Quizlet: Exploring Pedagogical Dynamics in Remote EFL Vocabulary Acquisition

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Abstract

The rapid transition to distance education, prompted by the global COVID-19 outbreak, has compelled educators to integrate CALL/MALL. Within the context of remote learning, this study examines Quizlet, a digital platform used for learning through flashcards, to determine its instructional advantages and limitations in facilitating the acquisition of vocabulary for EFL students. The study employed a case study of 47 Indonesian high school students participating in an English extracurricular club using two surveys and in-depth interviews to acquire insights about students' attitudes and experiences with Quizlet. Ten sets of flashcards covering fundamental and common words were used for a full semester of remote instruction. The findings indicate that Quizlet contributed positively to vocabulary acquisition. Students performed satisfaction in its various features, user-friendly interface, ease of memorization, accessibility, and motivational aspects of Quizlet. Despite the challenges encountered in terms of connectivity with the live quiz function, alternative methods such as self-tests were utilized. The investigation demonstrates that Quizlet's multimodal learning experience enhances the learning of EFL vocabulary. Nevertheless, the limitations linked to internet connectivity necessitate careful consideration. It underscores the importance of educators addressing potential hindrances, particularly those pertaining to the internet, in order to achieve successful remote teaching.

Keywords: Digital Flashcard, Quizlet, Remote Learning.

As many as 1.3 million educational institutions worldwide have shifted to distance learning in response to the impact of Covid 19 on education (UNESCO, 2020). To meet the demand of remote learning, many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) educators have learned to engage with Computer/Mobile assisted language learning (CALL/MALL) to better support their students. The affordance of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in CALL/MALL supports teachers in motivating and assessing students and has become essential for language teaching and learning (Al-Kadi, 2018). Through the use of CALL/MALL learners are afforded the opportunity to study in a non-formal environment without place-based and time restrictions (Miangah & Nezarat, 2012).

The importance of vocabulary in the context of EFL is highlighted in research on additional language acquisition. Vocabulary serves as a vital aspect of a language teaching pedagogy (Alqahtani, 2015; Ebrahini et al., 2015; Özer & Koçoğlu, 2017) and is often viewed as a main challenge for EFL learners (Hsu, 2020). Christanti (2018) argued students with limited vocabulary will encounter challenges developing the skills necessary for meeting second language (L2) targets. Alqahtani (2015) identified the intricate factors of vocabulary that cause difficulty for learners which includes the open-endedness of a vocabulary system, uncertain rules the learners may follow to acquire and develop knowledge.

This research focused on Quizlet as a digital flashcard learning tool. The use of flashcards in both conventional and digital formats has been promoted for vocabulary acquisition. Nakata (2020) defines flash-cards as a set of cards featuring a second language (L2) word on one side and its corresponding meaning, typically presented as a translation in the first language (L1), an L2 synonym, or a definition, on the opposite side. Hsu (2020) revealed that flashcards were effective to increase students' attention span and ability to concentrate necessary for acquiring new vocabulary. According to this study, flashcards also assist with vo-cabulary comprehension.

The reason why Quizlet was selected for this study is because of positive user feedback, low storage use, and the researcher's prolonged experience in the application. Quizlet is an online learning tool developed in 2007. This tool enables students to learn words through digital flashcards just by hand with digital devices. Although accessible via computers for both teachers and students, the software also provides a complimentary mobile application compatible with both Apple iOS and Android platforms (Dizon, 2016, p. 43-44). Here are the features of Quizlet both on website and mobile application:

- Flashcard: It is available on both websites and mobile apps. This mode performs digital flashcards for users to learn words. The flashcards are flipped and show their meaning when users click them. The cards come with an audio voice for users to practice pronunciation.
- Learn: This mode is available on both websites and mobile apps. It allows the users to learn sets of words in quiz format which provides multiple choice and typing questions.
- Write: This option is available on both websites and mobile apps. It drills users to learn their sets of terms in a quiz format. They are required to answer questions in a typing form.
- Spell: The spell feature is only available on websites. Users listen to audio prompts and type what they hear. The meaning of the words is shown on the screen to give the users a clue of the answers.
- Test: The test is available on websites and mobile apps. This option gives users questions in four formats: typing, matching, multiple choice, and true/false questions. The users will receive their score upon completing all tasks in the quiz.
- Match: This function is also available on both websites and mobile apps. It is a type of game that asks users to match terms to their meanings. It shows the sets of words with their definition and the game time counter. The users need to drag the terms to their definitions and vice versa. At the end, it shows the score and rank of the users.
- Gravity: This is a type of game that is only available on websites. The mission of the game is to protect the planets from coming asteroids. This game asks the users to type the correct meaning of a question which appears as a falling asteroid to the planet.
- Live: It is a live game that requires two or more players to play. The players can play individually or in a group. They must quickly respond to multiple-choice questions related to the study sets using their devices. The first player to finish

the game wins. The live quiz can only be administered from websites on a computer browser. However, to play this live game, users can join either from the app or browsers.

Quizlet has been the focus of many studies on ways to grow students' vocabulary size (e.g; Chaikovska & Zbaravska, 2020; Christanti, 2018; Dizon, 2016; Özer & Koçoğlu, 2017; Puspitasari, 2019; Setiawan & Wiedarti, 2020; Sanosi, 2018). In a recent study by Waluyo and Bucol (2021), it was proposed that integrating Quizlet into vocabulary learning instruction could effectively tackle significant challenges associated with vocabulary acquisition. The research revealed that employing gamified methods for vocabulary learning outside the classroom led to enhanced vocabulary acquisition among students with lower proficiency levels when they returned to the classroom.

Rather than assessing Quizlet's impact on student vocabulary acquisition, in this paper I investigated the pedagogical gains and challenges of vocabulary acquisition and suggested implications for teaching in remote settings. In this paper, I addressed the questions of to what extent do EFL students perceive the benefits of vocabulary learning using Quizlet in a remote teaching environment? And to what extent do EFL students perceive the drawbacks of vocabulary learning using Quizlet in a remote teaching environment and how to deal with issues of vocabulary learning using Quizlet in a remote setting?

Method

This study aimed to investigate the pedagogical gains and challenges of vocabulary acquisition and suggesting implications for teaching in remote settings. In this study, I crafted a case study approach. As described by Meyer (2001), a case study involves a thorough exploration of one or more organizations or groups within them, aiming to analyze the context and procedures surrounding a particular phenomenon. In this study, such

an approach was chosen to investigate the processes associated with EFL vocabulary learning, specifically focusing on the utilization of a digital flashcard tool within the framework of remote teaching. A case study was considered relevant to the research problem and the purpose of the current study since it provides a more in-depth analysis of the case.

Research Participants

Participants for this study included 47 Indonesian high school students in an English extracurricular club in Indonesia. There were six male and thirty-one female students, ages ranging from 15 to 17 years old. All of these students were in the first and third of their school period. In this program, students are expected to be able to communicate using English by learning how to speak and grammar materials. All of them had at least a smartphone and/or personal laptop with internet access. Most of these students have been learning English since their elementary school in the classroom setting and have never used Quizlet before attending this program.

Research Procedure

The research was undertaken within one academic semester in a fully remote teaching environment focusing on intentional vocabulary teaching. There were ten sets of flashcards consisting of basic vocabulary that the students needed to learn within a semester. These sets were given as supplemental materials in the program. Ten sets of common vocabularies that comprised 40 Common Verbs, 20 Adjectives, 20 Nouns, 10 Conjunctions/Transitional Words, 10 Prepositions were given at the beginning of the class in synchronous communication. The students were required to rehearse one of the selected sets within certain times before jumping into the topics, then a live quiz of the selected set was held. The following was the research schedule.

Research Instrument

Two surveys were carried out using google forms with all 47 participants. The first survey was intended to gain information about students' problems of learning vocabulary. The second survey was administered to gain insights on the students' responses towards their remote learning experience using Quizlet. The survey data were presented in descriptive statistics.

