Enhancing the learning engagement of first-year EFL students through the integration of quizlet in vocabulary learning

Lâm Mỹ An

HCMC University of Foreign Languages - Information Technology (HUFLIT)

Abstract: *In the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, fostering students' engagement is a crucial factor in promoting effective learning outcomes. Educators are constantly seeking innovative approaches and resources to help learners become more engaged and motivated within the EFL classroom. One such tool that has gained popularity is Quizlet, an online learning platform that offers a variety of interactive and gamified features for vocabulary learning. The purpose of this study is to investigate the advantages and drawbacks of using Quizlet in language learning. The findings are expected to contribute to the current body of knowledge on technology integration and offer practical guidance to EFL teachers, helping them make informed choices about its use and tackle any possible challenges. In the end, the study aims to enhance vocabulary learning methods and foster a more engaging and interactive learning experience for first-year EFL students.*

Keywords: *Learning engagement, quizlet, first-year EFL students, vocabulary learning*

1. Introduction

I noticed that my first-year EFL students are reluctant to learn new words in English. It made me wonder if digital tools could make these students more motivated and engaged in the classroom. Therefore, I'd like to investigate the effectiveness of using Quizlet in enhancing students' learning engagement during their process of acquiring vocabulary.

1.1. Context of the study

English is widely recognized as a bridge that connects Vietnam to the global community, providing access to numerous opportunities (Tran & Tanemura, 2020). Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004) argue that engaged first-year EFL students show heightened attention, improved comprehension, and better language performance due to their commitment to learning. These scholars highlight the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral advantages of student engagement, which encourages learners to be more stimulated, actively participate, and persist in their studies. Given that English proficiency is essential in academic, professional, and social contexts (Crystal, 2003), it is crucial to boost the learning engagement of first-year EFL students, particularly in vocabulary acquisition. Learning engagement is a complex concept involving a student's motivation, interest, active participation, and emotional investment in the learning process (Nunan, 2012; Lamb, 2017).

While learning engagement is not a new concept and has been explored in various educational studies (Krashen, 1982; Ellis, 2003; Benson, 2013), there has been limited focus on the use of web-based tools and their practical application. Nation (2003) highlights the role of technology in vocabulary acquisition, such as employing corpora and digital resources for vocabulary learning. Therefore, there is a need to explore this area further. Quizlet, in particular, is regarded as a valuable tool for both teachers and first-year students in enhancing the learning experience and achieving academic goals (Wang et al., 2014; Nguyen & Van, 2023). This study focuses on a group of thirty frirst-year EFL students and three lecturers from a private university in District 10, Ho Chi Minh city.

1.2. Research questions:

Following a thorough examination of the primary issues, the following two research questions act as guiding principles to ensure the project's objective orientation:

How does the integration of Quizlet in vocabulary learning enhance the overall learning engagement of EFL first-year students? (main question)

What are the potential disadvantages of employing Quizlet in the EFL classroom? (sub question)

1.3. Aim, Objectives and Outcomes

The aim of this research is to investigate how

using Quizlet in vocabulary learning can facilitate active participation among first-year EFL students and explore potential drawbacks of this digital tool in classroom settings. To achieve this aim, the study focuses on the following objectives.

Firstly, it aims to evaluate the overall impact of integrating Quizlet on students' engagement levels during vocabulary learning activities. Specifically, it will assess whether incorporating Quizlet positively affects students' motivation, interest, and active involvement in the learning process, as well as examine changes in students' attitudes and behaviors toward acquiring new vocabulary as a result of using Quizlet.

Secondly, the study will explore the types of vocabulary learning activities enabled by Quizlet that promote participation and interaction among students. It will focus on how interactive features like flashcards, quizzes, and collaborative learning options help foster active engagement in vocabulary acquisition.

Lastly, the research will examine any potential disadvantages or challenges associated with using Quizlet in the classroom.

By addressing these objectives, this research is expected to provide empirical evidence on the impact of integrating Quizlet into first-year EFL classrooms. It aims to highlight the effectiveness of Quizlet in enhancing learning engagement and promoting active participation in vocabulary learning. The findings will contribute to the existing body of knowledge in EFL education, offering practical insights and recommendations for educators on how to effectively incorporate Quizlet into their vocabulary instruction. The study primarily investigates the impact of Quizlet on first-year students' engagement levels and their participation in vocabulary learning activities. Particularly, it emphasizes the integration of Quizlet as the digital learning platform for vocabulary acquisition.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The definition of learning engagement

Grasping the concept of learning engagement is crucial for developing effective teaching strategies and promoting successful language acquisition. Learning engagement has been widely studied, with various universal definitions emerging over the years. Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004) offer a thorough definition, emphasizing its three key dimensions: behavioral, emotional, and cognitive

engagement. They suggest that when learners actively participate, are emotionally invested, and apply cognitive processes to make sense of the material, their language learning experience becomes more impactful and effective.

