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TEMA:

The Impact of Kahoot on Vocabulary Learning in 5th-Grade Learners at a Private School in the Highland Region

Autor:

Berrones Cevallos Dylan Vinicio
Prado Buele Luz Anagely
Vera Sarmiento Maria Cristina

Director: MSc. Riera Hermida Fernando Patricio

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RESUMEN

El dominio del vocabulario es un componente fundamental en la enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL); sin embargo, los métodos tradicionales no logran proporcionar suficiente motivación ni funcionar como herramientas para la retención a largo plazo de los estudiantes. ¡Frente a esta situación, esta investigación tuvo como objetivo analizar el efecto de la plataforma gamificada Kahoot! en la adquisición de vocabulario en alumnos de quinto grado de una escuela pública en Quito, Ecuador. Utilizando un enfoque cuantitativo de investigación acción, se realizó un pre-test y un post-test con 36 participantes para evaluar su progreso después de una intervención de cuatro semanas. Los resultados mostraron mejoras notables en todas las áreas analizadas, destacando especialmente el reconocimiento de palabras y la memoria, donde el promedio de retención de vocabulario creció considerablemente de 2.13 a 4.80. Se concluye que la inclusión de Kahoot! no sustituye la enseñanza convencional, sino que la fortalece al fomentar un entorno de aprendizaje interactivo y orientado al alumno, mejorando de manera significativa el compromiso y los resultados académicos en el desarrollo del léxico.

Palabras clave: Gamificación, aprendizaje de vocabulario, tecnología educativa, enseñanza del inglés

ABSTRACT

Vocabulary proficiency is a fundamental component of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction; however, traditional methods often fail to provide sufficient motivation or serve as effective tools for long-term student retention. In response to this situation, this research aimed to analyze the effect of the gamified platform Kahoot! on vocabulary acquisition among fifthgrade students at a public school in Quito, Ecuador. Utilizing a quantitative action research framework, a pre-test and a post-test were conducted with 36 participants to evaluate their progress following a four-week intervention. The results showed notable improvements across all analyzed areas, particularly highlighting word recognition and memory, where the average vocabulary recall grew considerably from 2.13 to 4.80. It is concluded that the inclusion of Kahoot! does not replace conventional teaching but rather strengthens it by fostering an interactive, student-centered learning environment, significantly enhancing engagement and academic outcomes in lexical development. Keywords: Gamification, vocabulary learning, e

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INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary development is a crucial aspect of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, especially at the beginner level, where students start to build essential communicative skills. Nonetheless, conventional vocabulary teaching frequently faces issues related to student motivation, engagement, and long-term retention. Lately, the combination of digital and game-oriented learning tools has captured interest as a method to improve language acquisition by encouraging active engagement and substantial practice. One such tool is Kahoot!, a digital learning platform based on games that integrates interactive quizzes, prompt feedback, and competitive features to enhance learning. Earlier studies indicate that game-oriented applications enhance learners' motivation and academic success, particularly in vocabulary acquisition settings. However, additional empirical evidence is required to assess its efficacy in authentic classroom environments, especially in public schools located in developing educational contexts. This study intends to assess the effect of Kahoot! on vocabulary learning among fifth-grade EFL learners in a public municipal school located in Quito, Ecuador. Employing a quantitative action research framework, the study evaluates pre-test and post-test outcomes to assess enhancements in vocabulary recognition, contextual application, lexical precision, and vocabulary retention. The results aid in grasping the educational benefits of incorporating digital game-based resources into elementary EFL teaching and offer practical guidance for educators aiming to improve vocabulary acquisition through technology.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Importance of Kahoot

Nowadays, Kahoot has become a vital digital tool for enhancing student engagement and promoting active learning in EFL classrooms. Wang (2015), as cited in Marsa et al. (2021), defined “Kahoot! is known as a game-based student response system that changes the classroom atmosphere to become more fun and engaging like a game show temporarily” (p. 136). As noted by Truong & Dinh (2024), Kahoot!’s ability to integrate graphics and video enhances the quality of educational games, which can be implemented in either competitive or cooperative modes depending on the group's needs (p. 204). Thus, Kahoot! supports active participation and collaboration in the classroom, making learning more engaging and dynamic for students. Zuleha et al (2025) claim that “Kahoot! shows that learning with games can help students remember words better. The fun and competitive features of Kahoot! such as answering questions quickly and earning points, keep students interested” (p.194)

