

# 12 Using PowerPoint to Teach Vocabulary in Grade 1

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

My experience of teaching young Omani learners of English suggests that many of them are not able to recall the vocabulary I teach even with the use of flash-cards. In response to this situation I decided to explore an alternative strategy for teaching vocabulary - PowerPoint – and this will be the focus of this study. In particular, I will examine whether my Grade 1 learners retain vocabulary more effectively through PowerPoint compared to when the methods suggested in the textbook are followed.

## 2 LEARNING L2 VOCABULARY

### 2.1 Remembering Vocabulary

According to Schimtt (2000), vocabulary is held in short-term memory, where information is stored quickly and in small amounts, and long-term memory, where information is stored over-time and in larger capacity. One of our goals as teachers is to support the transfer of vocabulary knowledge from learners' short to long term memory. Ur (1991), for example, suggests a number of ways of helping learners remember words; one is by linking the words with each other through meaning-sound associations. Holden (1999) suggests certain visual strategies which can facilitate the recall of vocabulary; PowerPoint addresses some of these visual factors in vocabulary learning.

In English for Me (EFM) Grade 1, the curriculum provides flashcards and big books to support the learning of vocabulary. Key vocabulary for each unit of material is recycled over ten lessons. My experience of teaching vocabulary using these materials is that they work for some learners but many still struggle to retain the vocabulary taught in this way. As explained above, the purpose of this study was to explore an approach using PowerPoint.

## **2.2 Assessing Vocabulary**

A common way of evaluating the effectiveness of different teaching strategies is to test learners. In this study I will use vocabulary tests to examine the impact on learners of different ways of teaching vocabulary. Ur (1991) and Thornbury (2002) point out that a test should be valid (i.e. test what it is meant to test), reliable (i.e. give consistent results) and practical (i.e. easy to administer and mark). I kept these points in mind in designing the tests for this study. Thornbury (2002) also emphasizes the importance of a pre-test in studies which try to compare the impact on learning of different instructional strategies. This is also a point that influenced my approach here.

## **2.3 Using PowerPoint**

As Radanov (2008) explains, "PowerPoint is a type of presentation software that allows one to show coloured text and images with simple animation and sound". This tool can be shown on a computer screen or using a projector with a large screen for the whole class who can view the same presentation at the same time. PowerPoint has many features which make it a useful classroom tool. It can save teachers time because the materials that are produced for PowerPoint can be reused many times. PowerPoint also allows teachers to vary their teaching methods and break the routine (Ahmed, 2005). Regarding the learners, PowerPoint is a fun and motivational tool which presents knowledge in an interactive way. Additionally, the different multi-media applications PowerPoint offers can appeal to various learning styles (e.g. visual, auditory and kinaesthetic learners). Moreover, Steele & Johnson (n.d) note that using PowerPoint's big screen allows all learners (at the front and back of the class) to see what is being introduced. They argue that, when used appropriately, it can enhance the teacher's instruction and learners' motivation.

Of course, teachers must also be aware of potential disadvantages of using PowerPoint. Tufte (2003), for example, notes that teachers should be moderate in their use of animations, transitions, and other multimedia effects. He also emphasizes the importance for teachers to focus on the content of what they will present rather than just on how they will do so. Also, Ahmed (2005) and Steele & Johnson (n.d) warn that overusing PowerPoint can bore learners and reduce the effectiveness of this teaching tool.

# **3 METHODOLOGY**

## **3.1 Research Questions**

My main question here was: Do Grade 1 learners retain more vocabulary when I use PowerPoint compared to EFM methods? The following sub-questions were addressed:

1. What are the differences in learners' responses when I use EFM materials and PowerPoint materials?
2. In which lessons do learners volunteer to participate more?
3. How do learners perform on a vocabulary test after the PowerPoint lessons?

## 3.2 Data Collection

### 3.2.1 Experiment

This research involved two Grade 1 Basic Education classes. Each class contained 25 urban Omani learners (boys and girls) who were mostly seven years of age. I will refer to these two classes as the Blue class and the Green class.

The design of the study was experimental, as described by Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2000). This approach is appropriate when the effects of different instructional strategies want to be compared (Swetnam, 2000).

The target vocabulary in this study was classroom objects, an area that is given attention in the EFM 1A coursebook. After a month of working on this topic I administered a vocabulary pre-test in which the learners had to listen and circle the correct picture of the two that were shown. On this test the Green class scored an average of 2.2 (out of 5) while the Blue class scored 2.1.

I then taught both classes two sets of single words from the Grade 1B coursebook, related to animals and clothes. I taught both sets of words to each class but with different methods. Table 1 summarizes the way the teaching was organized. (FCs = flashcards).

Table 1: Classes and activities for the study.

Class	Animals		Clothes	
	PowerPoint	FCs/Big book	PowerPoint	FCs/Big book
Blue	✓			✓
Green		✓	✓	

For each set of vocabulary taught here I administered two post-tests; one took place soon after the teaching (see Appendix) while the other was conducted four weeks later.

