the same flash card but this time they were provided with additional extra questions set of card. In their group they are required to discuss about it. The questions that they got were given to help them to have ideas on what area to converse about, to give a chance to them to use the words that they obtained from the “four square” forms activity. During this session it was clearly shown that student’s participation were dynamic even for a very poor usage learner before. They managed to share their opinions and gave recommendations on how to overcome the issues related to image shown in the flash card. The conducted activity was actually a preparatory for the group discussion assessment that will be conducted later.

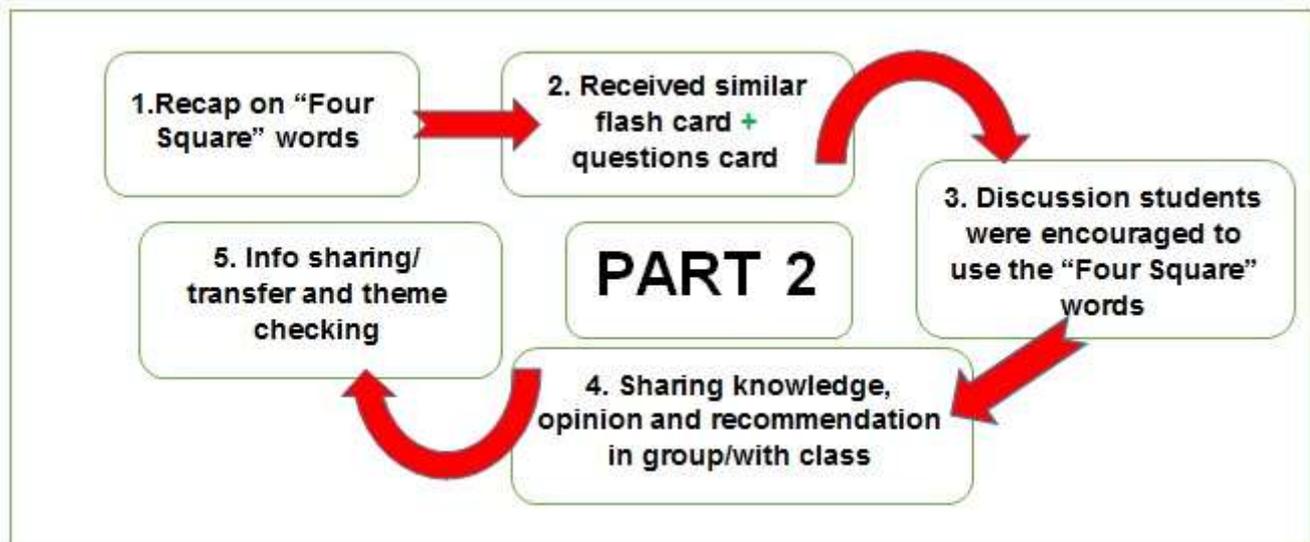


Figure 5 Vocabulary Enhancement Technique Part 2

The same activity was conducted again after a 2 week gap by using different flash card for each group. Later, a survey was conducted to obtain feedback from the students regarding the project of the Vocabulary Enhancement Technique.

Findings

After conducting two complete cycles of the Vocabulary Enhancement Technique activities in December and January, positive effects could be seen. Students were more confident in speaking and using the language. They showed great interest in learning the language and were not shy anymore. These changes could be seen during the second time when the activity was conducted in classroom. Students have become more familiar with the activity and managed to accomplish the activity independently with minimal supervision from lecturer. Based on the DKA1S2 student’s Continuous Assessment’s mark for DUE 1012 Communicative English course compared to the other two semester 1 Civil Engineering classes (DKA1S1 & DKA1S3) we could see a significant difference in the marks attained by the students. The students who have gone through Vocabulary Enhancement Technique activities averagely seem to have obtained higher marks than the students who did not use the Vocabulary Enhancement Technique. Refer to the table below for further details:-

Table 1 Student’s Continuous Assessment’s mark

Assessments/ Program	CLO1 Group Discussion	CLO2 Listening Test	CLO3 Reading Test	CLO4 Writing Test	CLO5 Oral Presentation	Total Average mark obtained
DKA1S1	12.6	12.2	13.5	7.2	17.3	63.05
DKA1S2	13	16.5	16	6.9	21.1	75.6
DKA1S3	12.3	14.4	13.7	6.2	17.5	61.95

Feedback

Based from the feedback gained from the participants it shows that the students gave a very positive response towards the activity in which it managed to provide a great effect to the students teaching and learning process. In the survey, the students strongly agreed that the activity conducted was an interesting and fun activity. While 99% of the participants strongly agreed that the images used for the flash cards were clear, interesting and colourful, they also found that through this activity they managed to discover new words and its meaning in a much interesting way. They also approved that now they know how to use the new words that they discovered from the activity. All of them responded that they learned different categories of words and themes according to the related current issues topic from the flash card. They also agreed that they can easily discuss about the current issues topic presented from the flash card using the provided questions. Nevertheless, they found that the activities conducted were very helpful to initiate their ability to speak in English confidently with their classmates.

Limitations

Despite the positive feedback given by students, there were a few limitations during the completion of the activity:-

1. The space for the first part of the flash card activity was quite limited this has made students movement restricted and a little bit congested. A better classroom space is needed so that the students will be more comfortable.
2. Class control; during the activity conducted some students who were very competitive tend to become too excited and too loud in the classroom. While the activity was going on in the classroom, the lecturer needed to have a good control of the students and had to always remind them to use English language.

This activity was planned to be executed for at least 3 - 4 times for a better training especially for their speaking practice. However due to time constrain it could only be executed twice.

The Benefits

This activity helps to contribute a lot of benefits not only for students but it is also helpful for wide variety language teaching activity for the lecturer in the classroom. Among the benefits are:-

1. The aids prepared are manageable and cheap.
2. This activity functions well in individual, pair and group work.
3. It can be a source of teaching aids that can be conducted to low, moderate or high level students.
4. Variety of other interesting activities can be conducted using the flash card aids it is not only limited to the brain bloom and “four square” activity only. (e.g: word games, spelling activity, vocabulary journal, writing activity and etc.)
5. It helps to improve student’s oral performance in the classroom and is beneficial for their preparation for DUE 1012 Communicative English assessments especially writing test, group discussion and oral presentation assessments.
6. It helps to motivate students to speak and use the language confidently.
7. Helps to establish interest and positive experience of language learning in classroom.
8. Active student’s participation.
9. Flash card is a useful resource that needs less preparation.

Conclusion

Experts agree that a combination of direct instruction of word meanings, discussion about words and word parts and encouragement of wide reading is the best way to help students to develop their vocabularies (Cynthia, Drew, Anaxos, Inc., 2000). Without some knowledge of vocabulary, neither language production nor language comprehension would be possible (Joseph, 2011). Making sure teaching and learning to be active and less burden would be effective and more fun learning not only to students but to the lecturer too. The Vocabulary Enhancement Activity approach not only is able to promote student’s interest in English language usage it is also useful to reduce student’s fear in their attempt to communicate using English language.

When lecturer assists students to focus more on the most important vocabulary, the content in the classroom becomes more practical, less burden and the workload will be less devastating. This activity also makes the learning and teaching process more dynamic where valuable time can be spent on what is most important and to avoid frustration as well as demotivation in learning. It has a lot of potential and can be commercialized to be used as a teaching tool not only restricted to semester 1 only it can also be conducted in the third and last semester of Communicative English 2 and 3 classroom.

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