



Investigating the Influence of Kahoot on Students' Vocabulary Acquisition in an EFL Context

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Abstract

Vocabulary learning remains a central yet challenging component of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction, particularly in contexts where classroom learning serves as the primary source of language exposure. Traditional teaching approaches often rely on memorization and translation, which may not effectively promote active learning or long-term retention. The purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of the Kahoot gamified learning platform on students' vocabulary acquisition in an EFL context. A quasi-experimental pretest–posttest design was conducted with two intact tenth-grade classes at SMK Negeri 2 Kolaka, consisting of 30 students in the experimental group and 30 in the control group. The treatment was implemented over six meetings using a 25-item multiple-choice vocabulary test with high reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.940$). T-tests for independent and paired samples were used to analyze the data, identifying within-group improvements and between-group differences. The findings indicated that the experimental group taught through Kahoot achieved significantly higher post-test scores than the control group ($p < 0.05$). The results suggest that integrating Kahoot as a gamified learning platform can enhance students' vocabulary mastery, increase engagement, and foster a more interactive learning environment in EFL classrooms. These results underscore the capability of Kahoot-based instruction to extend current understanding of digital gamification in EFL vocabulary teaching by demonstrating measurable gains in learner outcomes.

Keywords: Influence, Kahoot, Vocabulary Acquisition, EFL Context.

Introduction

Vocabulary is a vital component of language learning as it forms the foundation for the development of all language abilities—listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Without sufficient vocabulary, learners struggle to express ideas, comprehend information, and participate meaningfully in classroom interactions.

Zeng et al. (2025) and Harselina et al. (2024) emphasized that vocabulary knowledge enables learners to process and understand texts effectively, whereas limited vocabulary restricts comprehension and communication.

When it comes to learning English as a foreign language (EFL) in Indonesia, vocabulary mastery remains a major challenge, particularly at the secondary level. This issue is often linked to limited English exposure outside the classroom and the continued reliance on teacher-centered instruction that emphasizes linguistic form rather than communicative meaning. Traditional vocabulary teaching methods—such as memorization, translation, and repetition—have long dominated Indonesian classrooms, but they often produce only short-term learning gains and fail to promote meaningful retention.

According to Hashim (2025), these approaches engage learners minimally, as they rely on rote recall rather than cognitive understanding. Consequently, vocabulary learning often becomes monotonous, leading to declining motivation and limited long-term vocabulary acquisition. To address this, more interactive, contextual, and learner-centered pedagogical approaches are needed—ones grounded in constructivist and gamification learning theories, which emphasize active participation, discovery, and motivation through meaningful engagement.

Recent advances in educational technology have transformed language learning into a more dynamic and participatory process. Digital tools such as mobile applications, multimedia-based instruction, and online learning platforms offer opportunities for active and autonomous learning, consistent with constructivist principles that position learners as co-creators of knowledge. Tabasi et al. (2024) reported that technology integration enhances both accessibility and engagement in English learning.

Among these innovations, Kahoot has emerged as one of the most effective game-based learning platforms, allowing teachers to conduct real-time quizzes, provide instant feedback, and encourage healthy competition. By transforming learning into a game-like experience, Kahoot promotes active participation and enjoyment, resulting in a more motivating and inclusive classroom environment. Unlike other gamified tools, Kahoot was chosen for this study because it is free, easy to integrate into classroom instruction, and widely accessible even in resource-limited schools.

A growing body of research highlights the pedagogical benefits of Kahoot for language learning. Studies by Situmorang & Simanjuntak (2023), Aisyah & Salmiah (2024), Ruslana et al. (2024), Rochman et al. (2024), Hattee & Teo (2024), Rahmadani et al. (2024), Rose et al. (2025), Farhane (2025), and Boudinar & Lagmidi (2025) consistently demonstrate that Kahoot enhances students' motivation, participation, and vocabulary acquisition in EFL contexts. These results underscore the ability of game-based learning platforms to transform vocabulary instruction from a passive memorization task into an interactive and engaging learning process.

Moreover, Kahoot's design principles—collaboration, competition, and immediate feedback—align with active learning theory and self-determination theory, both of which assert that students who are actively engaged and intrinsically motivated demonstrate stronger learning outcomes. Despite these promising findings, previous research has primarily focused on students in higher education and urban contexts, often emphasizing learners' perceptions and motivation rather than measurable learning outcomes.

Very few studies have investigated the use of Kahoot in vocational school settings, where students' educational goals, motivation, and classroom dynamics differ significantly from those in academic high schools. Vocational students typically prioritize practical, hands-on competencies related to their technical fields, and English is often treated as a supplementary subject. This results in lower exposure, varying language proficiency levels, and different motivational orientations compared to general education students.