Then, an in-depth interview was conducted with four of the students who were willing to participate in this process to reveal the benefits and drawbacks of using Quizlet as their vocabulary learning platform during homeschooling. The interview focused on four students as a purposive sample of the group. They were taken from students in the 11th and 10th grade. The four students had intermediate proficiency level in English. They were selected for several reasons. First, they were willing to voluntarily take part in the interview. Last, they were among students who actively participated in the class during the remote learning. Rather than conducting interviews face to face, most of them suggested doing it online via chat on WhatsApp. The interview data were presented in accordance with the emerging themes.

Result and Discussion
Initial Investigation on Students' Problem in English Communication

Since the expected outcome of the program was the students' ability to use English for communicative purposes, this research merely investigated the students' issues dealing with communication using English. The data obtained from the first survey was then specified on the language components that hampered students from being communicative in the L2. From the three language components, students believed that grammar has become their hardest challenge in English communication since their childhood (47,8%) while vocabulary was the second challenge in students' communication in English (21,7%). This really affects their

spontaneity in constructing the students' repertoire in the target language.

The students assumed that they were often distracted by their failure to find the meaning of words in the target language that resulted in a temporary delay during speaking in English. The amount of time that most students needed to construct a new sentence in English ranged between 1-2 minutes. This was mainly because students had to translate the words in a sentence or because they needed to construct a grammatically correct sentence. Therefore, when constructing a new sentence, the students were required to prepare the sentence because they mainly did not know the words in L2 (41,3%). Given these facts, most of the students (54,3%) expected to increase their level of vocabulary in learning English in order to be able to communicate more fluently.

Benefits of Quizlet Perceived by Students

Before using Quizlet, students admitted that they acquired their random vocabulary through reading books, listening to songs and watching movies rather than memorizing words in a conventional way. This is different from learning with a Quizlet in the program. They learned sets of targeted vocabulary that were categorized based on topics. Students were given time to rehearse the sets before the teacher delivered a live quiz. Students who were unable to join the quiz could alternatively take the independent test on certain sets, then they took a screenshot and sent the test score to the teacher. Students were given access to these sets of vocabulary so that they could evaluate the sets anytime in any mode based upon their preferences.

Rich Features. Quizlet received positive responses of 46 students surveyed (47,8%). Despite its con-nectivity drawback, the Live Quiz feature that was played in the beginning of each class session by all the class members has been the most favorite option for students to learn. The live quizzes were sometimes played both in individual and team mode. In an individual format, students entered

the games and competed against their peers by answering the questions while in team mode, students were assigned in a random group that allowed them to compete with the other groups. This sense of competition in both individual and team formats boost their enthusiasm to learn the words through this gamified environment. The presence of audio in each vocabulary entry has also helped students learn the pronunciation of each word in flash card mode. Furthermore, images could also be attached to each word to add a visual feature that helped describe the target words. From the interview, most students enjoyed using Flashcards mode in their individual study. In this mode, students could learn the target words by simply sliding the cards left and right.

Convenient Interface. The simplicity of interface as well as multimodal learning experience the Quizlet offered made it convenient for the students to learn the vocabulary sets either provided by teachers or found inside the app itself. There were abundant resources of vocabulary that students could find just by typing the keywords of the vocabulary the students wanted to search. Students were also able to learn in many different modes of learning such as learn, flashcards, write, match and test. The mobile app was also completed with night mode that made it more user-friendly.

The home screen in the mobile app welcomed the students by presenting sets of vocabularies they recently opened, the folder of vocabularies they created as well as the classes they joined. As they tapped one of the vocabulary sets, they were presented with stacks of flashcards on that set, mode of learning as well as a list of vocabularies in the sets completed with the pronunciation audio. Students admitted that besides they could find abundant resources of vocabularies inside the Quizlet, they are also benefited from Quizlet because of its simple and user-friendly interface that make them convenient in learning vocabularies.

