

IMPACTS OF QUIZLET USE ON YOUNG ENGLISH LEARNERS' VOCABULARY ACQUISITION

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ABSTRACT

This 10-week research investigated the impacts of Quizlet, an online tool, on young English learners' vocabulary acquisition. 29 students, aged from 7 to 8, were the subjects of the research. In the first five weeks, students followed normal program without Quizlet implementation, while throughout five weeks of the second phase, Quizlet was relied on to facilitate vocabulary learning. Pretest, posttest and questionnaires were employed to collect data for analysis. The divergence between pretest and posttest results showed significant gains made by students after Quizlet was introduced. Besides, responses to the questionnaires displayed students' positive attitudes toward Quizlet use.

Key words: *Quizlet, young English learners, vocabulary acquisition, educational technology*

INTRODUCTION

The critical role of vocabulary in language learning has been widely acknowledged by a number of researchers. Lewis (1993:89) once stated that vocabulary is "the core or heart of language", while according to Wilkins (1972:111), "without vocabulary, nothing can be conveyed". Vocabulary knowledge significantly influences the reading, listening, speaking, and writing ability (Groot, 2000), and lack of vocabulary restricts language learners' comprehension and generation of both speeches and texts (Barr, 2016). As vocabulary enables learners to understand their interlocutors and express their own ideas in the target language, vocabulary development is considered the basis for learning any language (Weiser, 2013). Similarly, Swan and Walter (1984) agreed that vocabulary acquisition is the most important task facing the language learners. Therefore, promoting vocabulary learning has been a sustainable goal emphasized by any English training program, especially at basic levels.

Though enriching lexical knowledge is important, vocabulary acquisition is challenging to a number of language learners due to the fact that it is by far "the most sizeable and unmanageable component" in language learning (Oxford, 1990). So far, various approaches towards vocabulary teaching and learning have been introduced and implemented with the intent to help students tackle the learning challenges and facilitate word mastery. Driven by the technology development in this era, numerous technical tools have been developed to motivate vocabulary learning and enhance retention, in which Quizlet is among the most popularly used and has been reported to be highly effective with language learners of different ages.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEMS

In her English classes with young learners, the researcher once found a number of students failed to remember the words they learnt in the previous lessons. It was also challenging to encourage them to learn new lexical items at home by themselves. Problems that parents often reported include the fact that they do not know, or know very little English, which discourages them from guiding their kids to study as they were afraid that they would make a lot of mistakes when teaching. Also, kids are dynamic, they like moving all the time so it was hard for parents to keep

them learn in a focusing manner. Besides, although students appeared highly interested in classroom activities, they seemed to easily get bored with their homework activities, which were, very often, reading aloud to practice pronunciation and doing the matching, drawing exercises in their workbooks. This factual situation encouraged the researcher to introduce Quizlet in her classes with young learners under the expectation that it would become a remedy for vocabulary learning, providing students with new learning experience, keeping students' motivation for learning, and enhancing vocabulary retention and learner autonomy.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Vocabulary acquisition

Knowing a word can be categorized into two criteria including *receptive*, and *productive* knowledge. While the former refers to the ability of recognizing and recalling meanings (Schmitt, 2010: 86), the later can be understood as the ability to recognize and recall forms. It should be noticed that though this distinction is popularly accepted, it is not the only way to view the discrepancy between receptive and productive knowledge. According to Nation (2013: 44), there are "many degrees of knowing". Generally knowing a word means knowing its form, meaning and use (Nation, 2013). More specifically, knowing a word means knowing its form in terms of spoken, written, and word parts; its meaning in terms of form and meaning, concept and referents, and associations; and its use in terms of grammatical functions, collocations and constraints on use such as register or frequency. Similarly, Thornbury (2002) explained that knowing a word, at the most basic level, involves knowing its form and meaning, which was mentioned as the knowledge of spoken and written form, the grammatical behaviour, derivations, collocations, register, connotations, word's frequency, and meanings. In this study, since the subjects of the study were mostly beginners, the researcher also looked at the mastery of form, meaning and use to evaluate students' vocabulary acquisition, but at a moderate level with the focus on the spoken and written form (pronunciation and spelling), grammatical behaviour, and meanings.