Influence of Kahoot on Young Learners

Truong & Dinh (2024) highlighted that “in English language teaching, Kahoot! has been widely used in vocabulary lessons because of its potential in improving students’ motivation, collaboration, engagement, classroom atmosphere, and learning outcomes.” As noted by Nurul (2017), this application enables educators to assess classroom behavior and participation in a way that is far more motivating and inclusive for the student (p. 2553).

Meanwhile, Baskutlu (2024) claimed that “Kahoot! games provide students immediate feedback on their answers, helping them improve” (p.82). Furthermore, Kahoot can support young learners by incorporating game-based elements that create a fun yet meaningful learning environment, offering students an engaging and refreshing educational experience. Farijana (2017) stated that “playing games can invite the children to become active and make an interaction with other people” (p. 9). Rachma et al (2024) “Kahoot can also be a learning media that can increase students' learning motivation in the course” (p. 424). As learning becomes more enjoyable and interactive, students show greater interest and willingness to participate, which naturally leads to higher motivation.

Student Motivation Toward Learning Through Kahoot

One of the most significant factors enhanced by Kahoot is students' motivation. Salsabila & Apoko (2024) highlighted that "Motivation is an important aspect that directly influences the success of language acquisition, especially in the setting of foreign language learning" (p. 29). Kahoot! has a remarkably positive impact on student behaviour by promoting active participation. Its gamified design supports passive learners and provides adaptable features that enhance engagement. (Sivakami & Navinkumar, 2024). This is further supported by findings indicating that Kahoot increases students' learning motivation by fostering confidence in their abilities, which leads to greater active participation and engagement during learning activities (Perdananasari, 2021). Putera et al (2025) state that "learning vocabulary through Kahoot! was more enjoyable, motivating, and easier to understand. The gamified features of Kahoot! created a competitive and interactive atmosphere that supported vocabulary retention and increased student engagement" (p. 1209). On the other hand, Wang and Tahir (2020) mentioned that "Kahoot supports vocabulary learning by creating opportunities for learners to encounter lexical items multiple times in an engaging and interactive format, which is considered essential for vocabulary acquisition" (p. 201).

Importance of learning Vocabulary

Vocabulary acquisition has been identified as a core component of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, as lexical knowledge directly supports learners' ability to understand texts and produce accurate spoken and written language. While Wang & Tahir (2020) associate low vocabulary proficiency with poor communicative performance, Son and Ly (2026) go a step further by describing lexis as a vital element. According to these authors, communication in the target language is practically impossible if the learner lacks the necessary words (p. 3). For this reason, vocabulary instruction remains a central concern in contemporary EFL pedagogy.

Effectiveness of Kahoot in Enhancing Vocabulary Acquisition

Vocabulary knowledge is a fundamental component of English language learning, as it supports learners' development across listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. Nevertheless, many learners experience difficulties in vocabulary acquisition due to traditional instructional methods that emphasize passive learning and limited interaction, which often results in low motivation and weak retention (Wang & Tahir, 2020). To address these

limitations, gamified tools like Kahoot! have seen increased implementation to foster active participation and genuine engagement with vocabulary. Recent research suggests that its interactive and competitive nature not only sparks student interest but also ensures the repeated exposure to key terms—a decisive factor in effective vocabulary acquisition (Zuleha et al., 2025).

