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Improving Students' Ability in Using Irregular Verbs in the Simple Past Tense through Flashcards

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to examine the effectiveness of flashcards in improving students' ability to use irregular verbs in the simple past tense. The research was conducted at SMA Negeri 2 Badar during the 2023/2024 academic year using a quantitative approach with an experimental method. A one-group pretest–posttest design was applied. The population of the study consisted of 49 students from grades X, XI, and XII, while the sample involved 18 students from class X selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through pretests and posttests to measure students' mastery of irregular verbs in the simple past tense before and after the implementation of flashcard-based instruction. The data were analyzed using a t-test to determine the significance of the improvement. The results revealed that the mean score increased from 54.72 in the pretest to 80.55 in the posttest, with standard deviations of 3.89 and 3.68 respectively. The t-observed value (43.05) was higher than the t-table value (1.740) at a significance level of 0.05, indicating a statistically significant improvement. These findings demonstrate that flashcards are an effective instructional medium for enhancing students' ability to use irregular verbs in the simple past tense. Therefore, the use of flashcards is recommended for English teachers to improve grammar instruction and learning outcomes.

KATA KUNCI

irregular verbs,
flashcard, simple
past tense,
pembelajaran tata
bahasa, siswa EFL

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui efektivitas penggunaan flashcard dalam meningkatkan kemampuan siswa dalam menggunakan irregular verbs pada simple past tense. Penelitian dilaksanakan di SMA Negeri 2 Badar pada tahun ajaran 2023/2024 dengan menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dan metode eksperimen. Desain penelitian yang digunakan adalah one-group pretest–posttest. Populasi penelitian terdiri atas 49 siswa kelas X, XI, dan XII, sedangkan sampel penelitian berjumlah 18 siswa kelas X yang dipilih melalui teknik purposive sampling. Pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui pretest dan posttest untuk mengukur penguasaan siswa terhadap irregular verbs dalam simple past tense sebelum dan sesudah penerapan pembelajaran menggunakan flashcard. Data yang diperoleh dianalisis menggunakan uji t untuk mengetahui tingkat signifikansi peningkatan kemampuan siswa. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa nilai rata-rata pretest sebesar 54,72 meningkat menjadi 80,55 pada posttest, dengan standar deviasi masing-masing sebesar 3,89 dan 3,68. Nilai t-hitung sebesar 43,05 lebih tinggi dibandingkan dengan nilai t-tabel sebesar 1,740 pada taraf signifikansi 0,05, yang menunjukkan adanya peningkatan yang signifikan. Dengan demikian, dapat disimpulkan bahwa flashcard merupakan media pembelajaran yang efektif dalam meningkatkan kemampuan siswa menggunakan irregular verbs pada simple past tense. Oleh karena itu, penggunaan flashcard direkomendasikan bagi guru bahasa Inggris untuk meningkatkan kualitas pembelajaran tata bahasa.

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Introduction

Language plays a central role in human communication as it enables individuals to exchange information, ideas, and meanings in social interaction. Through language, people are able to understand the world around them and convey their thoughts effectively to others. Linguists generally agree that every language has its own system of rules governing how sounds, words, and sentences are formed, which makes language a structured and rule-governed phenomenon. In the context of foreign language learning, English occupies a particularly important position due to its global function as an international language in education, technology, and professional communication. Many learners are motivated to study English because they believe that proficiency in the language will provide broader academic opportunities and better career prospects. Mastery of English requires competence in four fundamental skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Among these skills, speaking and writing are closely related to grammatical knowledge, as grammar determines how words are organized into meaningful sentences. Grammar instruction is therefore essential in helping learners produce accurate and comprehensible language, develop writing proficiency, and gain deeper insight into how language works. However, grammar is often perceived by students as a difficult and monotonous subject, particularly when it is taught through traditional methods that emphasize memorization of rules without sufficient contextual practice. One of the grammatical aspects that frequently causes difficulty for learners is the use of irregular verbs in the simple past tense. Unlike regular verbs, irregular verbs do not follow predictable patterns, which makes them harder to memorize and apply correctly in affirmative, negative, and interrogative sentences. As a result, learners often struggle to change verbs from present to past forms accurately, leading to persistent grammatical errors. These challenges indicate the need for effective instructional strategies and engaging learning media that can make grammar learning more meaningful, enjoyable, and accessible for students.