Quizlet

Quizlet, at <https://quizlet.com>, is a game-based language learning tool created and publicly released over a decade ago. It was originally a website but then was developed to be a mobile application. Now learners can install Quizlet and conveniently use it in their smart phones.

The tool is immensely convenient for teachers as to create lessons, their only job is to prepare a list of the target words (and pictures if they want to use their own) to enter, and choose the meanings and pictures suggested by Quizlet. Multiple learning activities are then automatically created by the tool. The links to the lessons can easily be copied and send to learners so that they can join. Quizlet teacher accounts also allow teachers to create classes on the platforms for better control of their students' studying process and results. Teachers can also share the lessons they design and use lessons available on Quizlet system.

Quizlet incorporates a number of studying modes to facilitate word mastery, including *Flashcards*, *Learn*, *Write*, *Spell*, and *Test*. Match (a scatter game), Gravity game, together with the *Live game* mode for more attractive and interactive lessons are also among the activities designed. Particularly, sound files to guide pronunciation for the intended words through listening are automatically attached. By this token, Quizlet appears to be comprehensive has a high potential to enhance the effectiveness of the vocabulary learning process and improve the learning products as a consequence.

Previous studies

Since the invention of Quizlet for vocabulary learning, a number of researches have been conducted to investigate its effectiveness as a vocabulary instruction. To understand the impacts of Quizlet on local tertiary students' academic vocabulary acquisition and their attitudes, Dizon (2016) carried out a small-scale research with 9 EFL students. Quizlet was used as a habitual learning activity for the first ten minutes of every lesson during the period of ten weeks. Although further self-study with Quizlet was also encouraged, it was not compulsory for students after class time. A pretest and posttest, respectively conducted before and after the intervention, were employed to provide statistical data, while a questionnaire was relied on when the researcher investigated the students' attitudes. The findings were roughly in accordance with that of former studies in that students made significant gains in the posttest results compared to the pretest scores. Also, students found the learning process more enjoyable and

advantageous, which inspired them to invest a certain amount of time in studying on their own with Quizlet outside of their classes.

An experimental research looking at the use of *Quizlet flashcards* was done by Andarab (2017) with 52 English language learners (EFL) students randomly assigned to the control and experimental groups. The former group had to make paper flashcards by themselves under the instruction of the teacher, while the later group's members took advantage of Quizlet's online flashcards. After the 8-week of treatment, members of the experimental group showed remarkably better scores on the sample test released by the teacher. The researcher then concluded that Quizlet was useful for his students. Though the research was carefully conducted, the conclusion of the findings would be more convincing if the researcher collected data from one or two more instruments for judgment in addition to the posttest scores.

Sanosi (2018) also investigated the effect of Quizlet on vocabulary acquisition with university students as the subjects. In this experimental research, pretest and posttest results were the major sources of data for analysis, in which the former was distributed after the first four units while the later was released when students completed unit 8. Both tests were piloted and revised before use. All students followed the same program when learning the first four units; after that, Quizlet was introduced to 21 first-year EFL learners in the experimental group for both inside and outside classroom use, while the control group with the equal number of students continued the course with regular teaching and learning methods until the end of the research period. Pretest and posttest scores gained by both groups were then compared to look for the difference resulting from the application of Quizlet. The researcher then acknowledged that a considerable progress was made by the experimental groups. The literature review shows that Quizlet has the potential to be both practical and enjoyable, which led to the decision by the author of this study to investigate its impacts on young learners' vocabulary acquisition and their attitudes towards vocabulary learning.

