DIGITAL PLATFORMS IN TEACHING ENGLISH VOCABULARY IN SECONDARY SCHOOL: A REVIEW BASED ON QUIZLET, KAHOOT AND DUOLINGO

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Abstract: This review article examines the pedagogical value of digital platforms for teaching English vocabulary in secondary school, with a focus on Quizlet, Kahoot and Duolingo. Drawing on psycholinguistic theories of vocabulary acquisition, research on motivation and gamification, and the classroom evidence presented in the diploma project, the article argues that digital platforms are most effective when they are integrated into a purposeful methodological system rather than used as isolated entertainment tools. Quizlet supports structured presentation and repeated practice, Kahoot strengthens recognition and feedback through interactive quizzes, while Duolingo extends vocabulary learning beyond the classroom. The reviewed evidence suggests that these platforms can improve lexical retention, learner engagement and autonomous practice, provided that teacher guidance, age-appropriate tasks and balanced traditional instruction remain central.

Keywords: English vocabulary, digital platforms, Quizlet, Kahoot, Duolingo, lexical competence, secondary school.

Introduction

Vocabulary is a core component of foreign language competence because it supports listening, speaking, reading and writing. In secondary school English lessons, however, vocabulary learning is often reduced to translation, memorisation and short-term reproduction. Such practices may help learners recognise words, but they do not always lead to flexible use of lexical items in meaningful contexts. Contemporary learners are also surrounded by digital media, visual information and game-like interfaces. For this reason, teachers increasingly seek methods that combine systematic vocabulary work with interactive and motivational learning formats.

The diploma project on the use of Quizlet, Kahoot and Duolingo in teaching English vocabulary addresses this methodological need. Its central idea is that digital platforms should not replace the teacher or the textbook, but can reorganise vocabulary learning through multimodal presentation, repeated exposure, immediate feedback and learner autonomy. This article reviews the theoretical and practical foundations of that approach and summarises how digital platforms can be integrated into secondary school vocabulary instruction.

Lexical competence and vocabulary acquisition

Lexical competence is more than knowledge of word translation. It includes the ability to recognise the form of a word, understand its meaning, pronounce and spell it correctly, connect it with synonyms, antonyms and collocations, and use it appropriately in context. Nation (2022) emphasises that knowing a word involves form, meaning and use; therefore, effective vocabulary teaching must create repeated encounters with words in different tasks[97]. Ellis (1997) also treats

[97] Nation, I. S. P. (2022). Learning vocabulary in another language. Cambridge University Press.

vocabulary acquisition as a frequency-based cognitive process in which learners gradually detect patterns and automatise lexical knowledge through meaningful exposure[98].

Psycholinguistic research shows that vocabulary learning depends on attention, memory, depth of processing and motivation. Krashen's input hypothesis highlights the value of comprehensible language input, while research on cognitive correlates of vocabulary growth indicates that memory, processing speed and existing linguistic knowledge influence learning outcomes (Farnia & Geva, 2011). In school contexts, this means that new words should be introduced clearly, repeated systematically and used in tasks that require both recognition and production[99]. Digital platforms can support these conditions because they combine visual, auditory and interactive channels, but their effectiveness depends on pedagogical design rather than on technology itself.

Digital platforms as pedagogical tools

Quizlet, Kahoot and Duolingo represent three complementary functions in vocabulary instruction. Quizlet is especially suitable for the presentation and consolidation of new words. Its flashcards, Learn, Write, Spell, Test, Match and Live modes help learners connect word form and meaning, repeat lexical units, check spelling and practise retrieval. This structure supports autonomous learning because students can return to difficult words and monitor progress at their own pace. Studies on Quizlet use in English vocabulary learning similarly describe it as a tool that can strengthen independent practice and retention[100].

Kahoot is more effective at the revision and formative assessment stage. Its quiz format, time limits, points and leaderboard create a competitive but engaging classroom atmosphere. For vocabulary learning, this means that students practise rapid recognition of words, contextual choice and immediate correction. Research on gamification argues that game elements can increase attention and motivation when they are connected to clear learning objectives[101]. At the same time, Kahoot should be used carefully: competition may motivate many pupils, but it can also create pressure for some learners if the teacher does not balance speed with reflection.