Based on preliminary observations conducted at SMA Negeri 2 Badar, it was found that students' ability to use irregular verbs in the simple past tense was still relatively low, particularly among tenth-grade students. According to the English teacher, many students showed limited understanding of irregular verb forms and lacked motivation to review previously taught materials. This condition was reflected in students' achievement scores, which did not meet the minimum mastery criterion set by the school. Although some students from higher grades demonstrated partial understanding, they still expressed the need for additional practice and reinforcement

of irregular verb usage. These findings suggest that students experience significant difficulties in mastering irregular verbs, especially when required to apply them in different sentence structures. To address this issue, teachers are expected to employ creative and interactive learning media that can stimulate students' interest and participation in grammar lessons. One instructional medium that has the potential to enhance grammar learning is the use of flashcards. Flashcards are visual learning tools that present information in the form of images and brief textual cues, making them effective for improving memory retention and learner engagement. Previous studies have shown that flashcards can positively influence students' learning outcomes by increasing motivation, attention, and active involvement in the learning process. By incorporating flashcards into grammar instruction, particularly in teaching irregular verbs, students may find the learning process more enjoyable and less intimidating. This approach allows learners to associate visual representations with verb forms, facilitating better recall and understanding. Therefore, this study focuses on investigating the effectiveness of flashcards in improving students' ability to use irregular verbs in the simple past tense at SMA Negeri 2 Badar. The findings of this research are expected to contribute both theoretically and practically to English language teaching, especially in the area of grammar instruction for EFL learners.

Method

This study employed a quantitative research approach using an experimental design to examine the effectiveness of flashcards in improving students' ability to use irregular verbs in the simple past tense. Quantitative research was selected because it allows the researcher to measure learning outcomes objectively and analyze data statistically to determine significant differences before and after treatment. The experimental method applied in this study was a one-group pretest–posttest design, in which a single group of participants was observed before and after the implementation of the instructional treatment. The dependent variable of this study was students' ability to use irregular verbs in the simple past tense, while the independent variable was the use of flashcards as a learning medium. This design enabled the researcher to identify changes in students' grammatical performance that could be attributed to the instructional intervention. The research was conducted at SMA Negeri 2 Badar during the 2023/2024 academic year. The population consisted of 49 students from grades X, XI, and XII. However, the sample of the study included 18 students from class X who were selected using a saturated sampling technique, in which all members of the

selected class participated in the research. This sampling method was chosen to ensure that the data accurately reflected the learning condition of the class under investigation and to minimize sampling bias.

Data collection in this study was conducted through testing procedures designed to measure students' mastery of irregular verbs in the simple past tense. Two types of tests were administered: a pretest and a posttest. The pretest was given prior to the treatment to assess students' initial knowledge and ability related to irregular verb usage, while the posttest was administered after the treatment to measure learning improvement. Both tests used the same set of objective questions to ensure consistency and allow for direct comparison of results. The test items were developed based on an instrument blueprint to ensure content validity and alignment with the learning objectives. During the treatment phase, students were taught irregular verbs in the simple past tense using flashcards as instructional media. The flashcards contained visual cues and verb forms designed to help students memorize and recognize irregular verb changes effectively. The use of flashcards aimed to create an engaging learning atmosphere, encourage active participation, and reduce students' anxiety toward grammar learning. In addition to test instruments, a scoring rubric was applied to evaluate students' responses systematically. The rubric assessed several components, including grammar accuracy, vocabulary use, organization, and mechanics, ensuring that students' performance was evaluated comprehensively and objectively.

The data analysis technique involved descriptive and inferential statistical procedures to test the research hypothesis. Initially, students' pretest and posttest scores were calculated to obtain measures of central tendency, including mean, median, and mode, as well as measures of variability such as standard deviation and standard error. These descriptive statistics provided an overview of students' performance before and after the implementation of flashcard-based instruction. To determine whether the improvement in students' scores was statistically significant, a t-test was employed to compare the mean scores of the pretest and posttest. The t-test analysis involved calculating the mean difference, standard deviation of the difference scores, and standard error to obtain the t-observed value. The obtained t value was then compared with the critical value from the t table at a significance level of 0.05 with degrees of freedom equal to $n-1$. If the t-observed value exceeded the t-table value, the null hypothesis was rejected, indicating a significant effect of flashcard use on students' ability to use irregular verbs in the simple past tense. This statistical procedure allowed the researcher to draw valid conclusions regarding the effectiveness of flashcards as a

teaching medium. The research was carried out in October 2023 to avoid disruption of the school examination schedule, and the location was selected based on the identified learning difficulties and the school's willingness to support the research process.