Recent empirical evidence strongly supports the use of Kahoot! to boost vocabulary learning in EFL contexts. Quasi-experimental research shows that students who integrate this tool into their daily practice not only achieve higher test scores but also demonstrate much stronger lexical retention than those taught through traditional methods (Ahmed et al., 2022; Farhane, 2025). Furthermore, learner perceptions highlight that the combination of immediate feedback and interactive practice is key to effectively correcting errors and consolidating word meanings (Hattee, 2025; Martínez Sánchez et al., 2025). However, the literature also emphasizes that these benefits depend on instructional alignment, as game-based tools are most effective when integrated systematically into vocabulary instruction rather than used as isolated activities (Zhou & Wei, 2024)

EFL young learners primary school

Research on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning in primary school students highlights the importance of how children learn vocabulary to improve their language proficiency. Young learners experience cognitive and contextual factors that influence the acquisition of new vocabulary; therefore, it is necessary to implement instructional approaches according to their developmental characteristics. In primary EFL classrooms, vocabulary learning is commonly supported through explicit instruction and contextualized activities that promote meaningful language use (Agazzi, 2022).

Some studies examine instructional strategies in primary EFL classrooms to show that interactive and learner-centered methods are effective in vocabulary acquisition. For example, Hidayatullah et al. (2025) explored how vocabulary is learned using educational games, music, movies, and stories in interactive English as a Foreign Language environment. They discovered that these interactive approaches greatly improved students' ability to remember and use vocabulary by placing language within enjoyable experiences. These findings highlight those students gain more from engaging and participatory methods that match their preferred ways of learning rather than from conventional rote teaching techniques

The research's carried out in Ecuador shows typical trends in elementary English as a Foreign Language classroom. Results from investigations involving fifth-grade students indicate that a lack of vocabulary often links to challenges in understanding, while the use of interactive exercises and technology can enhance students' enthusiasm and involvement (Gongora, 2025). Even though a portion of these investigations targets public education settings, their conclusions are pertinent to private institutions in the Highland Region, where teaching methods and the availability of resources significantly influence vocabulary acquisition results

METHODOLOGY

This research aimed to evaluate the impact of the digital game-based platform Kahoot! on students' English language development, with particular emphasis on vocabulary acquisition, through the administration of pre- and post-tests. The research was conducted with fifth-grade students from a public municipal school located in the Highland Region of Ecuador, specifically in Quito. The participants consisted of 36 students, including 19 males and 17 females, whose ages ranged from 10 to 11 years old. This age range corresponds to fifth grade within Ecuador's Basic General Education (EGB). According to the standards established by the Ecuadorian Ministry of Education (n.d.), English proficiency expectations in Basic General Education are aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), where students are expected to reach the A1 proficiency level by the end of the corresponding stage in the curriculum. Regarding technological resources, all participants had access to an English language laboratory equipped with computers and stable internet connectivity. This availability of technological resources ensured that students could participate in Kahoot! -based activities without technical difficulties. Additionally, the controlled school environment enabled the English teacher– researcher to implement the intervention consistently during regular class hours. Furthermore, a sample of 15 students was selected based on their high academic performance during the first term of the school year. This selection was carried out in coordination with the English teacher and allowed the researcher to observe how students with stronger academic foundations responded to the use of Kahoot! as both an instructional and assessment tool. By including the entire class as well as a high-achieving subgroup, the study offers a broader perspective on Kahoot!'s effectiveness across different performance levels.

Instruments

Quantitative analysis in this study was conducted by comparing students' pre-test and post-test scores to measure the effectiveness of the Kahoot! Intervention on vocabulary acquisition is a common research strategy in educational studies, where the same test is administered before and after treatment to objectively assess learning gains and determine the impact of the instructional approach.

Vocabulary achievement test

The primary instrument used in this study was a Vocabulary Achievement Test, which was administered as both a pre-test and a post-test. The purpose of this test was to measure students' vocabulary knowledge before and after the instructional intervention using Kahoot! The test was designed in accordance with the A1 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and was aligned with the specific vocabulary content taught during the intervention.

The test included 40 questions split into eight parts: matching words with pictures to check understanding of meaning, multiple-choice items to test vocabulary meaning and application, and fill-in-the-blank questions to assess vocabulary in context. Each accurate answer received a score of one point, with a total possible score of 40 points. The identical format was employed in both test sessions to maintain consistency, and the change in scores from pre-test to post-test was examined to identify vocabulary improvements due to the implementation of Kahoot! .