Ease of Memorization. All the interviewed students reported that they could memorize words using Quizlet better and faster than using any other methods such as reading books, listening to songs, watching movies and so on. Because the English program required them to master selected vocabularies every week, they feel that this scheduled vocabulary learning helps them boost their vocabulary levels in a more routine way. This was underpinned by the result of the survey that 82,6 % of the total students felt that their vocabu-lary level increased upon using Quizlet as their vocabulary learning platform. 41,3 % of them believed that their vocabulary level increased 26% to 50% in a semester while 39,1% of them felt that their vocabulary growth ranges from 51% to 75% in a semester.

Accessibility. Accessibility has become one of the most influential factors to use the application during the online learning process since connectivity, workload and memory have become one of students' barriers in most areas where teachers conduct remote learning. In the android version, the application requires 16 megabytes. It means that this application does not require huge space compared to other vocabulary learning platforms such as famous monolingual dictionaries that can range 9 to 120 megabytes. From the interview, students admitted that the application is easy to operate. The workload does not require much space in ran-dom access memory (RAM) so that the app can work seamlessly. The connectivity of the internet outside of Live quiz use is stable and does not consume much bandwidth.

Motivation. Not only helping students work on their vocabulary growth, the presence of Quizlet also proved to boost the students' motivation to communicate in English. As many as 89,1 of the total students gained their confidence to use English in their communication. Their vocabulary and confidence growth will certainly contribute to their level of proficiency in English communication. From 36 respondents, almost all of them expected to utilize this application

to further their English vocabulary learning. This is supported by a students' claim on the interview, most of the students admitted that they will use Quizlet in the future to learn vocabulary.

The use of Quizlet in this study offered a different dimension of vocabulary learning during remote teaching. The rich features in the Quizlet such as digital flashcards, audio pronunciation, pictures and live quiz have exposed students to multimodal learning experience. The features have significantly helped EFL learners to expand L2 lexical knowledge. 82,6% of the students admitted that the level of their vocabularies raised mostly up to 26-75% after Quizlet was introduced. This emphasized Dizon (2016) who proved that Quizlet did in fact support L2 vocabulary enhancement through the feature of digital flashcards it had. This view was further confirmed by Solhi (2019), who believed that the visual components of Quizlet, along with its capability to link vocabulary items with visual representations such as images and GIFs, can greatly en-hance vocabulary acquisition.

Not only expanding the student's lexical knowledge, Quizlet also has given students with different learning experiences. Prior to the adaptation of Quizlet, most students were found to be distracted either by their failure to find the meaning of words that resulted in a temporary delay during their communication. It thus affected the students to feel anxious and inconvenient to practice their English communication. The results affirmed the idea proposed by Uchihara and Clenton in 2018, suggesting that there should be a link be-tween the size of one's vocabulary and the use of words in speech or writing. This is because a larger second language lexicon enables individuals to choose and remember words that are appropriate in terms of both meaning and context during communication. The integration of vocabulary learning with MALL through Quizlet application has not only helped reduce students' tension but also motivate them to practice the language.

Building upon this finding, Hashim et al. (2017) contend that integrating mobile phones into second language instruction could serve as a potent strategy for addressing educators' challenges in motivating stu-dents to learn English. Moreover, they suggest that such integration could enhance students' learning experi-ence and lead to a subsequent enhancement in their proficiency levels.

Quizlet has proved to be a powerful digital flashcard application that provides students with rich features in learning vocabulary. The option to learn through flashcards mode equipped with image and auto-mated sound as well as other learning modes to learn vocabularies (typing, spelling, matching, gravity, test and live quiz) has provided students with multimodal learning experience that underscored their learning autonomy. After a full semester learning vocabulary with application, students expected to have more chances to use Quizlet to expand their vocabularies. This supports Altiner's (2011) belief that computer-based flashcard applications can convey new vocabulary in a variety of ways using multimedia, hence increasing learners' motivation and autonomy. Quizlet's study sets are designed to allow learners to learn freely on their computers and cellphones (Barr, 2016). Korlu and Mede (2018) assert that Quizlet emerges as a valuable tool facilitating students' vocabulary learning, fostering enhanced performance and autonomy. This is achieved through features such as spaced repetition and diverse functions within a gamified interface. Utilizing Quizlet on mobile devices, both inside and outside the classroom, exposes students to target words repeatedly, thereby aiding in their acquisition and retention. Additionally, Sanosi (2018) suggests that the live learning mode fosters an environment where students can share information and discuss answers to vocabu-lary questions, fostering a potentially collaborative and effective learning experience.

