



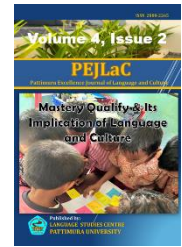
**Pattimura Excellence Journal of Language and
Culture**

(PEJLaC)

URL: <https://ojs3.unpatti.ac.id/index.php/pejlac/index>

ISSN: 2808-2265

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30598/PEJLaC.v4i2.pp111-121>



**Vocabulary-oriented Flashcards as a Solution to the Lack of German Usage in
Daily Life: Project Work in the Project Section of the "Seminar in German"**

Course at the German Department of Khon Kaen University

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Received : 6th December 2024
Revised : 11th December 2024
Published : 20th December 2024

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VOCABULARY-ORIENTED FLASHCARDS AS A SOLUTION TO THE LACK OF GERMAN USAGE IN DAILY LIFE: PROJECT WORK IN THE PROJECT SECTION OF THE "SEMINAR IN GERMAN" COURSE AT THE GERMAN DEPARTMENT OF KHON KAEN UNIVERSITY

Abstract

The exchange of experiences regarding the challenges of learning German with the students in the "Seminar in German" course in the second semester of 2024 at Khon Kaen University revealed that the lack of opportunities to practice the German language in daily life is the major shared challenge. The students were divided into groups to brainstorm possible solutions to this issue, and each group was tasked with creating a project that would produce an end product enabling as many opportunities as possible to practice German in everyday situations. The projects were presented at the end of the semester and tested by the class and the instructor to see how effectively they worked.

The students were divided into five groups, and each group created a different end product. This article will focus on the project work of the students in Group 3, namely flashcards on vocabulary related to different everyday topics. The reason for this focus is that this is my first article in which I write about the project works from this course. I see vocabulary as the foundation of language learning, which is why I want to begin by discussing the vocabulary-oriented project work.

These flashcards were designed to help learners remember words related to specific topics and to form sentences using them. The students and their target audience were at the A2 language level. Nevertheless, the creation of language games in areas they wish to practice, in a form that matches their interests and is playful, can be adapted and applied to learners of all language levels.

Keywords: Project Work, Vocabulary, Word Learning, Lexical Competence

The significant finding:

These flashcards were designed to help learners remember words related to specific topics and to form sentences using them. The students and their target audience were at the A2 language level. Nevertheless, the creation of language games in areas they wish to practice, in a form that matches their interests and is playful, can be adapted and applied to learners of all language levels.



ARTICLES

I. Introduction

The "Seminar in German" course in the German Studies program at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at Khon Kaen University is an elective course for senior German-majored students and was first offered in the second semester of the Academic Year 2023. It consists of two parts: the theoretical section and the project section. In the theoretical section, the development of German language learning in Thailand and the curricula of German studies programs at nine Thai universities offering German as a major were introduced. The project section gives students the opportunity to learn about project development. During this phase, students were encouraged and inspired by the instructor's experiences of

learning German in Germany and Thailand, as well as examples of achievements made with German language skills. They were then asked to share and reflect on their own experiences of learning German, including why they chose German as their major, their preferences in the German language, their expectations, and even their difficulties and challenges in learning German.

The result of the exchange of experiences showed that, although each student had to face different challenges and difficulties, they all shared a common issue: they had very few opportunities to use German in daily life outside the classroom. This also affected their preferences for the German language, as they

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felt demotivated, as if they were learning German without a clear purpose.

Learning a language without practicing or using it enough is ineffective and can undoubtedly demotivate learners. From the perspective of the department, and even the faculty and university, this is a significant challenge. In a non-touristy Thai city like Khon Kaen, there are indeed very few opportunities to practice the specific foreign language learned, and this is undoubtedly true. However, as a teacher, I did not view this challenge as a dead-end. In my opinion, even if one does not yet have a particular opportunity to use the language, one can still create opportunities on their own, in order to be ready when real opportunities arise in the future. I therefore shared this opinion with the students and further asked for ideas on possible solutions to create more opportunities to practice and apply German in daily life as much as possible. This formed the basis for the development of their project work.

