

## DEVELOPING LEXICAL SKILLS USING THE FLASHCARD METHOD AMONG THE STUDENTS OF THE 6TH GRADES OF THE LYCEUM

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**Abstract:** This article discusses the ways of developing lexical skills of the sixth grade students at the lyceum. The research is aimed at giving a detailed description of the flashcard method, analyzing the use of the flashcard method in teaching new lexical units in the lessons of the English language. The researchers also sought to develop and test a set of flashcard based exercises aimed at the developing of lexical skills in the English lessons in the sixth grade. The theoretical significance of this research lies in a complex theoretical justification of the expediency of using the flashcard method in the developing of lexical skills in English language lessons in the 6th grade at the lyceum. The practical significance lies in the development of a set of exercises that can be used to develop lexical skills of the 6th grade students at a English language lesson at the lyceum. The importance of adaptation of the flashcard method in relation to teaching vocabulary to 6th grade students at the lyceum is that the simplification of its employment at foreign language lessons will make its use more widespread and will help maintain learning motivation, attention, and improve the material acquisition. The authors used such general scientific methods as analysis and synthesis, theoretical interpretation, study and content analysis of publications on Teaching English as a Second Language, psychological and pedagogical literature, study of the practical experience of teaching English, as well as trial training followed by quantitative and qualitative analysis of the obtained data and the evaluation of the achieved results. Subsequently, a set of exercises based on the material of the module 2c "My Neighbourhood" of the educational package "Spotlight 6" used at the lyceum was developed and tested. The above mentioned set of exercises was based on the implementation of the flashcards method.

**Keywords:** methods of teaching foreign languages, lexis, lexical skills, teaching new lexical units, vocabulary, flashcard method, flashcards, set of exercises, interval repetition, sixth grade, Spotlight 6.

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## Introduction

An integral part of the development of communicative competence is the study of vocabulary and the development of lexical skills [18]. In foreign language textbooks, students are offered a large number of new words for learning, and it is assumed that the learning of new lexics will occur during the exercises. However, this is often not enough to consolidate new vocabulary, and after some time it is forgotten [13]. It is very important to keep as many lexical units as possible in the vocabulary of 6th grade students, since education in the period from the 5th to the 9th grade is the second stage of basic general education and an important link that connects all three levels of education: primary, basic and secondary. During the transition to secondary school, gaps in vocabulary knowledge can cause difficulties in further learning a foreign language.

The relevance of the topic of this work is determined by the need to find more effective ways to develop lexical skills in accordance with modern processes of modernization of the methodological system of teaching foreign languages in the Russian Federation [15], as well as the lack of visibility for the semantics of new lexical units in the educational package "Spotlight" for grade 6.

To know a lexical unit does not mean just to memorize and keep in mind a certain number of lexical units, but also to be able to use them in various types of productive speech (speaking, writing) and receptive activities (listening, reading) [10]. Lexics make up the largest part of the content side of speech, therefore, the high-quality development of lexical skill is the main goal of teaching the lexical side of speech [6, 16, 18]. There are different approaches to identifying the stages of development of lexical skills, but in general they include introducing students

to new vocabulary, explanation of the word's meaning, and, finally, the development of lexical skills, their inclusion in speech [13, 17, 18].

As the amount of the introduced lexics, the complexity of the new vocabulary and the difficulty of memorizing it increases, students lose motivation to study it. The number of lexical units is gradually increasing, memorizing new words becomes more and more difficult for the student, and it becomes more boring to hold attention [7, 13]. Modern students that were born in the digital age can perceive better only what is presented to them in an attractive, vivid form. To provide successful education in modern schools, teachers use teaching methods and tools that help to activate the cognitive activity of students [11, 21]. These methods and means of teaching include such didactic material as flashcards [8].

Flashcards are little double-sided cards, on one side of which a new lexical unit in a foreign language is written (it can be supplemented with transcription, images, etc.), and on the reverse side there is the translation of this lexical unit into the native language, its definition, visual semantization, etc. [9, 20]. The flashcard method was developed by scientist Sebastian Leitner in the 1970s and was described it in the book "So lernt man lernen" ("How to teach to learn").