2.2. The importance of learning engagement in language learning

2.2.1. Enhancing autonomy learning

Learning engagement is crucial to nurturing self-directedness and empowering attitudes required for autonomous language learning. Benson (2013) also contends that learning engagement in language education is closely tied to the concept of learner autonomy, and this process happens when learning is personalized to first-year students' interests, needs, and learning styles (Lamb, 2017; Nunan, 2012).

2.2.2. Enhancing Motivation

Reeve (2012) emphasizes that when first-year EFL students experience autonomy, competence, and relatedness in the classroom, as outlined by Ryan and Deci (2000), they demonstrate increased intrinsic motivation and actively seek opportunities to practice language and develop their skills. This can lead to students taking ownership of their learning, setting personal language goals, and engaging in self-directed language activities outside the classroom. Moreover, Lamb (2017) identifies motivation as central to engaging learners since it energizes first-year students to participate actively and persist through challenges. As a result, high anxiety, lack of confidence or motivation erect an affective filter that hinders engagement, lowering the filter helps acquisition and better learning outcomes (Krashen, 1982).

2.3. The relationship between vocabulary learning and engagement in the classroom context

Vocabulary learning is a crucial component of language acquisition, and the degree of learning engagement among EFL learners plays a vital role in their vocabulary development. Researchers have examined the connection between vocabulary learning and engagement, highlighting how increased engagement positively influences and enhances the process of vocabulary acquisition. Nation (2003) introduces the concept of vocabulary size and argues that a learner's vocabulary knowledge is a key determinant of their language proficiency and engagement. He stresses the importance of learners actively participating in vocabulary learning activities, such as extensive reading and deliberate

vocabulary practice, to improve their language skills. Furthermore, Zhang and Rahimi (2014) claim that EFL-engaged learners are more likely to employ effective vocabulary learning strategies, such as using context clues, creating associations, and engaging in extensive reading. These strategies facilitate deeper processing of vocabulary items and enhance their retention. Learning engagement encourages the use of active and effective vocabulary learning strategies (Schmitt, 2008).

2.4. Web-based tools used in language learning

Web-based tools have become powerful resources for increasing excitement and motivation, encouraging first-year students to actively engage with and explore learning materials. Godwin-Jones (2018) emphasizes the interactive and multimodal nature of web-based tools, such as online vocabulary games, flashcards, and digital resources, which capture students' attention and promote active participation. These tools often offer immediate feedback, scaffolded learning experiences, and opportunities for self-directed exploration, helping learners engage more deeply in vocabulary acquisition. However, there are potential challenges and limitations associated with web-based tools. Issues such as the digital divide, internet access, and the need for effective pedagogical integration can hinder their use (Warschauer, 1996). For instance, aligning tasks with learning objectives, choosing appropriate tools, and providing students with guidance on how to effectively navigate web-based resources are essential considerations (Godwin-Jones, 2018).

2.5. Using Quizlet in the classroom

The use of vocabulary tools on mobile devices has grown considerably among learners (Ma, 2017), and Quizlet is no exception to this trend. Aksel (2021) claims that the game-like modes provided interactive, competitive ways to review vocabulary that first-year students found very engaging. Secondly, Quizlet contributed to improving vocabulary acquisition among EFL learners. The repetitive practice facilitated by Quizlet's flashcards and games helped first-year students reinforce and retain wordy items more effectively (Wang et al., 2014). Another key finding of this study is that using Quizlet in the classroom enhanced first-year students' autonomy (Nation & Nation, 2001) by offering a tool that was easily accessible both during and outside of class. This accessibility encouraged voluntary

engagement, enabling students to take more control over their learning process (Kálecký, 2016).