At this stage, the students were asked to form groups on their own. Each group received criteria in the form of key questions that they needed to answer within their group in order to build their project work. These questions included, firstly, the origin of the project, such as their problem statement; secondly, the learning objectives they hoped to achieve through this project; thirdly, the functions of their project for the users; fourthly, the German proficiency level of their target group; fifthly, the working formats, such as cards, video recordings, board games, or mobile applications; and lastly, a small conclusion, such as the benefits and follow-ups that could be

drawn from their project. A suitable name for their project was also required.

Based on these criteria and with the guidance of the course instructor, the students formulated their project work, which aimed to address their difficulties or challenges in learning German, integrate more German into daily life, and improve or support German teaching and learning. Each group had to present their project work—i.e., the final product and the structure of the project—at the end of the semester to the class. After the presentation, there was a trial session in which the course instructor and students from other groups tested and evaluated the final product.

The students in the course were divided into 5 groups. The first group created their project work in the form of short video recordings with everyday situations on TikTok, the second group focused on flashcards for learning separable verbs, the third group created flashcards on vocabulary from various everyday topics, the fourth group organized a reading club, and the last group created a board game with various challenges in handling the German language, including dice and figures.

This article focuses on the project work of the students in Group 3, namely the flashcards on vocabulary from various everyday topics. The reason for this focus is that this is my first article in which I write about the project works from this course. I consider vocabulary to be the foundation of language learning, which is why I want to start by discussing the vocabulary-oriented project work. Other projects will be discussed in my future articles.

II. Definition of Key Terms

The important terms in this article are project work, vocabulary, word learning, lexical competence, and the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

Project Work

There are various definitions of a project. For example, Tweilmann defines a project as *an endeavor that is jointly carried out and shared by teachers and students, characterized by a limited connection to society. This societal relevance becomes especially clear in the outcome of the joint effort, which should somehow be socially relevant, i.e., "usable" and "practical"* (quoted from Krumm 1991). Michael Schart adds in his article on *project orientation that projects are to be understood as time-limited endeavors aimed at a specific goal or product within institutionalized teaching and learning processes, where the independent activity of the learners plays a prominent role* (Schart: 2010, 1172). Both definitions point in the same direction: project work is a practice-oriented teamwork that requires the joint effort of both teachers and students to create a targeted product. Through the process of creating a product in groups, project work allows students to learn independently.

Krumm (1991) identified five key characteristics of project work. These are (Krumm, 1991: 6):

1. A specific goal that enables language to be used in a communicative function, allowing new and foreign things to be discovered and experienced;
2. Joint planning and execution by teachers and students, where students initially try to manage with their existing language knowledge;

3. The integration of the outside world into the classroom or the extension of the classroom into the outside world, where the unity of language and action, language and situation, becomes concretely experienceable;
4. Independent research and action by the students using all available resources;
5. A presentable result that can also be shown beyond the classroom.

From these characteristics, it is already clear that project work sets a goal as a guideline and extends learning by integrating the classroom and the outside world to create a product. The result is not only a product of the learning process, but also a socially relevant product, as it is *usable* by society, particularly in the context of learning German, by creating more opportunities to practice German in everyday life.

Vocabulary

The term "vocabulary" was initially defined as *the total set of all words of a language or a person at a given point in time* (Tschirner, 2010: 236). In this article, the term "vocabulary" refers to the words from the Goethe Institute's word lists for German language levels A1 and A2, as the target group for the project work consists of learners at the A1 and A2 levels. According to **the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages**, which is used for assessing progress in foreign language learning (europaeischer-referenzrahmen.de), the language levels A1 and A2 are defined as follows:

A1 – Beginner:

Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at

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meeting concrete needs. Can introduce themselves and others, and ask others questions about themselves – for example, where they live, who they know, or what they have – and can answer questions of this type. Can communicate in a simple way if the other person speaks slowly and clearly and is willing to help.