### 3.2.2 Observation

I also collected data through observation. I designed an observation sheet (a checklist) for my colleagues to use and which asked them to record learners' participation and interest during the four lessons. I explained in advance to the colleagues who observed me how the checklist was meant to be used. The questions on the sheet were the following (observers had to write yes or no and to add comments for each statement:)

1. Did pupils show their interest toward the lesson? How?
2. Did pupils put up their hands?
3. Did pupils recall the words?
4. Did pupils get tired or bored? How do you know?
5. Did pupils try to predict the words?
6. Did pupils use any gestures or miming to show their enthusiasm?

I also asked a colleague to observe me and to complete a tally sheet in which the occurrence of particular behaviours were noted. The observer counted how many

times the learners volunteered to answer during each lesson by making a mark on the tally sheet. The instrument also asked the observer to classify learners' responses into correct and incorrect.

## **4 FINDINGS & DISCUSSION**

### **4.1 Observation**

#### ***4.1.1 Observation Checklist***

One observation checklist was completed for each lesson. The observers' responses suggested that in the PowerPoint lessons the learners were more successful at recalling the target vocabulary than they were in the flashcards lessons. The learners also predicted words in both PowerPoint lessons which showed their high level of interest; one observer wrote, for example, that "all pupils raised their hands to predict". Compared to the flashcard lessons, learners seemed slightly more motivated in the PowerPoint lessons. Concerning learners' non-verbal responses, there was much more reaction in the PowerPoint lessons. For instance, the learners clapped their hands if they predicted correctly. They were surprised by the animations (e.g. they opened their mouth and eyes when the pictures moved). Their interest was evident through their smiles and the way they imitated the sounds of the animals. In the flashcard lessons there were fewer reactions of this kind.

The above information answers part of the study's first and second sub-questions. Regarding the first sub-question, I found that my learners gave more verbal and non-verbal responses during PowerPoint lessons compared to flashcard lessons. Concerning the second question, the learners were more willing to answer in the PowerPoint lessons. This result does not imply that flashcard lessons were low interest. However, it supports the view mentioned earlier in the literature (e.g. Ahmed, 2005) that PowerPoint can motivate learners.

#### ***4.1.2 Observation Tally Sheet***

Observers using tally sheets had to count how often learners volunteered answers during the four lessons and also to say whether the answers they gave were correct or incorrect. The results for the second of these (correctness of answers) are presented in Figure 1. This shows that in PowerPoint lessons learners answered a total of 57 times compared to 44 times in flashcard lessons. In terms of correct answers, 38 of those in PowerPoint lessons (66.6%) were correct compared to 24 in the Flashcard lessons (54.5%). The higher number of answers and of correct answers in PowerPoint lessons may be due to the fact that PowerPoint activities aroused learners' interest and thus encouraged of them to guess and predict more than flashcard lessons.

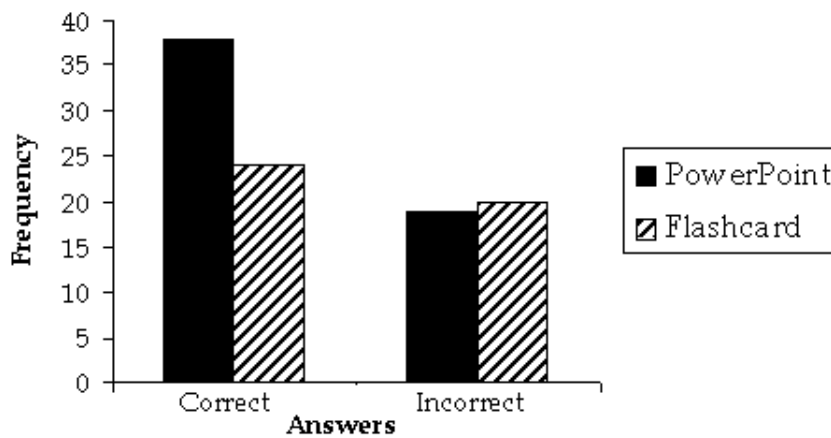


Figure 1: Correctness of answers in PowerPoint and flashcard lessons

Figure 2 compares how often learners volunteered to contribute during the different types of vocabulary lessons. This shows that in the PowerPoint lessons learners volunteered to speak a total of 30 times compared to 22 times in the flashcard lessons.