Results

This section presents the results of the study investigating the effectiveness of flashcard media in improving students' ability to use irregular verbs in the simple past tense. The findings are organized into descriptive statistics of students' pretest and posttest scores, measures of central tendency and variability, and the results of inferential statistical analysis using a t-test. All data were obtained from 18 tenth-grade students of SMA Negeri 2 Badar during the 2023/2024 academic year.

Descriptive Results of Pretest and Posttest Scores

To examine students' initial and final performance, a pretest and a posttest were administered before and after the flashcard-based instruction. Table 1 presents individual students' scores on the pretest and posttest, along with deviation scores used for statistical analysis.

Table 1

Students' Pretest and Posttest Scores

No	Student	Pretest	Posttest
1	AFS	60	85
2	AA	60	85
3	AB	50	75
4	CM	55	80
5	EZ	60	85
6	EL	55	80
7	HJ	55	80
8	IH	60	85
9	KA	50	75
10	RD	55	80
11	RVA	50	75
12	RN	50	75
13	SP	55	80

14	SN	50	80
15	SA	55	80
16	SS	50	85
17	SD	55	80
18	FK	60	85
Total		985	1450

As shown in Table 1, the total pretest score of the class was 985, with individual scores ranging from 50 to 60. Based on the predetermined scoring criteria, most students fell into the *poor* (≤ 55) and *fair* (56–70) categories prior to the treatment. These results indicate that students initially had limited mastery of irregular verbs in the simple past tense. In contrast, after receiving instruction using flashcards, the total posttest score increased substantially to 1450, with scores ranging from 75 to 85. Most students achieved scores classified as *good* (71–85), demonstrating a noticeable improvement in their grammatical performance. The distribution of scores clearly indicates that the use of flashcards contributed to a higher level of achievement. No student remained in the *poor* category after the treatment, suggesting that flashcard-based instruction was effective in supporting students' learning of irregular verb forms.

Mean Scores of Pretest and Posttest

To further describe students' performance, the mean scores of the pretest and posttest were calculated. Table 2 summarizes the descriptive statistics for both tests.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of Pretest and Posttest Scores

Test	N	Mean	Mode	Median	SD	SE
Pretest	18	54.72	55	55	3.89	0.94
Posttest	18	80.55	80	80	3.68	0.89

The mean pretest score was 54.72, indicating that students' initial ability to use irregular verbs in the simple past tense was relatively low. This result aligns with classroom observations, which showed that many students struggled to change verbs from present to past forms and to apply them correctly in sentences. After the flashcard-

based treatment, the mean posttest score increased to 80.55. This substantial difference between pretest and posttest means reflects a marked improvement in students' grammatical ability.

Mode and Median Analysis

The mode and median values were also calculated to examine the central tendency of the score distributions. In the pretest, the mode and median were both 55, which was the most frequently obtained score and the middle value after ordering the data. This further confirms that most students initially performed at a low level. In contrast, the posttest mode and median were both 80, indicating that a large number of students achieved higher scores after the instructional intervention. The shift in these values from 55 to 80 provides additional evidence of improvement in students' mastery of irregular verbs.

Standard Deviation and Standard Error

The standard deviation and standard error were calculated to assess the variability and precision of the score distributions. The pretest standard deviation was 3.89, while the posttest standard deviation was slightly lower at 3.68. This reduction suggests that students' scores became more consistent after the treatment, indicating that flashcard instruction not only improved overall performance but also reduced variability among students. Similarly, the standard error decreased from 0.94 in the pretest to 0.89 in the posttest, indicating increased reliability of the posttest mean score.

Inferential Analysis Using the t-Test

To determine whether the improvement in students' scores was statistically significant, a paired-sample t-test was conducted. Table 3 presents the difference scores between pretest and posttest results used in the t-test calculation.

Table 3
Difference Scores Between Pretest and Posttest

No	Pretest	Posttest	D
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1	60	85	25
2	60	85	25
3	50	75	25
4	55	80	25
5	60	85	25
6	55	80	25
7	55	80	25
8	60	85	25
9	50	75	25
10	55	80	25
11	50	75	25
12	50	75	25
13	55	80	25
14	50	80	30
15	55	80	25
16	50	85	35
17	55	80	25
18	60	85	25
Total			465

Based on the data in Table 3, the mean difference (Md) between the pretest and posttest scores was 25.83. The standard deviation of the difference scores was calculated as 2.53, and the standard error of the mean difference was 0.61. Using these values, the t-observed (t_o) value was calculated to be 43.05. The obtained t-observed value was then compared with the critical t-table value at a significance level of 0.05 with 17 degrees of freedom ($df = n - 1$). The t-table value was 1.740. Since the t-observed value (43.05) was far greater than the t-table value (1.740), the null hypothesis was rejected. This result indicates that there was a statistically significant difference between students' pretest and posttest scores.