2.6. Disadvantages and limitations of Quizlet

While Quizlet offers several advantages, some scholars have also explored potential limitations that educators should consider to ensure its effective use with EFL learners. A study by Kessler and Bikowski (2010) points out some limitations of Quizlet in promoting language production skills, noting that the platform primarily emphasizes receptive vocabulary learning, such as reading and recognition, rather than productive skills like speaking and writing. Additionally, other researchers have raised concerns about the potential lack of customization and contextualization in Quizlet. For instance, Quizlet's study sets may not always cater to learners' specific needs, contexts, or language proficiency levels. The study's findings stress the importance of guiding learners in selecting or creating study sets that are relevant and appropriate for their language learning objectives.

3. Research methodology

3.1. Action Research Design/ Methodology

An action research approach has been utilized in this project to address the research questions. Action research focuses on offering recommendations and practical solutions to address challenging issues or generate new knowledge by adjusting certain elements of the process (Denscombe, 2010, as cited in Bell & Waters, 2014). Indeed, by conducting an action research, teachers get the chance to reflect on their own teaching methods as well as try to address particular educational issues or challenges (Mills, 2013). Besides, I decide to implement the qualitative approach in action research, which helps researchers gain a deep understanding of the educational context, explore diverse perspectives, and generate insights to inform practice.

3.2. Participants:

There were thirty tertiary students and three colleagues involved in this study. The English proficiency is mostly at pre-intermediate (A2) level. In other words, they can understand and use common everyday expressions, basic phrases, and simple sentences related to familiar topics. However, they are often get bored or overwhelmed due to their short attention span (Brown & Lee, 2015).

3.3. Data collection

Research Instruments and methods

To address the two research questions, various

methods have been employed to evaluate the effectiveness of integrating Quizlet for vocabulary learning and to identify its potential drawbacks in the EFL classroom. One widely used method involves comparing the results of a vocabulary test taken at the beginning of the study with those taken after a set period of time (usually seven to ten weeks), allowing researchers to assess changes in vocabulary acquisition is employing pre-tests and post-tests (Avisteva & Halimi, 2021; Lin & Yu, 2017). Furthermore, since action research seeks to provide solutions to real-world problems (Lufungulo, Mambwe & Kalinde, 2021), this suggests that the current study is most effectively carried out in a practical educational setting.

3.4. Data collection procedure

During the first four weeks, participants were given clear explanations of the study's objectives and procedures, and informed consent letters were distributed. Lessons were conducted as usual before the observation process began. In week 5, students were guided on how to access and use Quizlet for vocabulary learning and actively participated in the process. To gather insights on effective Quizlet implementation, I conducted semi-structured interviews with three EFL teachers who had used Quizlet in their classrooms. Each interview lasted 20 minutes, took place in the teachers' offices, and was audio-recorded for transcription.

4. Findings and Discussion

The findings indicate a positive impact on EFL students' learning engagement when integrating Quizlet into vocabulary learning. First, interactive activities such as games and quizzes increased students' interest and enjoyment during lessons, fostering a positive attitude toward the subject. Second, the repetition and reinforcement provided by flashcards and review features enhanced students' ability to retain vocabulary. Third, Quizlet's accessibility and user-friendly interface supported self-directed learning, empowering students to take control of their learning process by allowing them to learn at their own pace and independently review vocabulary. However, the interviews revealed some minor disadvantages associated with its use.

4.1 Advantages of employing Quizlet in the classroom

4.1.1. Interactive games and quizzes promote positive emotions

The interactive activities, including games and quizzes, proved to be successful in boosting students' interest and enjoyment during the lessons. Students participated actively in the Quizlet exercises. All three teachers interviewed agreed that the interactive games and quizzes on Quizlet kept students highly engaged. They noted that students were "excited and eager" to join, particularly in "Classic Live" (Figure 1) and "Check Point" (Figure 2) activities.

Figure 1
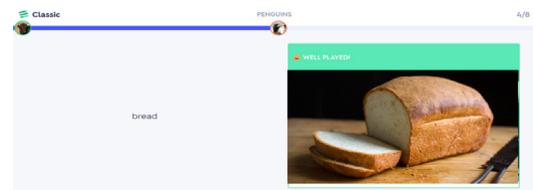
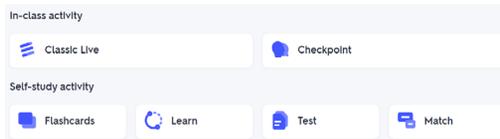In-class activity - Classic Live