Duolingo extends vocabulary learning outside the lesson. Its mobile format, daily practice, progress levels and reward system encourage regular repetition. For secondary school learners, this is important because vocabulary is forgotten quickly without distributed practice. A systematic review of Duolingo in vocabulary learning notes its potential for repeated exposure and learner autonomy, while also recognising limitations such as limited grammatical explanation and restricted contextual depth[102]. Therefore, Duolingo is best used as a supplementary tool for independent revision, not as a full substitute for classroom instruction.

Classroom evidence from the diploma project

The diploma project connected the literature review with a small-scale pedagogical experiment conducted at A. Kunanbayuly School-Gymnasium No. 87 in Astana. Twenty-five fifth-

[98] Ellis, N. C. (1997). Vocabulary acquisition: Word structure, collocation, word-class, and meaning. In N. Schmitt & M. McCarthy (Eds.), Vocabulary: Description, acquisition and pedagogy (pp. 122–139). Cambridge University Press.
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grade pupils participated: 12 learners in the experimental group and 13 learners in the control group. The experimental group used Quizlet and Kahoot systematically during English vocabulary lessons, while Duolingo was recommended for independent practice. The control group studied vocabulary through traditional tasks, dictionary work and repetition.

The diagnostic design included contextual multiple-choice tasks, open recall tasks, matching exercises with synonyms, antonyms and collocations, and self-assessment on a Likert scale. At the pre-test stage, both groups demonstrated similar initial results. The experimental group scored about 58% in contextual tasks, 52% in open tasks and 60% in matching, while the control group scored 55%, 50% and 57% respectively. This showed that the groups were comparable before the intervention.

After the formative stage, the experimental group demonstrated a stronger improvement. Contextual task results increased from 58% to 93%, open tasks from 52% to 86%, and matching tasks from 60% to 90%. In the control group, the growth was more moderate: from 55% to 68%, from 50% to 62%, and from 57% to 70%. The overall experimental group average rose from approximately 56–58% to 88–90%, whereas the control group improved by about 10–13 percentage points. Survey responses also supported these findings: around 90% of learners evaluated digital platforms positively, 91% reported that new words were easier to remember, 89% felt more active during game-based lessons, and 85% used applications outside class.

These findings should be interpreted cautiously because the sample was small and the intervention was limited to one school context. Nevertheless, the results are consistent with the reviewed literature: vocabulary development improves when learners receive repeated exposure, immediate feedback, varied task formats and opportunities for autonomous practice.

Methodological implications

The main methodological implication is that digital platforms should be aligned with lesson stages. Quizlet can be used for introducing and practising new vocabulary; Kahoot can be used for revision, classroom interaction and formative assessment; Duolingo can support independent repetition after lessons. This sequence creates a coherent vocabulary cycle: presentation, guided practice, interactive consolidation, feedback and autonomous review.

Teacher guidance remains decisive. The teacher selects lexical material, checks the quality of digital content, regulates task difficulty, explains mistakes and connects platform activities with communicative use. Without these functions, digital tasks may become superficial entertainment. A balanced lesson should still include sentence building, oral practice, short texts, writing tasks and contextual use of words. Digital platforms are most useful when they strengthen these traditional activities rather than replace them.

Age appropriateness is also important. For fifth-grade learners, tasks should be short, visual, clear and gradually more complex. Game elements can increase motivation, but they should not dominate the lesson. Learners need time to discuss answers, correct errors and use words in meaningful speech. In this sense, digital platforms are not independent teaching methods; they are instruments within a broader methodology of vocabulary instruction.

Conclusion

The reviewed theoretical and experimental evidence shows that Quizlet, Kahoot and Duolingo can contribute to the development of English lexical competence in secondary school. Their value lies in structured repetition, multimodal presentation, interactivity, quick feedback and support for autonomous practice. The diploma-based experiment suggests that systematic platform

use may lead to higher vocabulary test results, stronger learner confidence and more positive attitudes toward English lessons. However, the effectiveness of these tools depends on thoughtful integration into the lesson, teacher mediation, technical accessibility and combination with traditional vocabulary work. Digital platforms should therefore be viewed not as a universal solution, but as flexible pedagogical resources that can make vocabulary learning more visible, active and continuous.

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