Drawbacks of Quizlet from Students' Perception

Live Quiz Delay. The live quiz has been a weekly agenda in the English program to test students' mastery of the target vocabularies they learned every week. The live quiz was played in both individual and team formats. In playing this quiz, I shared the quiz link to students and waited for students to join the game in 5-10 minutes. When the waiting time was over, I immediately started the game. Before the live quizzes began, I observed that there had been troubles before playing the games, especially the students who had problems with unstable connection. These students were accidentally expelled from joining the games. This was admitted by students who were interviewed in this study.

Mobile Browser Version. The mobile browser version can become one of the alternatives for students who do not have much space on their mobile phone. However, from all the participants in the interview, none of them like to use the mobile browser version due to its complex steps of getting into the Quizlet. From students who were interviewed, only one has tried the browser version using chrome on Android. The web browser version offers a different interface but the same features as in the application. However, the student favored the app version since in the browser version, the user needed extra work to open the Quizlet from searching for the domain, signing in and loading.

Despite providing students with fruitful features, the connectivity issue in live Quiz mode of Quizlet has remained flaws for several students. Students who had problems with unstable internet connection were frequently expelled from joining the games. Since the internet has always become a mainstay of remote learning praxis that students often confront, educators need to take special attention to internet related issues in L2 learning. This confirmed Pham's testimony (2022) which claimed that the basic version of Quizlet functioned effectively only for users whose phones maintained constant internet connectivity. Consequently, educators must develop relevant strategies to address issues related to internet access. Alternative activities should always be provided in order to solve issues to reach learning goals.

Practical Implications on Using Quizlet in Remote Classroom

Since live quiz was played regularly in a synchronous setting. Students frequently found troubles in connectivity and time constraints. The live quiz delay would not allow students to participate in the live quiz in unstable internet connectivity. In my case, I did not force students to join the live quiz. Instead, I gave students the chance to do a self-test which was available in the Quizlet, and it could be done anytime they want. After taking the test, I requested students to take a screenshot of their score then send it to me. In this way, students can personalize their own vocabulary learning based on the suitable time. The self-test also did not require students to have good internet connection as that in the live quiz. The test in this option will also benefit teachers to know more about their student's vocabulary mastery since the score reported how well students could answer the questions of certain sets rather than the live quiz which only reported the overall students' mastery of certain sets plus the winner of the live quiz.

Unlike the live quiz mode which required a highly stable internet connection, the test mode gave students flexibility to evaluate the vocabulary sets in an asynchronous learning experience. In this scenario, students could personalize their one learning while concomitantly fulfilling the learning expectation. In the same vein, Chauhan (2017) highlighted the benefits of asynchronous learning, emphasizing its capacity to cultivate students' autonomy in learning, promote self-reflection, offer convenience with no need for physical presence, reduce social barriers particularly for introverted students, and enable interactive engagement irrespective of

time and location constraints.

Conclusion

The implementation of Quizlet for vocabulary learning has successfully gained diverse responses from EFL students during remote teaching. As one of digital flashcards platforms which is rich in features. Quizlet has helped students by providing multimodal features, convenient interface, ease of memorization, accessibility and motivation. This application has not just helped EFL learners to expand L2 lexical knowledge but also reduced their anxiety to communicate with the target language.

Nevertheless, the potential challenge of implementing Quizlet in remote learning was the internet connection issue especially in playing the live quiz. Since the free version of Quizlet did not offer students with offline access, teachers need to prepare alternative solutions for students who cannot gain internet access. Teachers are expected to really pay attention and the possible drawbacks of the application before putting it into practice. The availability of supporting components such as a stable internet connection and students' device features should be carefully considered. Alternative activities should always be carefully planned in order to solve remote learning issues to reach learning goals.

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