Use of Digital Applications- Quizlet, Kahoot, and Padlet in ESL Classroom

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ABSTRACT

Quizlet, Kahoot and Padlet are digital resources that are widespread in most modern ESL classes, but their pedagogical usefulness is questionable. A recent synthesis of research on these tools reveals three main findings: (1) the essential skills represented by each platform are reinforced by their use; (2) learning outcomes are realized as learners engage with constructivist pedagogies; and (3) sociocultural and gamification principles are involved in the effectiveness of these technologies in the ESL classroom. A literature review conducted to synthesize research published within the recent ten years reveals that learners can learn best when they actively construct knowledge, partner with others, and get immediate feedback in stimulating settings. These tools encourage interaction, but they are associated with several challenges, such as technical inequities, excessive visual and auditory stimulation, rapid interaction, which can foster surface learning and extensive preparation time of the teacher. In general, technology is strictly curriculum-based to maximize learning. The review ends with the recommendations about studying the long-term learning impacts, varied conditions, and features that can maintain the interest of learners.

1. Introduction

Technology has become a fundamental part of almost all ESL classrooms; however, its success still relies on the level of its purposeful integration. Studies indicate that online evaluation is still quite restricted although there has been a rise in the accessibility (Sharma & Holbah, 2022), whereas virtual learning setups might help develop intercultural competence if students are engaged in an interactive way. Researchers also strongly recommend teachers to be more willing and ready in using social media and digital platforms to improve their teaching methods (Sharma & Begum, 2024). The use of Quizlet, Kahoot, and Padlet can provide the means to vocabulary acquisition, formative assessment, and student collaboration; however, the worth of these tools is determined by them being in harmony with the curriculum and the learning theory. This article reviews their advantages, obstacles, and theoretical base.

The primary aims of the research are:

1. To measure the pedagogical efficacy of Quizlet, Kahoot, and Padlet in ESL classrooms using a

synthesis of new research.

2. To recognize the most prominent issues related to the use of these tools and offer the recommendations concerning the successful integration of the instruction.

2. Review of Literature

Digitally powered tools like Quizlet, Kahoot, and Padlet are progressively becoming part of ESL classes. These tools allow teachers to conduct formative assessments and enable students to engage in collaborative writing. These tools are most effective when aligned with established learning theories: constructivism emphasizes the active participation of the learner, sociocultural theory focuses on interaction and the help from peers, and gamification describes how the points and the competition increase their motivation. Nevertheless, the integration of the tools is still at a different level in different places. The online assessment has not been widely used yet (Sharma & Holbah, 2022), while virtual intercultural learning can get the best results only when it is implemented through collaborative, text-based tasks. These results point to the continued necessity of deliberate, practical utilization of digital platforms (Sharma & Begum, 2024).

Quizlet is widely used for vocabulary learning through digital flashcards and games. Spanish learners found it "fun and attractive," supporting autonomy (Nasr, 2024), and a quasi-experimental study in Indonesia showed significant vocabulary gains compared to traditional methods (Nasr, 2024), aligning with gamification theory. Quizlet's game design elements (Daniel & Cowan, 2012) support self-paced, constructivist learning, though (Kálecký, 2016) found no clear gains in low-performing schools. From a sociocultural view, limited peer interaction restricts deeper learning; thus, teachers should scaffold real-life tasks, peer-set games, and reflection activities to enhance its benefits.

Kahoot is a perfect example of a gamified assessment that employs music, timers, and scoreboards to foster energetic competitions. According to (Ismail et al., 2019), students consider it fun and user-friendly, while medical students perceive it as highly motivating. (Plump, 2017) emphasizes the instant feedback and the energizing nature of the activity. All these elements are in line with gamification theory, as they not only increase attention and recall but also allow shared (Deterding et al, 2012) experiences which facilitate sociocultural learning. Nevertheless, it should be noted that countdowns and leaderboards may cause anxiety, and a quick-response format may lead to surface learning only (Shaker et al., 2021). The use of team modes, deeper-thinking questions, and discussions after the Kahoot session can help to keep the participants' engagement and at the same time ensure the learning is not compromised.

Padlet is an interactive digital wall that can be utilized for writing, creative ideas, and getting feedback from peers. The tool is effective in anxiety reduction, motivation of shy students and in

the accuracy of the interaction process (Rashid et al., 2019). In the context of ESL/EFL in Saudi Arabia, the users of Padlet have shown a better performance than the control group (Sharma et al., 2023). From a sociocultural perspective, it helps in the formation of a supportive online community. It allows feedback, reflection, and peer modeling which is particularly beneficial for learners of lower proficiency level. From a constructivist point of view, students become content co-creators and are involved in deep reflection. There are high achievers who may not like the idea of collaborating (Rashid et al., 2019; Lisa & Yunus, 2014) and problems such as digital literacy and uneven participation may constitute challenges. It is important to have clear prompts and structured tasks.

3.   Methodology

This research uses a narrative review method to integrate various studies on Quizlet, Kahoot, and Padlet in ESL instruction. Since the publications vary a lot in their approach, and instructional emphasis, a narrative review was the proper choice to account for these differences and at the same time maintain coherence. To be thorough, the method included the following: formulating precise guiding questions, picking suitable scholarly databases, performing organized searches, using open inclusion and exclusion criteria, and collecting data uniformly.

Researcher reviewed articles on Quizlet, Kahoot, and Padlet that involved constructivism or sociocultural framework(s). The databases used to locate these articles included Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, Google Scholar, Taylor & Francis Online, SpringerLink, and ScienceDirect. These initial search results were filtered to include articles that included Web 2.0 Tools used in ESL/EFL contexts, and articles that had not undergone external peer review or used inappropriate methods were removed. The data extracted included information about each article including the year of publication, research method(s) employed, skills assessed through the research, major results, pedagogical implications, and limitations found after completing systematic and thematic synthesis.

4.   Results and Discussion

Digital instruments such as Quizlet, Kahoot, and Padlet bring about fascinating opportunities for both ESL instructors and learners; nevertheless, they also impose difficulties regarding their application. The main restrictions are highlighted in this part and suggestions for proper use are also mentioned.

4.1 Student-Level Challenges

4.1.1 Student-Level Digital Equity and Access

Access to reliable devices and the internet remains a persistent barrier in implementing digital tools effectively. Students without consistent connectivity often struggle to participate in activities like remote Quizlet tasks or Padlet collaborations, especially during online instruction (Sadi-Yilmaz, 2023; Waluyo, 2024). This lack of access can limit engagement and widen learning gaps. Addressing this issue requires targeted investment in infrastructure, inclusive policy reforms, and broader availability of offline-compatible tools to ensure all learners can participate fully.

4.1.2 Motivation and Engagement

While tools like Kahoot, and Quizlet often spark initial enthusiasm, maintaining that motivation can be difficult (Waluyo, 2024). Familiarity with game elements may dull the novelty, reducing their effectiveness over time. To sustain engagement, educators should pair gamified tasks with intrinsic motivators such as goal setting, personal relevance, and peer collaboration. These deeper connections can help extend interest beyond the surface-level excitement of points and badges.

4.1.3 Surface Learning

Gamified tools that emphasize speed like Kahoot! can promote quick responses at the expense of comprehension (Ismail et al., 2019). Students may prioritize getting the right answer fast rather than engaging in meaningful reflection or language processing. This is particularly challenging for ESL learners who need time to think through responses. (Sharma et al., 2023) to deepen learning, teachers should incorporate follow-up tasks that prompt discussion and application of content beyond the quiz itself.

4.1.4 Cognitive Overload

Interactive platforms can overwhelm ESL learners already managing significant linguistic demands. Features like loud sound effects, countdowns, and cluttered layouts can increase mental load, especially for lower-proficiency students. For example, Padlet boards packed with multimedia posts may become difficult to navigate. (Rashid et al. 2019) emphasizes the importance of simplicity. Streamlining content and reducing distractions helps learners focus on language rather than on navigating the technology (Alharbi et al., 2020).

4.2 Teacher-Level Challenges

4.2.1 Training and Confidence

Many ESL educators lack the training need to navigate digital tools effectively (Yi-Ching Pan, 2014; Sadi- Yilmaz, 2023). This gap can lead to hesitation or avoidance, especially when teachers are unsure of a tool's pedagogical value. Studies show that without confidence in a tool's benefits, educators are unlikely to adopt it (Sharma et al., 2023). Building digital competence requires sustained professional development offering hands-on training, mentoring, and post-training support to encourage meaningful integration.

4.2.2 Time and Workload

The design and customization of tech-based tasks such as creating Kahoot! quizzes or planning collaborative Padlet activities demand significant preparation time. Teachers juggling lesson planning and grading often struggle to manage these additions (Nasr, 2024). (Daniel & Cowan 2012) argue that institutions must provide collaborative planning time and access to shared resources like pre-made Quizlet sets to reduce barriers to adoption.

4.2.3 Tool Fatigue

Constantly adapting to new platforms can lead to "tool fatigue." Juggling multiple logins, interfaces, and troubleshooting disrupts lesson flow and creates frustration. This fragmentation affects both teaching and learning. Schools can mitigate this by prioritizing a few multifunctional tools and offering centralized technical support, making tech use more manageable and sustainable.

4.2.4 Curriculum Alignment

A recurring concern in CALL is that many teachers are not yet ready to integrate digital tools into a coherent pedagogical framework despite evidence of their effectiveness (Sharma & Begum, 2024) due to lack of curriculum alignment. Without curriculum integration, online activities will remain peripheral (Sharma & Holbah, 2022). Teachers may doubt the value of student-created Quizlet or Kahoot! tasks without clear curricular links (Yi-Ching Pan, 2014), which makes curriculum alignment essential.

4.2.5 Over-Gamification and Over-Reliance

Excessive gamification can dilute educational value. When students expect games for every activity, deeper engagement may decline. (Waluyo, 2024) warns that overuse of extrinsic rewards like points and badges can erode intrinsic motivation. Gamified tools should be supplemented, not replace core instruction. As (Plump, 2017) notes, Kahoot! is effective when used strategically, and not as a

dominant method. Educators should balance digital tasks with reflective activities like discussion or peer writing, ensuring technology enhances rather than overshadows learning.

4.3 Comparative Summary of Quizlet, Kahoot, and Padlet

Tool	Pedagogical Functions in ESL	Theoretical Alignment	Key Advantages	Key Limitations
Quizlet	-Digital flashcards for vocabulary practice. -Self-paced learning modes. -Live team quiz game for review.	**-Constructivism:** Learner centered, self- directed study. **-Cognitive/Behaviorist**: repetition and recall practice with immediate feedback. **-Gamification**: Points, competition in live games enhance motivation	-Improves vocabulary retention. -Increases student motivation and memorization. -Easy to use; versatile. -Encourages autonomous learning and can differentiate pace for students.	-User generated content can contain errors. -Ads in free version can distract students. -May not show significant gains vs. traditional methods, depending on context.
Kahoot	-Live quiz game for formative assessment and review. -Whole-class participation with real time feedback. -Can be used for vocabulary, grammar, comprehension questions.	**-Gamification:** Strong alignment. **-Behaviorism:** Immediate feedback reinforces learning. **-Sociocultural:** Fun group atmosphere, peer discussion of questions builds community.	-Dramatically boosts engagements and motivation in class. -Provides instant feedback and tracks performance for teacher analysis. -Can improve learning outcomes. -Lower test anxiety by making assessment games like.	-Requires stable internet and devices for all students. -Emphasis on speed can stress some learners. -Mostly limited to factual or closed questions. -Preparation of good quizzes may be time consuming.
Padlet	-Online bulletin board for collaboration and sharing. -Brainstorming, Q&A, or group writing tasks in real time. -Multi mode postings for creative projects.	**-Sociocultural Theory:** High alignment. -**Constructivism:** Students create content and reflect on others' contributions. **-Connectivism:** Leverages online studying for learning beyond classroom walls.	-Enhance students' participation including shy learners. -Reduces language anxiety. -Fosters collaboration and peer learning. -Versatile for many tasks and promotes digital literacy.	-Dependent on internet/device access -Technical issues or low connectivity may hinder use. -Teachers must moderate content and ensure constructive feedback.