Figure 2
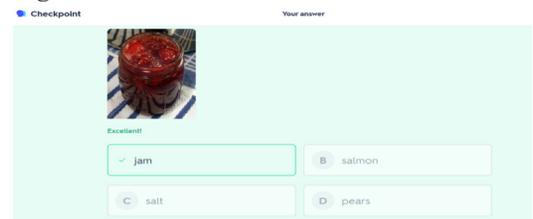
In-class activity - Checkpoint

By integrating elements of competition, immediate feedback, and visual aids, Quizlet effectively captured students' attention and encouraged active participation in vocabulary learning. This positive outcome aligns with Deci and Ryan's (1985) findings, which suggest that when students perceive an activity as intrinsically motivating and enjoyable, they are more likely to engage with it willingly and develop a positive attitude toward the subject. The interactive nature of Quizlet activities leverages students' intrinsic motivation, as they enjoy the challenges, sense of accomplishment, and social interactions involved in the vocabulary learning process.

4.1.2. Accessibility Enhances Self-Directed Learning

Observations revealed that 23 out of 30 students independently used Quizlet during recess and after school on their personal devices to review flashcards, play games, or take self-quizzes at their own pace. Field notes highlighted that students confidently navigated Quizlet's user-friendly interface for self-study, empowering them to take control of their learning through the accessibility of Quizlet on mobile devices.

Studying sets of In-class activity and Self-study activity

4.2. Several disadvantages of employing Quizlet in the classroom

While numerous benefits of Quizlet integration were observed, some drawbacks also surfaced. Firstly, technological issues posed distractions during learning. In particular, during observations, 5 students encountered login problems, which disrupted their engagement for around 10 minutes until the issues were resolved. Also. one limitation identified by teachers was that Quizlet tends to focus on isolated terms and their definitions, rather than offering contextualized language learning experiences. Learning vocabulary in isolation may not fully equip students to grasp the appropriate usage, collocations, or nuances of words in real-life contexts. This limitation can affect students' ability to effectively apply and transfer their vocabulary knowledge in authentic language situations. As a result, educators need to be aware of these limitations and take steps to mitigate them to maximize the benefits of Quizlet integration. To address technological challenges, providing clear guidance to learners before lessons and having alternative backup plans in place are essential.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study found that the strategic use of Quizlet can significantly enhance student engagement in vocabulary learning through its interactive games and support for self-directed study. Teacher interviews and classroom observations indicated that these features increased student interest, enjoyment, and vocabulary retention. However, the study also highlighted some challenges, such as occasional technical difficulties, the potential for over-reliance on entertainment over learning, and the risk of disengagement without proper guidance. Educators should be mindful of these limitations and adopt a balanced approach to vocabulary instruction, integrating a range of strategies and materials to optimize learning outcomes. Additionally, future studies could investigate strategies to mitigate the limitations identified, such as the lack of contextualized language learning and potential over-reliance on entertainment. Research could also focus on how to better integrate Quizlet with other instructional tools to create a more holistic language learning experience.

References

1. Aksel, A. (2021). Vocabulary learning with Quizlet in higher education. *Language Education and Technology*, *1*(2), 53-62.

2. Avisteva, R. T., & Halimi, S. S. (2021). The Use of Quizlet as a Vocabulary Acquisition Learning Media for Eleventh Grade Students. *In International University Symposium on Humanities and Arts 2020 (INUSHARTS 2020)* (pp. 254-260). Atlantis Press.

3. Bell, J., & Waters, S. (2014). *Doing your research project: A guide for first time researchers* (6th ed.). Open University Press.

4. Benson, P. (2013). *Teaching and researching: Autonomy in language learning*. Routledge.

5. Brown, H. D. and Lee, H. (2015). Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy. Pearson Education, New York.

6. Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1985). The general causality orientations scale: Self-determination in personality. *Journal of research in personality, 19*(2), 109-134.

7. Ellis, R. (2003). *Task-based language learning and teaching*. Oxford university press.

8. Fredricks, J. A., Blumenfeld, P. C., & Paris, A. H. (2004). School engagement: Potential of the concept, state of the evidence. *Review of educational research, 74*(1), 59-109.

9. Godwin-Jones, R. (2018). Contextualized vocabulary learning.

10. Kálecký, R. (2016). *Quizlet vs. vocabulary notebook: The impact of different methods of storing and revising vocabulary on students' progress, retention, and autonomy*. Masaryk University.

11. Kessler, G., & Bikowski, D. (2010). Developing collaborative autonomous learning abilities in computer mediated language learning: Attention to meaning among students in wiki space. *Computer Assisted Language Learning, 23*(1), 41-58.