Given these contextual distinctions, there remains a clear research gap in understanding the measurable effects of Kahoot on vocabulary learning outcomes in Indonesian vocational schools. Most previous studies used self-reported surveys rather than experimental methods, providing limited empirical evidence on actual vocabulary improvement. Therefore, this study adopts a quasi-experimental design to objectively evaluate the impact of Kahoot-based instruction on students' vocabulary achievement.

It also examines whether the integration of Kahoot enhances learners' enthusiasm and engagement in English learning activities. Beyond theoretical contributions, the practical significance of this study lies in its potential to inform Indonesian education policy—particularly the integration of digital gamification tools in vocational school curricula to promote interactive and technology-enhanced learning. By combining technological innovation with empirical investigation, this study aims to contribute to both the theoretical understanding and practical application of game-based learning in EFL contexts.

Method

This study employed a quasi-experimental design using a pre-test and post-test to examine the impact of the Kahoot application on students' vocabulary achievement. The research was conducted at SMK Negeri 2 Kolaka, a vocational school in Kolaka Regency, Indonesia. A total of 64 tenth-grade students participated, consisting of 32 students in the experimental group and 32 in the control group. Both classes were selected based on their comparable English proficiency levels, as determined by the results of a preliminary placement test.

The participants were chosen using purposive sampling, focusing on classes that had similar schedules, curriculum content, and teacher assignment. All participants were aged between 15 and 17 years and represented typical EFL learners in vocational education, characterized by limited exposure to English in

real-life contexts and a high dependency on teacher-centered instruction. Informed consent was obtained from both the participants and their English teacher prior to data collection, and the study followed standard ethical procedures established by the institution.

One class was designated as the experimental group, which engaged in vocabulary learning through Kahoot-based quizzes, while the other class served as the control group, which received instruction through conventional methods emphasizing translation and rote memorization. The assignment of groups was based on existing classroom divisions to maintain natural learning settings, while efforts were made to minimize confounding variables by ensuring that both groups shared the same teacher, curriculum materials, instructional time, and learning objectives.

The treatment lasted for six class meetings (clarifying previous mention of five) conducted over three weeks, with each session lasting approximately ninety minutes. The experimental group learned vocabulary through interactive quiz sessions using the Kahoot application. Each Kahoot session consisted of 20–25 multiple-choice questions targeting the vocabulary items from the current unit in the syllabus. After each question, immediate automated feedback was provided by the application, and the teacher facilitated brief explanations of the correct answers to reinforce learning. Leaderboards and points were used to sustain motivation and engagement.

In contrast, the control group learned the same vocabulary items through textbook-based explanations, including translation tasks, sentence completion exercises, and vocabulary memorization drills without the use of digital tools. Both groups followed the same topics and lesson objectives to ensure instructional equivalence.

Data were collected through a 25-item multiple-choice vocabulary test administered as both the pre-test and post-test. The test items were developed based on the English syllabus and validated by two experts in language education to ensure content relevance. The time interval between the pre-test and post-test was three weeks, corresponding to the duration of the intervention. A pilot test confirmed the reliability of the instrument, yielding a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.940, indicating excellent internal consistency. Classroom observations were also conducted to document students' engagement and learning behaviors during the treatment sessions.

For data analysis, the collected scores were processed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, version 26). Descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation, were computed for both groups. Prior to inferential testing, data normality was checked using the Shapiro–Wilk test, confirming that the data met the assumptions for parametric analysis. Inferential analyses were then performed using paired-sample t-tests to determine improvements within each group and independent-sample t-tests to identify significant differences

between the experimental and control groups. These analyses allowed the researcher to determine whether the observed improvements in vocabulary mastery were statistically significant.

Table 1. Treatment Procedure for Experimental and Control Groups

Week	Session	Experimental Group (Kahoot-Based Learning)	Control Group (Conventional Learning)
1	1	Introduction to Kahoot; Pre-test administration	Introduction to topic; Pre-test administration
1	2	Kahoot quiz (20 items) – Unit 1 vocabulary; feedback discussion	Textbook-based vocabulary explanation (Unit 1)
2	3	Kahoot quiz (25 items) – Unit 2 vocabulary; peer competition	Vocabulary translation and memorization (Unit 2)
2	4	Kahoot review session – mixed topics; group reflection	Sentence completion and oral repetition drills
3	5	Kahoot quiz (20 items) – Unit 3 vocabulary; final review	Vocabulary practice using textbook exercises
3	6	Post-test administration and feedback discussion	Post-test administration and closing discussion

To provide a clear research process framework, a graphic illustration of the study procedure, including pre-test administration, treatment stages, and post-test evaluation, is presented in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Research Procedure Flow