Summary of Results

Overall, the statistical findings demonstrate that the use of flashcard media had a significant positive effect on students' ability to use irregular verbs in the simple past tense. The increase in mean scores, the shift in score distributions, the reduction in

variability, and the significant t-test result all support the conclusion that flashcards are an effective instructional medium for teaching grammar, particularly irregular verb forms, to EFL students at the senior high school level.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the use of flashcards significantly improved students' ability to use irregular verbs in the simple past tense. The substantial increase in the mean score from the pretest (54.72) to the posttest (80.55) indicates that flashcard-based instruction effectively enhanced students' grammatical performance. This improvement suggests that visual learning media play a crucial role in supporting students' understanding of complex grammatical forms, particularly irregular verbs that do not follow consistent morphological patterns. Prior to the treatment, many students experienced difficulty in changing verbs from present to past forms and in applying these forms accurately in sentences. After the implementation of flashcards, students were better able to recognize, memorize, and apply irregular verb forms correctly. This result aligns with cognitive learning theories which emphasize that visual stimuli can enhance memory retention by providing concrete representations of abstract concepts. Flashcards allowed students to associate visual cues with verb forms, reducing cognitive load and making grammar learning more accessible. Moreover, the reduction in score variability, as indicated by a lower posttest standard deviation, suggests that flashcards benefited not only high-achieving students but also those with lower initial proficiency, leading to more evenly distributed learning outcomes across the class.

The statistically significant t-test result further confirms that the observed improvement was not due to chance but was directly related to the instructional intervention. The t-observed value greatly exceeded the critical t-table value, providing strong evidence of the effectiveness of flashcard media in grammar instruction. This finding is consistent with previous studies that have reported positive effects of flashcards on vocabulary acquisition, memorization, and language structure learning. Flashcards encourage active learning by requiring students to recall information rather than passively receive it, which strengthens long-term memory. In the context of learning irregular verbs, repeated exposure through flashcards enabled students to internalize verb forms more efficiently. Additionally, flashcards promoted student engagement and motivation, as they introduced an element of interaction and

enjoyment into grammar lessons that are often perceived as monotonous. Increased motivation likely contributed to students' willingness to participate and practice, which is essential for mastering grammatical structures. The findings also support the view that instructional media should be aligned with students' learning needs and cognitive characteristics, especially in EFL classrooms where learners often struggle with grammatical accuracy.

From a pedagogical perspective, the results of this study have important implications for English language teaching, particularly in grammar instruction at the secondary school level. The effectiveness of flashcards in improving students' mastery of irregular verbs suggests that teachers should integrate visual and interactive media into their instructional practices. Flashcards can be easily adapted to various classroom contexts and can be used not only for teaching verb forms but also for reinforcing sentence patterns, tenses, and other grammatical components. Furthermore, the use of flashcards supports a learner-centered approach by encouraging active participation and reducing teacher-dominated instruction. However, despite the positive results, this study has certain limitations that should be considered. The research employed a one-group pretest–posttest design without a control group, which limits the ability to compare flashcard instruction with other teaching methods. The relatively small sample size and focus on a single school context may also affect the generalizability of the findings. Future research is therefore recommended to employ experimental designs with control groups, larger samples, and longer treatment durations to further examine the effectiveness of flashcards in grammar learning. Nevertheless, the present study provides empirical evidence that flashcards are a practical and effective instructional medium for improving students' ability to use irregular verbs in the simple past tense, contributing to more engaging and effective grammar instruction in EFL classrooms.

Conclusions

This study concludes that the use of flashcards is an effective instructional medium for improving students' ability to use irregular verbs in the simple past tense. The significant increase in students' posttest scores compared to their pretest results indicates that flashcard-based instruction successfully enhanced grammatical mastery among tenth-grade students at SMA Negeri 2 Badar. The statistical analysis confirmed that the improvement was not coincidental, demonstrating a meaningful impact of the

treatment on students' learning outcomes. The visual and interactive characteristics of flashcards contributed to better memorization, increased student engagement, and reduced difficulties commonly associated with learning irregular verb forms. Although the study was limited by its one-group experimental design and relatively small sample size, the findings provide empirical support for the integration of flashcards into grammar instruction. Therefore, it is recommended that English teachers incorporate flashcards as part of their teaching strategies to create more effective and engaging grammar learning experiences, while future research may expand on this study by involving control groups and larger populations to strengthen generalizability.

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