12. Krashen, S. (1982). Principles and practice in second language acquisition.

13. Lamb, M. (2017). The motivational dimension of language teaching. *Language Teaching*, *50*(3), 301-346.

phu. Hơn nữa, các tiêu chí đánh giá NLGTTH của HS khi học đạo hàm cũng cần chuẩn bị khá chi tiết và bám sát các yêu cầu cần đạt trong Chương trình Giáo dục phổ thông môn Toán 2018. Việc dạy học môn Toán nói chung và dạy học đạo hàm nói riêng, GV cần quan tâm đúng mức đến sự phát triển NLGTTH của HS.

Tài liệu tham khảo

1. Baker, M. J, Quignard, M. & Lund, K. (2002). *Designing a computer-supported collaborative learning situation for broadening and deepening understanding of the space of debate*. Processdings of the Fifth International Conference of the International Society for the Study of Argumentation (ISSA 2002), Amsterdam, June 2002. Amsterdam: Sic Sat Publications.

2. Vũ Thị Bình. (2016). Bồi dưỡng năng lực biểu diễn toán học và năng lực giao tiếp toán học cho học sinh trong dạy học môn Toán lớp 6, lớp 7. Luận án tiến sĩ, Viện Khoa học Giáo dục Việt Nam.

3. Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo. (2018). *Chương trình giáo dục phổ thông môn Toán*. Ban hành kèm theo thông tư số 32/2018/TT-BGDĐT ngày 26/12/2018 của Bộ trưởng Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo.

4. Byerley, C., Hatfild, N., & Thompson, P. W. (2012). Calculus students' understandings of division and rate. In S. Brown, S. Larsen, K. Marrongelle, & M. Oehrtman(Eds.), *Proceedings of the 15th Annual Conference on Research in Undergraduate Mathematics Education* (pp.358–363). Portland, OR: SIGMAA/RUME.

5. Haciomeroglu, E. S. (2007). *Calculus students' understanding derivative graphs: problems of representations in Calculus*. A Dissertation for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the Florida State University.

6. National Council of Teachers of Mathematics. (2000). *Principles and Standards for School mathematics*. Reston, VA: Author.

7. Orton, A. (1983). Students' understanding of differentiation. *Educational Studies in Mathematics, 14*, 235–250.

8. Vương Vĩnh Phát. (2021). *Phát triển năng lực giao tiếp toán học của học sinh bằng hình thức tranh luận khoa học trong dạy học giải tích ở trung học phổ thông. Luận án tiến sĩ, Trường Đại học Sư phạm TPHCM.*

Enhancing the learning engagement of...

14. Lufungulo, E. S., Mambwe, R., & Kalinde, B. (2021). The meaning and role of action research in education. *Multidisciplinary Journal of Language and Social Sciences Education (2664-083X, Online ISSN: Print ISSN: 2616-4736), 4*(2), 115-128.

15. Ma, Q. (2017). A multi-case study of university students' language-learning experience mediated by mobile technologies: A socio-cultural perspective. *Computer Assisted Language Learning, 30*(3–4), 183–203.

16. Mills, G. E. (2013). *Action Research: A guide for the teacher researcher* (5th ed.). Boston: Pearson.

17. Nation, I. S., & Nation, I. S. P. (2001). *Learning vocabulary in another language* (Vol. 10). Cambridge: Cambridge university press.

18. Nation, P. (2003). The role of the first language in foreign language learning.

19. Nunan, D. (2012). *Learner-centered English language education: The selected works of David Nunan*. Routledge.

20. Reeve, J. (2012). A self-determination theory perspective on student engagement. In *Handbook of research on student engagement* (pp. 149-172). Boston, MA: Springer US.

21. Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations: Classic definitions and new directions. *Contemporary educational psychology, 25*(1), 54-67.

22. Schmitt, C. (2008). *The Leviathan in the state theory of Thomas Hobbes: meaning and failure of a political symbol.* University of Chicago Press.

23. Tran, P. M., & Tanemura, K. (2020). English in Vietnam. World Englishes, 39(3), 528–541.

24. Wang, C. Y., Shen, H. Y., & Chen, Y. L. (2014). The effects of Quizlet on English vocabulary learning for junior high school students. *Educational Technology & Society, 17*(2), 392-402.

25. Warschauer, M. (1996). Computer-assisted language learning: An introduction. Multimedia language teaching, 320.

26. Zhang, L. J., & Rahimi, M. (2014). EFL learners' anxiety level and their beliefs about corrective feedback in oral communication classes. *System, 42*, 429-439.