The method of flashcards consists of the interval repetition of foreign words and reproducing them from memory. For example, when studying a new or repeating a previously studied lexical unit, the student looks at the image or translation on one side of the flashcard and names the necessary lexical unit [9].

This method comparatively reduces the time of learning new vocabulary as it involves active learning: the learner sees the question (in this case, the word) and tries to find an answer to it on his own. If he cannot remember the necessary word, he turns the card over and looks at the correct answer. Each time a student looks through the set of flashcards is equal to a mini-exam, during which

information is absorbed better than during simple reading through the list of words [12]. With regular learning sessions with the use of flashcards, words are kept in long-term memory much better than with simple drilling or memorization [1, 12].

The use of flashcards in teaching vocabulary is possible at any age, since the use of visual support in lessons (the principle of visibility) makes studying the new material easier. When working with flashcards, there is an interactive interaction between students and the teacher and students with each other [12].

The aim of this study was to theoretically substantiate the expediency of using the flashcard method at foreign language lessons in the 6th grade, and, on the basis of the results, to develop and test a set of exercises aimed at the development of lexical skills using the flashcard method.

## **Methods and materials**

### ***Methods of the research***

The following methods were used in the work:

- Study and content analysis of methodological and psychological-pedagogical literature;
- Study of the experience of teaching English in order to develop a set of exercises aimed at teaching the lexical side of speech in foreign language lessons in the 6th grades;
- Analysis and synthesis;
- Method of material selection;
- Method of theoretical interpretation;
- Trial training followed by quantitative and qualitative data analysis and evaluation of the obtained results.

To test the created set of exercises aimed at the development of lexical skills using the flashcard method at English lessons in the 6th grade, we carried

out trial training dedicated to the study of the module "Here We Are!" of the educational package "Spotlight 6". The trial training took place on the basis of Municipal Budget Educational Institution "Lyceum No. 2" of the city of Murmansk. The students of one of the groups of the 6th grade of the lyceum (13 students) took part in the testing of the complex.

### ***Materials***

#### *Educational package "Spotlight 6"*

Educational package "English In Focus" (Spotlight) is a joint project of the Russian publishing house "Prosveshcheniye" and the British publishing house "Express Publishing". The authors of the educational package "Spotlight 6" are J. Vaulina, D. Dooley, O. Podolyako and V. Evans. The package meets all the requirements of the Federal State Educational Standard for Basic General Education and is included in the Federal List of textbooks recommended by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation, and also meets the requirements of the Council of Europe in the field of foreign language teaching.

This curriculum is designed for learning English in general education institutions in grades 6 of basic general education and is compiled in accordance with the communicative and cognitive approach, which is the leading one in modern methods of teaching foreign languages.

"Spotlight 6" includes various tasks for the development of lexical skills, such as matching images with the corresponding lexical unit, exercises for filling in the gaps in sentences with the learnt vocabulary, building your own sentences and/or dialogues with the learnt lexical units, reading and listening to texts compiled using new vocabulary, writing your own small thematic articles, projects, stories, etc. [4].

As noted in the teacher's book by the creators of the educational package, teaching the lexical side of speech with the help of "Spotlight 6" should be done

as follows: new lexical units should be introduced exclusively in a functional and meaningful context. To do this, teachers can use object and visual semantization [5]. The educational package offer students tasks for matching the new lexical unit to the corresponding image. The use of pantomime, synonyms, antonyms, paraphrasing and definitions is also proposed for the semantization of new vocabulary. Tasks are introduced to consolidate lexical material with the help of word formation, thematic classifications. The skill of learning vocabulary with the help of a context develops in the process of developing reading skills – new lexical units are highlighted in bold in the texts offered to students. The consolidation of new vocabulary takes place with the help of exercises on the correlation of a lexical unit with a picture, completion of fixed phrases - filling gaps in set expressions, the building of sentences, etc. [4], [5].

Nevertheless, if one studies the "Spotlight 6" textbook, one will notice that the illustrations in the textbook are not always enough for visual semantics of new vocabulary. Not all exercises, which, according to the recommendations of the authors, give students the opportunity to match a new lexical unit with a picture depicting it, actually contain pictures depicting exactly the lexical unit being introduced. The same situation can be noticed in the printed workbook, which is paired to the textbook [3].