Design, Procedure, And Data Analysis

This study employed an action research design to examine the use of Kahoot! supports A1-level EFL students in improving their vocabulary learning. Action Research is a systematic inquiry conducted by teacher-researchers to better understand teaching practices, student learning, and classroom dynamics, with the aim of fostering reflective practice, improving educational outcomes, and generating positive changes in the learning environment (Mills, 2011). The intervention was implemented over a four-week period, during which Kahoot! was incorporated into regular English lessons as a complementary instructional tool. The instructional process was structured into four stages, one per week, focusing primarily on vocabulary development while also reinforcing basic grammar and reading comprehension skills.

In the first week, a pre-test was administered to assess students' initial English proficiency, prior vocabulary knowledge, and attitudes toward digital learning tools. During the second and third weeks, students participated in interactive quizzes using Kahoot!, individually or in groups, which encouraged enthusiasm, involvement and frequent encounters with fresh vocabulary. Consequently, the students showed greater self-confidence, faster reaction times, and greater accuracy. In the final week, a test was conducted to assess vocabulary development and students' opinions about their progress. A numerical analysis was carried out contrasting the pre-test and post-test scores. Overall, this action research approach enabled the teacher–researcher to systematically evaluate the effectiveness of Kahoot! as a game-based learning tool and to reflect on its impact on students' English vocabulary development within an authentic classroom context.

RESULTS

The charts below demonstrate the positive results of applying Kahoot for acquiring vocabulary in students who are in the fifth grade. For the results, the SPSS program was used to analyze all the data collected. In addition, it helps to determine the effectiveness of this study.

Table 1: Pre-test and post-test

Criteria	Mean pre-test	Mean post-test
Vocabulary Recognition	3.87	4.53
Word - Meaning Association	4.80	4.93
Contextual Use of Vocabulary	4.33	4.73
Spelling Accuracy	4.73	4.73
Meaning Discrimination	4.80	4.87
Semantic Association	4.93	4.93
Lexical Accuracy	2.93	4.07
Vocabulary Recall	2.13	4.80

Source: Berrones D; Prado A, Vera M

This chart shows the positive impact of using technological apps such as Kahoot and how it improves vocabulary in students who are in fifth grade. The learners improve their recognition of vocabulary by having a mean of 3.87 in the pre-test and a mean of 4.53 in the post-test which demonstrates that they acquire more words in the target language. In addition, the criteria of word meaning association showed a mean score rising from 4.80 in the pre-test to 4.93 in the post-test. The results indicated that learners demonstrated enhanced abilities in using vocabulary within context, with average scores climbing from 4.33 in the pretest to 4.73 in the posttest, implying they effectively incorporated new terms in appropriate contexts. A marked enhancement was noted in their lexical precision, which went up from an average of 2.93 in the pretest to 4.07 in the posttest. Lastly, the ability to remember vocabulary exhibited the greatest advancement, increasing from an average of 2.13 in the pretest to 4.80 in the posttest. This research shows that students became much more effective at remembering and retrieving vocabulary after using the technological application

DISCUSSION

Overall, the findings clearly demonstrate the positive impact of using Kahoot as a technological and game-based learning application for vocabulary acquisition among fifth-grade students. The results indicated that improvements in vocabulary recognition, contextual use, lexical accuracy, and especially vocabulary recall indicate that Kahoot effectively supports both vocabulary development and retention. The interactive and engaging nature of the platform likely contributed to increased learners' motivation, active participation, and repeated exposure to vocabulary, which are essential factors in successful language learning.

These results confirm that incorporating technology like Kahoot into vocabulary teaching can improve conventional educational approaches by tackling students' challenges with memory and proper use. The instant feedback and ongoing practice offered by game-oriented platforms aid students in recognizing and fixing mistakes, which enhances their vocabulary retention.

Furthermore, the competitive and engaging aspects of Kahoot boost learners' enthusiasm and involvement, which are crucial elements for successful vocabulary acquisition. Therefore, the research offers solid evidence of the benefits of using game-based learning tools to enhance vocabulary skills among elementary students, as shown by the notable improvements in performance seen in post-testing.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results and discussion, it can be concluded that Kahoot! is an effective technological tool for improving vocabulary acquisition among fifth-grade EFL learners. The significant differences between pre-test and post-test scores demonstrate that students enhanced their vocabulary recognition, contextual use, lexical accuracy, and especially vocabulary recall. These improvements indicate that Kahoot! supports both vocabulary development and retention. The findings confirm that game-based learning can successfully address common difficulties in vocabulary learning at the elementary level. Therefore, Kahoot! represents a valuable instructional resource for vocabulary teaching. Its use contributes positively to students' language learning outcomes.