A2 – Basic Knowledge:

Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of immediate relevance (e.g., personal and family information, shopping, work, immediate surroundings). Can communicate in simple, routine situations where there is a straightforward and direct exchange of information about familiar and everyday topics. Can describe their origin, education, immediate surroundings, and things related to immediate needs using simple means.

According to the Goethe-Institut Germany, a learner at this level should have access to approximately half of the 650 entries from the word list as part of their active vocabulary. These words are categorized in the A1 word list under essential topic areas. The selection of entries is based on everyday communication in the following four areas:

- Private sphere
- Professional sphere
- Education or training sphere
- Public sphere.

The vocabulary underlying the Goethe-Zertifikat A2 includes approximately 1,300 lexical units that learners at the A2 level should know. This is applicable to both the youth and adult exams. The vocabulary is based on the standard German variant of the Federal Republic

of Germany. Different standard variants from German-speaking countries such as Austria and Switzerland are not included. The selection criterion for compiling the list was the relevance of a word in everyday, contemporary usage, especially in the private and public spheres, but also in the areas of work, school, and education (Goethe-Institut Germany, 2016).

Word Learning

When learning vocabulary, two approaches need to be considered: explicit learning and implicit learning. In explicit learning, word forms are intentionally associated with meanings, whereas implicit learning focuses on connecting meaning and usage patterns, where learners encounter words in texts. Most word knowledge is acquired implicitly, primarily through listening and reading (cf. Schmitt 2008, cited in Tschirner 2010: 242).

Lexical Competence

Vocabulary and vocabulary learning inevitably involve Lexical Competence or types of word knowledge. It can be subdivided into three categories: form knowledge, meaning knowledge, and usage knowledge.

- Form knowledge is the knowledge of how a word sounds, is written, pronounced, and spelled.
- Meaning knowledge is the knowledge of the general meaning of a word and its specific meaning in a given context, including which context or specific communicative intention the word should be chosen for.
- Usage knowledge is the knowledge about the conjugation or declension of a word, word order, grammatical

relationships, and pragmatic effects of word placement, and which words must be used with which others and in which contexts words can be used (cf. Nation 2001: 40-58, cited in Tschirner 2010: 242).

With these types of word knowledge, we understand how the learning process through vocabulary learning with flashcards works, and how vocabulary learning connects to the process of word formation. It also helps identify what knowledge needs to be supplemented in cases of difficulties when using vocabulary-oriented flashcards.

III. Methodology

Criteria for Structuring the Project Using the Example of Vocabulary-Oriented Flashcards

This article refers to the vocabulary-oriented flashcards created by Group 3 as a selection example from the five project works of the five groups of students in the *Seminar in German* course during the second semester of the 2023 academic year in the German Studies program at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Khon Kaen University. The methods and criteria for structuring the project in this project work are similar to those of the other four groups.

After exchanging experiences with German learning between the instructor and each individual student in the plenary session and identifying the common problem — the lack of opportunities to apply German in everyday life outside the classroom — the students were asked for ideas for possible solutions to this shared issue. The question was: *through what means or activities can we create opportunities*

to bring more German into everyday life and practice or apply as much German as possible in daily situations? This was the guideline for structuring their project work.