METHODOLOGY

Research aims and questions

The research goals were to depict the impacts of Quizlet tool on young learners' English vocabulary acquisition and inspect their attitudes towards vocabulary learning. Therefore, the two questions to be answered included:

- (1) How does Quizlet impact students' vocabulary acquisition?
- (2) What are the students' attitudes towards the use of Quizlet for vocabulary learning?

Sample choosing

The research was conducted with the participation of 29 young learners aged 7 and 8 at an English centre in Vietnam. 16 and 13 students belonged to the first and second class, respectively. Members of both classes were all beginners, had never learnt English before, were taught by the same teacher, had the same teaching assistant (TA), followed the same syllabus and number of class hours per week, and used the same classroom. The first class inaugurated two weeks prior to the commencement of the second one.

Data collection instruments

Pretest and posttest with the same format were employed as the main tools to collect data, in which the former one was done after the first three units and the later when unit 6 finished. All lexical items to be tested were the targeted words in their textbooks named *My Little Island 2*, written by Leone Dyson, published by Pearson Education in 2013. Each test consisted of 25 items with four aspects tested including pronunciation, meanings, spelling and understanding of words used in contexts. The total mark was 100 for each test, one aspect of a word tested accounted for one point. The tests, which were a mixture of spoken and written formats, had two parts. The first part was designed to check retention of individual word's meaning and pronunciation with flashcards, the second part to test spelling and understanding of words in given contexts (full sentences). The oral part of the test was marked by a native English speaker and teacher, who was also the main teacher of the two classes in this research. The author of this research was the observer during the tests as well as the TA, who constantly worked with the two classes from the beginning to the end of the course. All these were set up in order to alleviate students' negative feelings, which potentially affected their test scores.

Brief survey questionnaires were distributed to students twice to collect data regarding students' level of frequency and their preference towards vocabulary learning, one was at the time of the pretest and the other was after the relief of the posttest.

Procedures

The research period lasted for 10 weeks in total. During the first five weeks when students learnt the three first units of the course, Quizlet was not relied on. Students were asked to spend at least 30 minutes reviewing what they learnt after every lesson at home. Their parents periodically received reminders from the TA to ask their children to study, also to check their work. The pretest was distributed upon the completion of unit 3. Pre-intervention questionnaire was filled by students after they took the test. The data was then recorded for later use.

In the second phase, Quizlet was introduced. A quick meeting with the students' parents was done to provide manuals on how to use Quizlet to make sure they could help their children use the platform in a comprehensive manner. Since Unit 4, students were required to review the targeted lexical items by completing the compatible Quizlet lesson after every class session. When another five weeks passed, at the end of unit 6, students took the posttest. Post-intervention survey data was also collected after the test was completed by students. Students' posttest results were recorded and compared to that of the pretest to work out their score gains. Response to survey questionnaires regarding their learning habits and attitudes towards vocabulary learning were also analyzed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Divergence between the pretest and posttest results

Table 1 below presents the divergence between the pretest and posttest results of students in both classes and the average score gain of each.

Table 1: Divergence between the pretest and posttest results

	Average scores (Total mark: 100)		Average score gains
	Pretest	Posttest	
Group 1	60.1	72.0	11.9
Group 2	57.0	69.8	12.8

The figures in table 1 shows that a significant improvement in test scores was made by students of both groups in the second phase of learning. Though there was a slight difference regarding the score gains, both groups achieved, on average, more than 10 points (out of 100) higher in the posttest than in the pre-test. Regarding the test scores of each individual, all students received better results for the posttest; however, their achievements were inconsistency, ranging from three points higher at least and 23 points at most.

Despite the lack of data from a group without Quizlet application to compare, scores gained by students for the posttest in both groups were better than for the pretest. This implied that the application of Quizlet has positive impacts on students' vocabulary acquisition and potentially promotes word mastery. This finding agrees with that of the previous studies by Dizon (2016), Andarab (2017), and Sanosi (2018) despite the different age groups.

Students' attitudes towards vocabulary learning

Figure 1 below portrayed students' changes of attitudes towards vocabulary learning before and after the implementation period.