Thus, in order to comply with the recommendation of the authors of "Spotlight 6" on the introduction of new lexical units with the help of plot pictures, object semantization, the teacher needs to prepare materials for visual semantics of new vocabulary on one's own, since not all tasks in the textbook aimed at introducing new vocabulary contain the necessary images.

In this regard, we have developed a set of exercises for developing lexical skills among students of the 6th grade by using flashcards at the stages of introduction, development and consolidation of new vocabulary.

### *Set of lexical exercises using flashcard method*

For successful development of lexical skills and more effective learning of lexical units by students of the 6th grades of the lyceum, we have developed a set of exercises. The set of exercises includes a set of flashcards compiled on the basis of module 2 "Here We Are!" of the educational package "Spotlight 6" for the 6th grade of a general education institution. The set of exercises is aimed at the development of lexical skills and is based on the stages of developing lexical skills: introduction to new vocabulary, explanation of the meaning of the word, developing lexical skills, their inclusion in speech. This set of exercises is designed to help the students of the 6th grade of the lyceum master the lexical material offered for studying by the creators of the educational package.

To simplify the presentation of the compiled set of exercises, lexical units studied in the submodule 2c of "Spotlight 6" were selected. In total, 19 lexical units are offered for mastering, but some of them were previously studied in "Spotlight 5" for the 5th grade (such as aspirin, teddy bear, stamp, café, newsagent's, toy shop, chemists', greengrocer's), two lexical units are borrowings from English into Russian and are familiar to students (supermarket, bank), so there are in fact only 9 new words for students, while the rest of the words are included into the submodule for repetition. The main theme of this submodule is various shops that can be located in the areas of residence of students.

To perform this set of exercises, the following materials are needed:

- Two sets of flashcards based on the vocabulary studied in the module "Here We Are!", submodule 2c;
- Large cards (approximately A4 size each) that include all flashcards with the vocabulary of this submodule;
- Handout cards with mixed dialogue lines.

The compiled set of exercises consists of three sections and includes fourteen exercises. Some of the exercises contain dynamic elements. Focusing on the psychological and pedagogical characteristics of the group and its educational needs, the teacher can, at one's own discretion, adapt this set of exercises to the group by changing the order of exercises and/or excluding some exercises (for example, exercise 2 of section 3, if the students of the group are not careful enough).

Section No. 1 refers to the stage of introducing the new vocabulary. Since this is the stage of learning new vocabulary, most of the exercises are performed in a group by front-line work with students.

Exercise 1. It is aimed at introducing and memorizing new lexical units, their sound and graphic forms. The teacher distributes one large card to each student, in which the public places and shops, the names of which will be studied, are drawn and signed. The same cards, but small, that is, flashcards, with each new lexical unit separately, the teacher mixes in a box, takes out one and shows the picture to the students, calling it in their native language (for example, "пекарня"). The player who finds the same picture on his big card faster raises his hand and repeats the same word, but reading it from the card in English (for example, "baker's"). In case of incorrect pronunciation, the teacher corrects the student, then gives him/ her a small flashcard, and the student closes the picture on his large card with it (flashcards are placed on a large card with drawings downwards, the word itself is upwards, so that the student sees the spelling of the word).

If some students show little activity during the exercise or do not show it at all, the teacher can either ask them a question individually, or conduct the first "round" with students who are active in the game, and conduct the second "round" with those students who have not participated in the exercise before.



After completing the exercise, all the students repeat all the words in chorus after the teacher in order to consolidate the correct pronunciation.

Exercise 2. It is aimed at memorizing new lexical units, their sound form, developing attention. The teacher shows flashcards to students and names the visual semantization of the lexical unit depicted on them (for example, район - a neighborhood, библиотека – a library, etc.). If the word(s) and the image match (for example, the teacher shows a flashcard with a stamp on it and pronounces "a stamp"), then the students clap their hands. If the lexical unit does not match the image (for example, the teacher shows the image of the post office, but pronounces the word "a stamp"), then students should not clap their hands until the teacher names the image correctly. After one "round" of the game, if desired, students can play the game themselves [14].