At this stage, the students were informed that they should form groups, as the project work was group-based. They could choose their group members, but there was a rule: to avoid excessive workload, each group should consist of at least three people. The students were thus divided into five groups. Each group was given seven key questions as criteria for structuring the project, which they had to answer clearly and concretely during the process of building their project. These criteria were:

1. The origin of their project, by identifying a specific problem in their German learning and the lack of opportunities to practice German in everyday life;
2. The goals they aimed to achieve in learning German and helping other German learners through the creation and final product of the project;
3. The functions of their project for users, i.e., how their final product could contribute to improving the practice of German in everyday life, with justification;
4. The target group, i.e., what German language proficiency level the users should have, with justification;
5. The forms of work, i.e., in what form they would create their project, such as flashcards, videos, board games, apps, etc., with justification;
6. The advantages and potential follow-ups that could be derived from their project;

7. A suitable name for their project.

IV. Findings and Discussion

Through answering the above-mentioned questions as criteria, the students built their projects over the course of two months. The course instructor guided them at each step and provided feedback and suggestions on the specific criteria. Each group had the opportunity to report the progress of their project work weekly in the course, in order to receive help and feedback from the instructor and their peers for improvement. It was made clear at the beginning of the course that the weekly progress report was not mandatory, but served as a helpful method. It was also emphasized that all five project works in the course were the collective products of all participants in the course, i.e., all students and the instructor, and we should therefore help and support each other. Additionally, it was communicated that the feedback and suggestions in the course should focus on mutual improvement and thus should be action-oriented and inspirational.

Two weeks before the final presentation, each group had to present the entire course of their project work and the nearly finished final product, if they had one. This served as a progress report and preparation for the final presentation. At this point, each group received feedback and specific advice on certain areas of their work from the course instructor and their peers to help improve their work. In the final presentation, all groups presented their complete projects along with their final products. At the end of each presentation, the instructor and peers from the other groups would ask questions to the presenting group, try the final product, and

experience how it worked, verifying whether it functioned as explained. The evaluation for each group was given by the instructor and their peers from the other four groups in the form of an evaluation sheet with specific criteria and four rating scales ranging from *very good*, *good*, *satisfactory*, to *needs improvement*.

The report on the structure and presentation of the project work by Group 3 is based on their attached presentation slides and the follow-up questions and answers exchanged between and after their final presentation on March 13, 2024, at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Khon Kaen University. The names of the three students from Group 3 remain anonymous in this article for their privacy, according to their request.

4. Vocabulary-Oriented Flashcards: A Selected Project Work as an Example of Vocabulary-Oriented Projects



Figure 1: The first page of their presentation with the project name

Group 3, as the creators of the selected project work, developed their project in the form of vocabulary-oriented flashcards. They named their final product "Flashcards" (Flashcards in English). The following section will present the

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structure of their project based on the seven criteria mentioned in point 3, as well as the final product, namely the vocabulary-oriented flashcards, in the correct order.

In Figure 1, you can see the name of their project: *Development of German Language Communication through the Use of Flashcards*. They named their project based on the function of their final product. The project structure did not specify that they had to come up with a creative name, so this name was **considered appropriate for their project**.

Regarding the problem statement as **the origin of their project**, they shared that they conducted a survey in the class among their fellow students. From the results, they found that most students had a good understanding of grammar but faced difficulties with communication, and vocabulary knowledge played a crucial role in this. The words they had in mind were not sufficient for communication in German in everyday situations. For this reason, they concluded that their project would focus on practicing and using vocabulary in everyday contexts. One weakness here was that they needed to include the survey results related to this part.

The goals of their project were set as follows:

1. To improve the difficulty that beginners face when communicating in German;
2. To develop communication skills in German more effectively using the learning tools they created;
3. To promote a new way of learning German outside of textbooks through portable tools.

These goals are aligned with improving German language learning and integrating German into everyday life, which matches the guidelines for the project.

Their strategies or **the functions of their project work for users** involve memorizing vocabulary through sentence construction based on given words or images on flashcards. The reasoning behind this is that practicing vocabulary memorization would help learners expand their vocabulary circle, and this could further improve their sentence construction in conversation. Additionally, the constant attempt to form sentences through vocabulary memorization with the flashcards would encourage learners to apply the sentences more fluently. This explanation and justification relate to the types of word knowledge, namely form knowledge, meaning knowledge, and use knowledge, as learners would become familiar with the form of words (how they are written and pronounced), the meanings (both their general meanings and specific meanings in a concrete context), and usage (how words are conjugated or declined and the grammatical relationships they must follow in conversation).