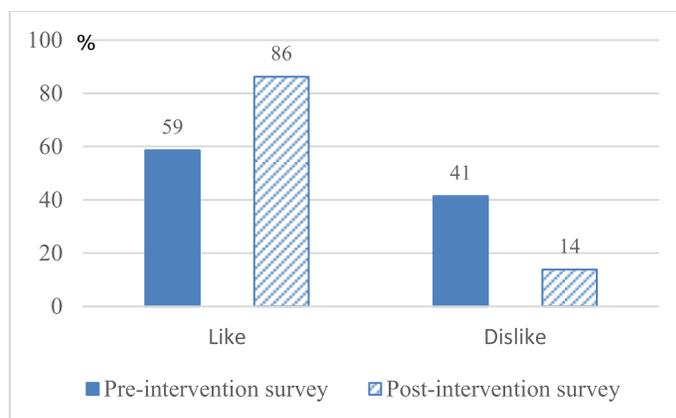


Figure 1: Students' attitudes towards vocabulary learning

Prior to the application of Quizlet, only 59% of the students surveyed had interest in learning vocabulary. After the implementation period, the proportion of students who found vocabulary learning enjoyable increased by 27%, which, accordingly, meant a downfall of the same percentage of those who did not, to only 14%. Regarding students' attitudes towards Quizlet itself, in response to another question in the survey, 89% agreed that Quizlet helped them learn vocabulary more easily, and the same proportion perceived Quizlet as useful. This finding reinforces the study by Dizon (2016), who also investigated students' perceptions regarding the application of Quizlet and reported similar positive responses.

Students' change of self-studying habits

In addition to the change of attitudes, students' self-studying habits were also changed in a positive manner. The numeric data regarding self-studying habits before and after the intervention period are presented in table 2.

Table 2: Students' change of self-studying habits

Learning habits	Survey			
	Pre-intervention		Post-intervention	
	No. of responses	%	No. of responses	%
I study <i>all</i> lessons.	7	24	12	41
I study <i>most</i> lessons.	9	32	13	45
I study <i>some</i> lessons.	7	24	4	14
I <i>never</i> study any lessons.	6	21	0	0
Total number of responses	29	100	29	100

Figures in table 2 showed that there was an increase to 41% and 45% in the number of students who studied all or most lessons assigned as homework, respectively. This was impressive compared to the proportion of 24% and 32% in the previous phase. On the contrary, the number of students who only studied a few lessons reduced by 10%. Most notably, the figures for students who never studied any lessons at home fell from 21% to an amazing number, 0%. The higher frequency of learning after the introduction of Quizlet implies that this tool made students more willing to learn by themselves.

CONCLUSION

Based on the data analysis, it can be concluded that the application of Quizlet was beneficial to young English learners. Regarding vocabulary acquisition, Quizlet facilitated the learning of the primary but crucial aspects of an individual word, including meanings, pronunciation, and spelling. Specifically, Quizlet helped improve retention of the target vocabulary items, train pronunciation and familiarize students with their written form. With regard to students' attitudes, the data collected has shown that the majority of students surveyed perceived Quizlet as an effective and motivating tool for vocabulary learning, and that they were more willing to learn by themselves. The application of Quizlet has not only inspired students the love for learning, but also helped them learn more quickly and easily and develop their long-term memory. Therefore, Quizlet should be highly recommended for English learners of all ages including the young. For successful application of Quizlet with young learners, some recommendations should be taken into consideration. First, it is advisable that Quizlet also be used as a regular class activity, which enables teachers to control their students' learning, to provide assistance in a timely manner, to prevent students from skipping any lessons, and to ensure that all students receive the same treatment. When Quizlet is used as home assignments, brief training and careful instructions should be provided in advance so that students are clear about what they are supposed to do. Besides, since Quizlet automatically creates an array of learning activities for each lesson, it is recommended that teachers should consider the amount of vocabulary to be covered in a lesson so that it suits students' average capacity.

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