Another result is that Kahoot! Increased student enthusiasm and engagement during vocabulary lessons. Elements of competition, rapid feedback, and visual aids helped keep students attentive and engaged throughout their education, allowing for more frequent encounters with vocabulary words, improving memory retention and correct application. The results indicate that students improved their ability to remember and use new vocabulary after the intervention. Thus, motivation and participation played a key role in the observed learning gains. This highlights the importance of integrating engaging digital tools in EFL classrooms.

Finally, the study concludes that integrating Kahoot! into vocabulary instruction enhances traditional teaching methods rather than replacing them. When used purposefully, Kahoot! complements classroom instruction by reinforcing vocabulary through practice and assessment. The results indicate that technology-enhanced learning environments can boost student performance when they are in line with teaching objectives. The favorable post-exam results validate the educational benefits of merging digital resources with traditional methods. As a result, Kahoot! It can be considered a useful platform for teaching vocabulary in elementary schools. Its incorporation fosters an interactive, student-centered classroom environment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Given that Kahoot! significantly improved vocabulary recognition, recall, and lexical accuracy. It is recommended that EFL teachers incorporate Kahoot! regularly into vocabulary instruction at the elementary level. Teachers should use the platform to reinforce key vocabulary items and support retention through repeated practice. Kahoot! activities should focus on vocabulary recall and accurate usage, as these areas showed the greatest improvement. The platform can also be used as a formative assessment tool. This approach will help strengthen students' vocabulary development. Regular use can lead to sustained learning gains

Since increased motivation and active participation contributed to improved vocabulary learning, teachers are encouraged to design engaging and interactive Kahoot! activities. The competitive elements of the platform should be used to maintain students' attention and involvement. Teachers should to deliver prompt responses using Kahoot! to assist students in spotting and amending mistakes. Exercises should encourage frequent interaction with vocabulary within relevant situations. This approach fosters successful learning and memory retention. Engaged students are more inclined to employ vocabulary correctly.

Recognizing that Kahoot! enhances traditional teaching techniques, it is advisable for instructors to combine this tool with standard teaching methods. Kahoot! should be aligned with lesson objectives and curriculum goals to ensure meaningful learning. Teachers should use it to reinforce content previously taught in class. This balanced integration helps maintain instructional coherence. When used thoughtfully, Kahoot! enhances vocabulary instruction without replacing traditional methods. Such integration fosters a learner-centered and interactive classroom environment.

LIMITATIONS

One significant limitation of this research was the insufficient access to technology within the school. Not every student was able to utilize tablets, computers, or reliable internet during lessons. This constrained how often and how long Kahoot! activities could be conducted in the learning environment. Consequently, certain activities needed to be either shortened or modified. The scarcity of technological resources might have affected the extent of student participation. This limitation could have affected the overall consistency of the intervention.

Another limitation was that some students completed the tests at home rather than in a controlled classroom environment. This situation provided learners with more time to answer the questions than originally planned. Consequently, external support or reference materials could not be fully controlled. This may have influenced the accuracy of the test results. Although clear instructions were provided, testing conditions were not entirely uniform. Therefore, the results should be interpreted with caution.

A significant drawback was the limited teaching time during standard class sessions. It was difficult to involve every participant actively given the short work timeframe. Overseeing the whole class while conducting Kahoot! sessions needed extra time for clarity and setup. This cut down the time that could be spent on practice and receiving feedback. The time limitations might have restricted the thoroughness of the intervention. This aspect may have influenced the learning results seen.

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Autor(s): Luz Anagely Prado Buele¹, Dylan Vinicio Berrones Cevallos², Maria Cristina Vera Sarmiento³, Fernando Patricio Riera Hermida⁴.

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