The target group for this project work is German learners at language levels A1 and A2. Their reasoning for this is that these learning tools are aimed at learners at the beginner levels who want to expand their vocabulary for use in everyday life, as the learning tools, namely these flashcards, focus on basic adjustments so that learners can continue their study of the German language at higher levels. In my opinion, there are two suggestions for improvement regarding this point. First, they could have included the vocabulary lists for the A1 and A2 levels in this

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section to clearly show the selection of words in their final product and reference the vocabulary lists. Second, I believe these learning tools, the vocabulary-oriented flashcards, can be adapted to any language level, as learners at higher language levels will encounter more words and therefore need to continually expand their vocabulary. They should have stated in their justification that they chose the A1 and A2 levels because one of the goals of the project was to improve the difficulty beginners face when communicating in German.

The form of their final product is flashcards, or "Flashkarten" as the creating group called them. The reasons for this choice are:

1. The use of flashcards stimulates the brain's ability to retain information;
2. Flashcards help develop communication skills;
3. Flashcards can be taken and used anywhere.

I suggested to them that they should have included references for the first and second reasons. The third reason is self-explanatory.

The following are images of the final product of this project: the flashcards. There are two types

of flashcards. The first type has words and their main themes on the front, as shown in **Figure 2**.

Figure 2: Examples of the flashcards (1st type) on the front side.



Figure 3: Examples of the flashcards on the back side

In Figure 3, the help for using the flashcards is provided, namely the pronunciation of the word, which is transcribed using Thai words, the general meaning of the word, an example sentence that can be formed with the word, how the example sentence is pronounced, the meaning of the example sentence, and the possible simple answers to the example sentence.



Figure 4: Examples of the flashcards (2nd type) on the front side and the back side

For the second type of flashcards, there is a picture on the front side and a word related to the picture on the back side. According to the creating group, this second type of flashcard can be used by memorizing words in connection with images and also by forming sentences with the words. The functions of the two types of flashcards clearly support the learners' lexical knowledge by helping them engage with aspects of form knowledge, meaning knowledge, and usage knowledge. Learners can familiarize themselves with the pronunciation, written form, general meanings, conjugations and declensions, and grammatical contexts of the words offered on the flashcards, and practice forming sentences with them.

Finally, the project group discussed *the advantages of the project work*, noting that the flashcards promote fast and effective memorization and encourage learners to form comprehensible sentences through the sentence-building tasks. Additionally, the fun and knowledge gained through playing with the flashcards were seen as major benefits. As a teacher, I agreed with this point and added that these learning tools could be extended to help learners memorize new words at any language level.

The evaluation of the project group, after the classmates and teacher actually played with the flashcards following the presentation, was clearly positive. The fun of using the flashcards was apparent, and the efforts to engage the teacher and classmates encouraged Group 3,

reinforcing that they had achieved their set goals.

V. Conclusion and Future Prospects

The project work allowed students to integrate their own experiences, skills, and knowledge by learning how to set goals and work independently to achieve those goals through the creation of a final product with the help of guiding questions from the teacher. They developed a tool for enhancing German learning and teaching. This shows that they applied what they learned in practice. Setting goals and working independently to achieve them are important skills for autonomous and lifelong learning, and form the basis for further development in all areas. In conclusion, an additional observation: what makes learning effective, aside from "learning by doing" as in project work, is the enjoyment derived from it.

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Public presentation September 2018 at IGV (Indonesischer Germanistenverband), DaF conference organized by IGV and Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, published in IGV online journal volume 4/August 2019 Page:87-92

URL: <https://shorturl.at/7Bgwz>

Pattimura Excellence Journal of Language and Culture

ISSN: 2808-2265

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30598/PEJLaC.v4.i2.pp111-121>



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