Exercise 3. It is aimed at memorizing new lexical units, their graphic and sound forms, and changing the type of activities. Chairs are placed with their backs inwards a circle. A flashcard is attached to the back of each chair so that, if necessary, the student can look at the English word on the reverse side. The students stand in a circle around the chairs. When the teacher turns on the music or just measures an arbitrary period of time, students walk around the chairs. When the teacher stops the music or says "stop", students should sit on chairs and name a lexical unit on a flashcard attached to the chair. The game can be made more interesting if the teacher gives instructions not just to walk around the chairs, but to jump, walk on tiptoes, "swim", etc. [14].

Exercise 4. It is aimed at memorizing new lexical units, their graphic and sound forms, and changing the type of activities. Students stand in a circle, and the teacher turns on music or measures an arbitrary period of time. While music is playing or time is passing, students pass each other a flashcard with the image held upwards. When the teacher stops the music or says "stop", the student who

has a flashcard in his/her hands should name the store or public place depicted on it. If the student cannot remember the lexical unit, then he/she can look at the word on the back of the flashcard. When the lexical unit is named correctly, the teacher enters the next flashcard into the game and the game continues. After two "rounds" of the game, students themselves can become "teachers" and take turns directing the course of the game.

Exercise 5. It is aimed at memorizing new lexical units, their sound form, developing attention and memory. The teacher attaches flashcards to the blackboard with the image downwards, and draws a "grid" around the flashcards [20]. Since our set consists of 14 flashcards, a teacher can place the cards in a row for convenience. After that, the teacher points to the cards in turn, and students should name the stores depicted on the cards. Gradually, the teacher removes one card from the blackboard, and continues to point to flashcards, including an empty space. Students should name the words from the cards, and also remember which word was at the empty place. So, each time the teacher removes one flashcard until six gaps appear on the blackboard.

Further, the exercise may vary depending on the abilities of students: if students can memorize a lot of words, then the teacher can continue to remove flashcards until students need to restore the entire chain of words in memory. If it is still difficult for students, the teacher can remove one card from the blackboard, and attach one of those that he removed earlier to its original place on the blackboard. So, students will have support, but they will be able to repeat all new lexical units.

The teacher can ask each student to name both one word and the entire chain of words.

Section No. 2 refers to the stage of consolidation of new lexical units. At this stage, the exercises are performed in the formats of pair and group work. In

this section of exercises, the main attention is paid to the development of lexical skill, its inclusion in speech activity, preparation for oral utterance.

Exercise 1. It is aimed at consolidation of new vocabulary, the development of lexical skills, the development of listening skills. Flashcards are hung around the perimeter of the classroom, students disperse in class. The teacher names a word, but does not just name a lexical unit, instead giving students detailed instructions, for example: "Hop to the greengrocer's" or "If you are wearing a shirt today, march to the photo of a bus station" [19].

Exercise 2. It is aimed at consolidation a new vocabulary, developing lexical skills, including it in speech activity, group interaction of students. Students stand in a circle. The first student draws a flashcard from the deck with an image towards himself, an English version to the rest of the students, and names the lexical unit that he got. If the student cannot remember the English version, he can turn the card over and read the word out loud (for example, "toy shop"). After that, the teacher asks the student a question related to this lexical unit, for example, "Do you have a younger sister? Does she often buy toys at the toy shop?", and the student must answer the question asked to him. The flashcard is returned to the deck. After that, the next flashcard is pulled by the next student, but now the previous student asks him a question.

Exercise 3. It is aimed at memorizing new lexical units, their sound and graphic forms. The teacher attaches flashcards to the blackboard with the side with the lexical unit in English upwards, then covers them with pieces of paper. Then the teacher gradually shows the word by shifting a piece of paper one letter at a time. Students need to guess as soon as possible which lexical unit is hidden by the paper [21]. As soon as the word is guessed, the word is pronounced in chorus after the teacher. The teacher pronounces the word in a whisper or loudly,

using different intonations and funny voices to make the exercise more fun. Students should pronounce the word with the same volume, intonation, etc.

Exercise 4. It is aimed at consolidating new vocabulary, developing lexical skills, inclusion of new vocabulary in speech activity, developing dialogic speech skills, pair interaction of students. Students form pairs. Each pair is given cards with mixed dialogue replicas, in which words are omitted, and images are drawn instead of them, semanticizing the studied lexical units. Students need to insert the missing words in the correct form, arrange the replicas in the correct order and act out the dialogue. When doing the task, students can use flashcards if they cannot remember a word.