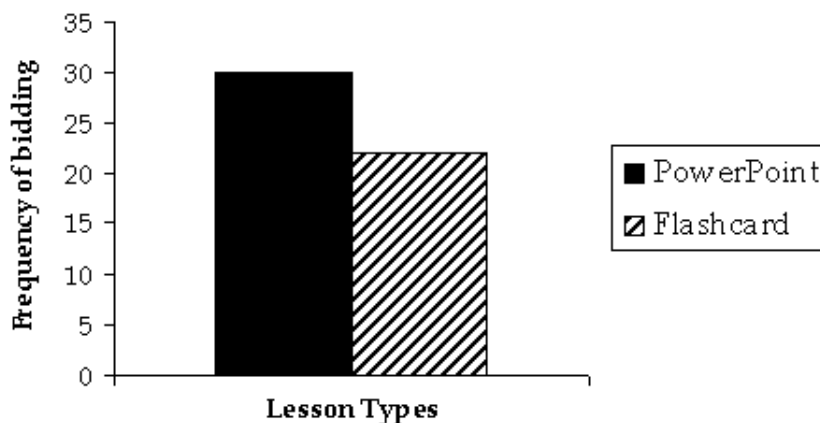


Figure 2: Frequency of bidding in PowerPoint and flashcard lessons

## 4.2 Vocabulary Test

### 4.2.1 Immediate Post-Test

Figure 3 shows the average results of the immediate vocabulary post-tests. The maximum score on each test was five marks. Each class completed this test right after their lesson. The results show that the scores of the class who did the PowerPoint lessons were in both cases higher. That is, when the Green group learned animal words through PowerPoint, they performed better than the Blue group, and when the Blue group were taught the clothes vocabulary using PowerPoint, they did better than the Green group.

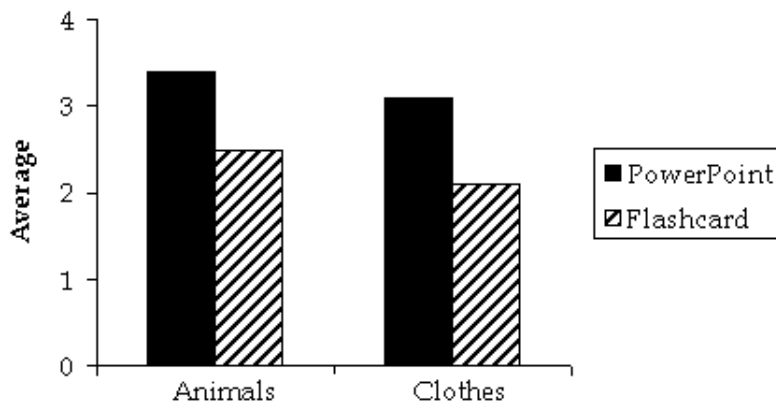


Figure 3: Immediate post-test results

#### 4.2.2 Delayed Post-Test

The results for the vocabulary tests administered four weeks after the teaching of the lessons are given in Figure 4.

This figure shows that, once again, the group taught using PowerPoint did better than the flashcard group on both tests. The immediate benefits of PowerPoint, then, in teaching vocabulary, also held true four weeks later.

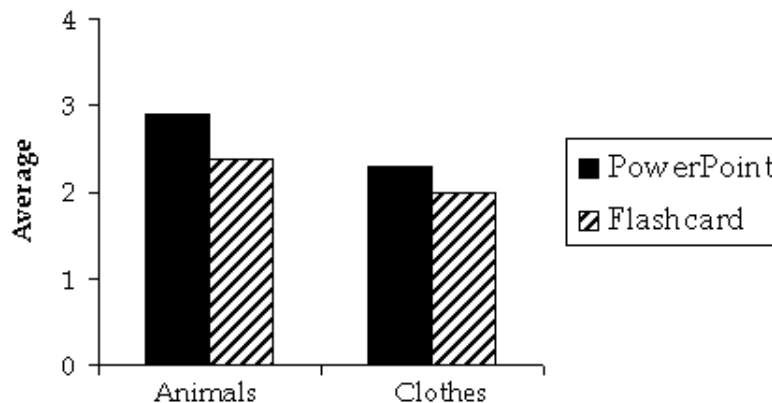


Figure 4: Delayed post-test results

#### 4.3 Limitations

During this study I became aware of the challenges that arise when we design observation instruments for colleagues to use in our classrooms. In this case, although the colleagues using the observation checklist answered the questions I set, they did not write many additional comments; further training for them in using the instrument would have been useful in advance of the study. Also, there may have been other factors in the four intervening weeks which affected how learners performed on the post-test. I was not able to control these. My enthusiasm for PowerPoint may have also influenced how learners responded to those lessons. Finally, the results of this work apply only to the groups of learners studied here.

## 5 CONCLUSION

The findings of this study have confirmed my belief in the value of PowerPoint as a tool in the English language classroom. I am not suggesting that PowerPoint is the solution to all our problems or that flashcards and big books should not be used. What I am confident of, though, is that, when used thoughtfully, PowerPoint can engage learners' interest and thus help make English lessons more memorable. In this study I have demonstrated its use in teaching vocabulary, but it can be applied equally well to other areas of the Basic Education English curriculum.

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**APPENDIX: FIRST POST-TEST**

Listen and write the numbers:

