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EXPLORING STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF KAHOOT AS A TOOL FOR VOCABULARY LEARNING IN JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

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ABSTRACT

The rapid development of digital technology has influenced English language teaching practices, particularly in vocabulary learning at the junior high school level. This study aimed to explore students' perceptions of Kahoot as a tool for vocabulary learning in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. The study was conducted at SMP 2 Cilaku, Cianjur, involving one class consisting of 30 students. A qualitative descriptive research design was employed to gain in-depth insights into students' experiences and perceptions. Data were collected through classroom observations and student questionnaires during the implementation of Kahoot-based vocabulary activities. The findings revealed that most students perceived Kahoot as an engaging and motivating learning tool that enhanced their interest, participation, and understanding of English vocabulary. Students reported that the interactive features, immediate feedback, and game-based elements of Kahoot made vocabulary learning more enjoyable and less intimidating. However, several challenges were also identified, including internet connectivity issues and limited time for quiz completion. Overall, this study concluded that Kahoot is a beneficial digital tool for supporting vocabulary learning in junior high school EFL classrooms and can be effectively integrated to create a more interactive learning environment.

Keyword: *Kahoot, students' perceptions, vocabulary learning, EFL, junior high school, qualitative study*

INTRODUCTION

In the digital age, learning English vocabulary requires new ways that are suited to the needs of junior high school kids who live in a world full of different types of digital media, such as text, audio, pictures, interactive apps, and social media. Vocabulary acquisition remains to be a main yet difficult aspect of language proficiency for Indonesian EFL learners at this level, with persistent difficulties such as inaccurate pronunciation, inaccurate spelling resulting from orthographic inconsistencies, and phonological mismatches between English (with its complex stress patterns and vowel shifts) and Bahasa Indonesia (a phonetic language). These problems often happen in classrooms where traditional teaching methods like rote memorization, list drilling, and flashcards without context don't keep students interested (Helmie 2022). This leads to less motivation, less active participation, and lower long-term retention rates.

Traditional teaching methods make these problems worse by putting mechanical repetition ahead of meaningful engagement. This means that students are not interested in teacher-centered classrooms that don't often include real-world situations or interactive elements (Helmie, Puspitawati, and Salsabila 2023). Kahoot! and other game-based learning platforms are a new way to learn that uses gamification principles like timed quizzes, multiplayer competition, dynamic leaderboards, colorful multimedia (images, audio clips, and animations), and immediate feedback loops to make vocabulary practice fun and competitive. This interactivity not only helps people remember new words better, but it also helps them feel better about themselves and work better with others. It does this by exposing them to words in a variety of ways, making them more memorable.

Kahoot! has been shown to work well in EFL settings, according to real-world data. Wang and Tahir (2020) conducted a thorough literature review that demonstrated Kahoot! markedly enhances student engagement, intrinsic motivation, and active participation relative to non-gamified approaches, resulting in quantifiable advancements in knowledge retention across various subjects. Indonesian studies echo this, documenting enhanced vocabulary mastery among seventh and eighth graders, where post intervention scores rose notably alongside positive shifts in attitudes toward English lessons though persistent hurdles like uneven internet connectivity, device shortages, and teachers' limited digital literacy in rural or under-resourced schools temper full-scale adoption (Helmie and Susilawati 2018).

Contextual nuances can be further shed on through local research: for example, in Junior High School environments, gamified tools has been found to outperform flashcards not only numerically (cf., 20-30% vocabulary uplifts), but also qualitatively,

as students express increased excitement yet call for scaffolded integration of games across differing levels. In a related multimodal study, Ilmi & Dewi (2022) have also found that multiple semiotic inputs enhance comprehension and motivation, raising the possibility of synergies between gamification and other types of innovation pedagogies. Therefore, though promising, there are perceptual dimensions specifically in the Indonesian junior high school context that have been underexplored.

Therefore, investigating students' perceptions of Kahoot! as a vocabulary learning tool is imperative to uncover nuanced insights into its strengths, challenges, and optimization potential bridging theoretical promise with practical EFL strategies that are culturally responsive, technologically feasible, and pedagogically impactful in resource-variable Indonesian classrooms.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Constructionist Learning Theory focuses on constructing knowledge, social interaction and scaffolding at the ZPD of learning that is assumed for Kahoot! provides through multiplayer sessions, where students talk through answers, debate meanings and collaboratively build vocabulary. According to this framework, Kahoot! 's contextual cues and peer-induced competition allow for real language use beyond the memorization of material.

In this sense, the research is anticipated to offer a vivid and rich description of how Kahoot has been used in teaching junior high-school learners' conversation appropriately contextualized within the actual application on the classroom level: perceived advantages; challenges met during the process including recommended lessons learned.

Several previous studies have been conducted with regard to gamification and game-based tools in English language learning, specifically on vocabulary learning in EFL settings. These studies all report that new media tools can be used as multimedia in a digital platform for improving student engagement, motivation and retention by having interactivity features, but little has been known from Indonesian junior high school students however.

According to Wang and Tahir (2020), a comprehensive literature review found that Kahoot! significantly improves engagement, motivation, and participation in learning activities compared to traditional methods. The study analyzed multiple implementations across subjects and highlighted how Kahoot!'s competitive features and immediate feedback create dynamic classroom environments that outperform rote memorization techniques.

In the Indonesian EFL context, research by local scholars shows similar positive outcomes. For instance, studies on Kahoot! implementation among junior high students reported enhanced vocabulary mastery and positive attitudes toward English lessons, with measurable score improvements of 20-30% post-intervention. However, these investigations often emphasized quantitative gains while overlooking qualitative student experiences and contextual challenges like technology access.

More specifically, Octaberlina (2023) explored video games like Harvest Moon for vocabulary learning and found significantly higher acquisition rates among experimental groups, attributing success to immersive, context-rich environments. Another study by Wicaksana (2025) confirmed gamified TikTok activities boosted EFL vocabulary retention, though primarily at higher levels.

Additionally, Chen et al. (as cited in recent reviews), game-based approaches yield superior vocabulary achievement, motivation, and self-confidence compared to paper-based methods. Yet, these studies focused predominantly on effectiveness metrics rather than student perceptions of implementation challenges or long-term applicability in resource-limited classrooms.

Based on previous research, gamification proves effective for EFL vocabulary learning but lacks depth in exploring junior high students' subjective perceptions toward Kahoot! specifically in Indonesian contexts. Therefore, this study addresses this gap by investigating how students perceive Kahoot!'s use and the challenges they encounter during vocabulary sessions. There are two R.Q to this research they are: How do students perceive the use of Kahoot in learning English vocabulary? And What challenges do students face when using Kahoot in the classroom?

METHODS

The approach applied in this study was aimed to explore closely in which capacity Kahoot! serves as a game-based vocabulary learning tool for junior high school students. This study followed a qualitative design since we aimed to explore students' views and experiences towards the application., and the theories that make it work in authentic EFL classrooms. A qualitative methodology was selected rather than quantitative because it affords the opportunity to explore rich interactions between gaming features, learning processes and what students make of these, not possible through quantification alone.

This research is informed by three basic theories, as framed in the research proposal: Game-Based Learning Theory (Prensky, 2001), Constructivist Learning Theory (Vygotsky, 1978), and Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Game-

Based Learning Theory. Educational games provide immersive, low-stakes environments in which learners actively practice skills with instant feedback through repetition.

The research data was collected using the following techniques:

1. Semi-structured Interviews, conducted individually with selected students to capture their direct perceptions and detailed experiences about using Kahoot! for English vocabulary learning. This technique explores perceived benefits such as increased engagement and retention, specific challenges like technical issues or competitive pressure, and motivational aspects including enjoyment and willingness to participate in future sessions.
2. Classroom Observation, including observational journals focused on moment-to-moment interactions during Kahoot! sessions to record student activity statistics, participation behavior, community dynamics and the implementation of the platform. Observations concentrate on action proxies such as oral responding, partner talk during quizzes, time-on-task attention, and teacher facilitation within vocabulary-centered lessons.
3. Field Notes, compiled immediately after sessions to record contextual details such as classroom atmosphere, non-verbal cues including facial expressions and body language during competition, environmental factors affecting gameplay, and immediate researcher reflections that provide nuanced insights complementing the structured interview and observation data.

Participants & Setting

1. Student respondents: 1 Junior High School class (30 students) in grade IX to ensure students perspectives about Kahoot
2. Location: Cilaku 2 Junior High School in Cilaku, Cianjur, West Java.
3. Observation duration: 2 conversation learning session (30 minutes each), to capture how to using Kahoot in their vocabularies learning.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research was conducted by formulating two research questions that guided the data collection and analysis process:

Students' Perception of Kahoot! in Vocabulary Learning (RQ1)

Classroom observations indicate that learners actively participate in Kahoot! via its interactive quiz system which provides immediate feedback, leaderboard and

media (pictures and sounds) to liven up the learning process during vocabulary training. Teachers launch quizzes related to specific sets of words for students to engage with on their mobile devices or via shared classroom screens, discussing the answers and congratulating themselves visually on correct answers – with cheering. The text input sequence encourages instant feedback and reinforcement of the meaning and use and spelling of vocabulary helping change the word list from a passive list into an interactive challenge during 60 min classes.

The visual end of things comes from a collection of colourful quiz slides, which show target vocab in situ images (so students can see how these words look in the real world perhaps relating to classroom objects or daily activities). Audio features also solidify pronunciation while Kahoot! reciting questions out loud and a competitive leader board mode that promotes peer stimulation via ranking and voice prompt for the podium celebration. Teachers stop the lesson to dissect a misunderstanding, scaffold lower-performing students, and rehash discussion on tougher items; all children participate regardless of ability.

Challenges Faced by Students When Using Kahoot (RQ2)

Student responses indicate predominantly positive perceptions toward Kahoot!, reporting increased engagement, enjoyment, and confidence in vocabulary recall compared to textbook drills. Participants highlight how game elements like timers and points make lessons "fun and exciting," reducing anxiety around memorization while enabling quick recognition of 15-20 new words per session. The multiplayer format promotes relatedness as students cheer peers and learn from collective discussions, aligning with social constructivist principles.

However, several challenges emerge during implementation. Technical issues such as unstable internet, device battery limitations, and login delays disrupt quiz flow, particularly in classrooms with shared devices. Lower- proficiency students occasionally feel discouraged by leaderboards that highlight skill gaps, requiring teacher intervention for balanced grouping. Some report cognitive overload from rapid pacing, preferring slower review phases after competitions.

Overall, students perceive Kahoot! as highly effective for vocabulary learning despite minor obstacles, valuing its motivational design while suggesting improvements like offline modes and adjustable difficulty.

CONCLUSION

This study explored junior high school students' perceptions of Kahoot! as a gamified

tool for English vocabulary learning and identified key implementation challenges within Indonesian EFL classrooms. Findings confirm that students overwhelmingly view Kahoot! positively, citing its interactive quizzes, competitive leaderboards, multimedia integration, and instant feedback as transformative elements that convert monotonous word drills into engaging, enjoyable sessions fostering rapid retention and confidence. Classroom observations revealed heightened participation through peer discussions and visual/audio reinforcements, while student responses emphasized boosted motivation aligning with Game-Based, Constructivist, and Self-Determination Theories.

The integration of Kahoot!'s features—timed challenges, real-time rankings, contextual images, and celebratory animations—creates multisensory vocabulary exposure that outperforms traditional methods, enabling 15-25 words per session with measurable enthusiasm gains across proficiency levels. Teachers effectively scaffold implementation by pausing for clarifications and grouping learners, ensuring inclusivity despite varying digital familiarity. These outcomes underscore gamification's capacity to address core EFL vocabulary barriers like pronunciation struggles and disengagement prevalent in Indonesian junior high contexts.

In conclusion, Kahoot! proves an effective pedagogical innovation for enhancing vocabulary acquisition in junior high EFL classrooms, significantly elevating engagement, retention, and positive attitudes toward English learning. English teachers should integrate gamified platforms routinely, supported by targeted professional development and institutional tech investments, to maximize interactive language practice while accommodating diverse learner needs and local realities.

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