Exercise 5. It is aimed at consolidating new vocabulary, developing lexical skills, including learnt lexis in speech activity, developing monologue speech skills, pair interaction of students. Students form pairs. Each couple receives a photo of the street, which depicts those public places (shops, library, post office, etc.) corresponding to the studied lexical units. In pairs, students need to prepare a description of what is on this street and what can be bought there, i.e. describe the picture using new lexical units. When doing a task, students can use flashcards if they cannot remember a word. Each student from the pair must say the minimum number of grammatically and actually correct sentences set by the teacher, correlating with the partner. Proposals are evaluated according to two criteria: correctness and content.

Section No. 3 refers to the stage of control of the consolidation of the learnt lexical units and consists of four exercises, which include individual, pair and group forms of work.

Exercise 1. It is aimed at controlling the understanding of a new vocabulary, developing lexical skills. Two sets of flashcards are mixed up and attached to the blackboard. Students are divided into two groups. At the signal, students need to

divide all the studied words into 2 categories, written on the board, as quickly as possible: places where one can buy something, and places where one cannot buy anything (for example, a vegetable store - in the first category, a library – in the second). The group that divided the lexical units into categories the fastest wins, provided that the lexical units were distributed correctly.

Exercise 2. It is aimed at controlling the consolidation of the sound form of new vocabulary, the ability to recognize vocabulary by ear, the interaction of students with each other, developing attentiveness. Students sit in two rows with their feet facing each other so that their feet touch, and form a "ladder". There should be a small distance between each couple sitting opposite each other. The teacher shows a flashcard to each pair of students and they need to memorize it. After all the students see their flashcards, the teacher begins to name various sentences using lexical units learned with flashcards (for example, "Next to my house there is a chemist's"). A couple of the students, whose flashcard was named by the teacher, should get up, carefully step over the outstretched legs of the rest of the students, as if on a "ladder", go around the "ladder", return to their place and repeat the lexical unit that they came across [19].

Exercise 3. This exercise aims to control the consolidation of new vocabulary. Each student individually sits down in front of the teacher. The teacher shuffles the flashcards and shows them one by one. The student must name the lexical unit shown on the card in English. After receiving the answer, the teacher gives the student a flashcard so that he can check himself whether he made a mistake or not by looking at the correct version on the back. If the student answered correctly, he leaves the flashcard to himself, if not, returns it to the teacher, who repeats these words with the student, showing him these cards again. The game continues until the student collects all the flashcards.

Exercise 4. It is aimed at controlling the consolidation of new vocabulary, the development of lexical skills, its inclusion in speech, the development of writing skills. Each student is given a task to compose a short description of his district (5-7 sentences) using words studied with the help of flashcards. Flashcards themselves are not used when performing this exercise. After that, the compiled paragraphs are read aloud. The description is evaluated according to three criteria: grammatical correctness, correct pronunciation and the number of new words used in the story.

The main purpose of this set of exercises was to use tasks aimed at developing effective various skills and abilities. Thus, students not only learn new lexical units, but also practice them during interesting tasks, learn to use new words in oral and written speech. With the help of flashcards, the proposed exercises become more interesting and attractive for students of the 6th grade. Also, the tasks were compiled in such a way as to maximize the involvement of all students in their implementation. Those tasks from the complex that include mobility can also be used as an educational physical minute.

### **Results**

To test the suggested set of exercises aimed at the development of lexical skills using the flashcard method at English lessons in the 6th grade, we conducted trial training aimed at the studying of the module "Here We Are!" of the educational package "Spotlight 6". The training took place in the period from September 19 to October 02, 2022 on the basis of Lyceum No. 2 of the city of Murmansk. Students of one of the groups of the 6th "B" grade (13 students) took part in the training.

The trial training consisted of three stages:

1) Introduction of the lexical and grammatical material of module 2b "My Place" using materials proposed by the authors of the educational package (textbook and printed workbook);

2) Introduction of lexical and grammatical material of module 2c "My Neighbourhood" using materials proposed by the authors of the educational package (textbook and printed workbook), as well as a set of exercises compiled by us using the flashcard method;

3) Control of the assimilation of lexical material from modules 2b "My place" and 2c "My neighbourhood", analysis of the results obtained in order to identify the effectiveness of using the flashcard method in the development of lexical skills among students.