4.4 Implications

4.4.1 Teachers

Instructors should use these tools in ways that maximize students' motivation and collaboration. Regular Quizlet practice strengthens vocabulary acquisition and enthusiasm (Nasr, 2024), while Quizlet Live or flashcard competitions make lessons interactive. Kahoot! quizzes serve as engaging formative checks and motivate students to study (Ismail et al., 2019), especially when team mode balances competition with support. For writing, Padlet enables asynchronous collaboration, reducing participation anxiety. Across all tools, teachers should design pedagogically aligned tasks such as student-created quiz questions or peer feedback and give clear instructions and positive

feedback to engagement that centers on language learning rather than the technology itself.

4.4.2 Curriculum designers

Educational programmers should formally endorse digital game-based tools in ESL curricula by giving resources, class time, and syllabus integration to Quizlet, Kahoot, and Padlet. Training for the teachers should emphasize their theoretical worth, pointing up the proof that collaborative writing on Padlet can lead to significant improvement of EFL reading and writing (Rashid et al., 2019; Sharma et al., 2023). E-learning designers should make sure of the provision of access, technical support, and the availability of offline options like the offline mode of Quizlet. ESL programs, through a systematic application of constructivist and sociocultural approaches via these gamified, collaborative tools, can become capable of furthering writing accuracy, vocabulary retention, and student confidence.

5. Future Research Directions

Considering the mentioned restrictions, future studies need to find out the means to bring the   most out of the digital tools in ESL classrooms while minimizing their negative aspects. Key directions include:

5.1 Long-Term Efficacy and Engagement

While numerous studies emphasize the short-term benefits of gamified tools; the long-term effects of such tools are still a matter of debate. One of the most important questions is whether Quizlet and Kahoot! really promote language improvement that lasts beyond one semester or if the advantages just disappear when the novelty wears off. A longitudinal study could measure vocabulary retention in a class that uses Quizlet regularly as compared to a class that uses the traditional method. It would be advantageous to check motivation levels throughout a whole year in lessons supported by Kahoot! Longer periods may also uncover potential disadvantages if present. (Alharbi et al., 2020) By using delayed post-tests and tracking over several semesters, researchers would be able to gain a lot more insight into how these tools affect language acquisition beyond very immediate results.

5.2 Equity and Underrepresented Contexts

Most of the current studies focus on affluent schools and as a result, rural, poorly funded, and culturally diverse ESL environments have been left without sufficient research. The next research should find out the effect of Kahoot! and Padlet in a places with low connectivity or a class in which students share devices and if a simplified or offline version is still effective. There could be cultural

differences in using Padlet in an Asian or a Latin American EFL classroom, and these differences

might help to adjust to the culture properly. Research on refugee learners or marginalized groups (Shaker et al., 2021) will also be important to understand if digital tools are a means of closing the gap in access to opportunities or if they are widening the gap unintentionally. The testing of bilingual Quizlet sets or culturally relevant content of Kahoot! might be a way to open more inclusive access.

5.3 Reducing Negative Effects and Improving Design

Further research needs to focus on how to lessen the risks associated with the use of digital tools. In particular, the experiment of a Kahoot! slow mode could be instrumental in reducing anxiety, and the rotation of tools might prevent the decline of motivation. Research that compares trained and untrained teachers could provide evidence of how preparation affects performance. Students being taught such techniques as spaced repetition or being allowed to make their own Quizlet sets can, in fact, enhance the learning.

Conclusion

All three of these digital learning platforms provide meaningful opportunities to improve vocabulary, formative assessment, and collaborative writing for ESL students when coupled with purposeful pedagogical practices. This review shows that each of these platforms facilitates three of the main components -Constructivist, Social and Gamification Learning Theories. The results of this narrative literature review strongly suggest that using the digital learning platforms alone does not lead to deep learning and that unless the issues mentioned in this review are carefully and strategically addressed, the potential of using these tools will not be achieved. Future studies should consider how to measure long-term learning impacts from the use of these digital platforms, how these tools and resources be available to ESL teachers, and how to design modifications to digital platforms to alleviate learner apprehension and increase learner engagement and motivation while providing learners with intensive learning experiences. ESL digital platforms will have the greatest positive impact on ESL teaching and learning when they are developed with intentionality and built on sound theoretical bases.

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The authors used ChatGPT-4o only to assist with editing and improving language clarity and readability during the writing process. After using the tool, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and took full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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