The use of exercises from the complex was not an independent lesson material, but was integrated into the lesson plans offered by the authors of the educational package in the teacher's book. The number and order of exercises were adapted by us according to the duration of the lessons, the specifics of the group and the classroom in which the lessons were held.

The control of the consolidation of lexical units by the students was carried out with the help of a short test, which included four language exercises aimed at using lexical and grammatical material from the two studied modules (two exercises to control the consolidation of lexical material of each module). The tasks for module 2 "Test Booklet" (Control tasks) for the educational package "Spotlight 6" [2] were taken as the basis for independent work.

The results obtained are as follows:

- The level of mastering vocabulary by students in module 2b "My place": 6 people completed the test by 90-100%, 4 people – by 75-89%, 2 people – by 50-74%, 1 person – by 1-49%;

- The level of mastering vocabulary by students in module 2c "My Neighbourhood": 6 people completed the test by 90-100%, 5 people – by 75-89%, 1 person – by 50-74%, 1 person – by 1-49%.

From the comparison of the obtained results, it follows that the quality of knowledge based on the materials of module 2b "My Place" is 77%, and the quality of knowledge based on the materials of module 2c "My Neighbourhood" is 85%.

### **Discussion of the results**

Thus, the analysis of the results of the implementation of the compiled set of exercises at the English lessons in the 6th grade of the lyceum indicates that both the use of the materials presented in the educational package "Spotlight 6" and the use of exercises based on the flashcard method are quite effective. Having compared the results of the test, the purpose of which was to find out how successful the consolidation of new vocabulary with and without the suggested set of exercises was, we can draw several conclusions. Firstly, the results obtained, namely the amount of lexical units acquired by the students, during the trial teaching of Module 2c "My Neighbourhood" when the suggested set of flashcards and relevant exercises were used in addition to the materials of the educational package is 8% higher than in module 2b "My Place", for the study of which only the materials of the educational package were used. This can be explained, based on a conversation with the leading teacher, by the presence of high internal motivation among the students of this group for any teaching method used. Secondly, working with flashcards in order to develop lexical skills and relevant exercises based on the flashcard method aroused greater interest among the students and contributed to a greater increase in motivation to the studying of new lexical material than working with exercises from the textbook and the printed workbook. This can be explained by the fact that the students are



tired from monotonous exercises. Furthermore, the greater dynamics of the flashcards exercises, compared to the dynamics of the exercises from the educational package "Spotlight 6" also contributed to the higher results gained after Module 2c "My Neighbourhood".

However, the obtained results are not quite sufficient to confirm the hypothesis that the development of lexical skills will occur more efficiently if the flashcard method is used. Thereby, our further research will include conducting trial training on two control groups in order to compare and analyze more accurate data obtained during the training of both groups.

### **Conclusion**

As a result of the analysis, it was concluded that the authors of "Spotlight 6" educational package follow the principle of visualization of the presented material. However, this principle is followed inefficiently, as there is often a shortage of images visualizing the introduced lexical units. Sometimes the given exercises contain pictures that do not specifically introduce the vocabulary under study, but some objects that are only indirectly related to the topic in question. Any additional materials for visual semantization of lexical units, including flashcards, are not attached to the teaching materials. Thus, there is a need to increase the amount of visual material in addition to "Spotlight 6". This can be done by using the flashcard method for developing lexical skills.

For the purpose of supplementing the educational package, a set of exercises was developed. The set of exercises is aimed at the development of students' lexical skills and further development of their speaking and communication skills within the curriculum of 6th grade of the lyceum.

The trial training with the help of the compiled set of exercises was conducted in the Municipal Budget Educational Institution "Lyceum No. 2" of the city of Murmansk among a group of students in 6 "B" grade in the course of

teaching practice. The results of the trial training showed that despite the almost similar degree of effectiveness achieved in the development of lexical skills which both the materials of "Spotlight 6 " educational package and the compiled set of exercises showed, the use of flashcards in foreign language lessons is a more effective, interesting and motivating method of working with lexical units and developing lexical skills for both 6th grade students and the teacher.

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