Results

a. Data Analysis of Students' Pre-Test

Before introducing Kahoot!, a pre-test was administered to both groups to measure their initial vocabulary knowledge. Descriptive statistics are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Pre-Test Vocabulary Scores of Experimental and Control Groups

Group	N	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Experimental	20	57.20	6.85	Moderate vocabulary knowledge
Control	20	56.80	7.10	Moderate vocabulary knowledge

As shown in Table 1, both groups demonstrated very similar pre-test mean scores, with only a minor difference of 0.40 points ($t(38) = 0.18$, $p = .857$, $d = 0.06$). This confirms that the two groups were statistically equivalent at baseline, establishing a fair foundation for assessing the impact of Kahoot! on vocabulary learning.

Normality and homogeneity of variance tests were also conducted. Both groups met the normality assumption (Shapiro–Wilk $p > .05$) and homogeneity of variance (Levene's test $F(1,38) = 0.12$, $p = .729$), confirming that the data met the prerequisites for parametric testing.

b. Data Analysis of Students' Post-Test

After implementing Kahoot!-based activities, the post-test was conducted to evaluate vocabulary improvement. The descriptive results are displayed in Table 2.

Table 2. Post-Test Vocabulary Scores of Experimental and Control Groups

Group	N	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Experimental	20	78.45	5.92	Significant improvement
Control	20	66.10	6.47	Moderate improvement

A paired-sample t-test (Table 3) showed that both groups improved significantly after treatment; however, the experimental group's improvement was far greater.

c. Data Analysis of Students' Gain Scores

To emphasize vocabulary improvement, gain scores were computed (post-test minus pre-test). These results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Gain Scores of Experimental and Control Groups

Group	Mean Gain	SD	Interpretation
Experimental	21.25	4.85	High improvement in vocabulary acquisition
Control	9.30	5.10	Moderate improvement

The difference in gain scores between groups was statistically significant, as shown in the independent-samples t-test in Table 4.

d. Inferential Statistical Analysis

Table 4. Paired-Sample t-Test Results (Within-Group Comparisons)

Group	t(df)	p-value	Cohen's d	Interpretation
Experimental	$t(19) = 13.12$	$p < .001$	2.93	Very large effect
Control	$t(19) = 5.12$	$p < .001$	1.14	Large effect

Table 5. Independent-Samples t-Test Results (Between-Group Comparison)

Comparison	t(df)	p-value		Cohen's d	Interpretation
Experimental vs. Control (Post-Test)	t(38) = 6.48	p < .001		2.03	Very large effect

The results indicate that Kahoot! had a statistically and practically significant effect on students' vocabulary achievement.

e. Distribution of Vocabulary Scores

Table 6. Distribution of Vocabulary Scores Across Ranges (Post-Test)

Score Range	Experimental (n)	Control (n)
85–100	8	1
70–84	10	9
55–69	2	8
< 55	0	2

The majority of students in the experimental group scored above 70, whereas most control group participants remained in the 55–69 range. This distribution further supports the statistical findings.

f. Visualization of Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores

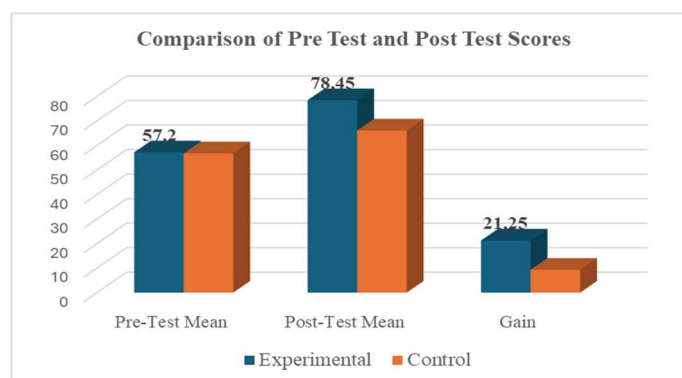


Figure 2. Pre- and Post-Test Scores of Experimental and Control Groups

g. Treatment Procedure Summary

Table 7. Weekly Summary of Treatment Procedures for Experimental Group

Week	Activity Description	Duration
1	Introduction to Kahoot! and orientation session	90 minutes
2	Vocabulary review (nouns and adjectives) using Kahoot! quizzes	90 minutes
3	Verb practice and sentence building	90 minutes
4	Prepositions and contextual vocabulary	90 minutes

5	Integrated quiz competition using cumulative vocabulary sets	90 minutes
6	Post-test administration and feedback discussion	60 minutes

These results demonstrate that both groups improved after the intervention; however, the experimental group achieved significantly higher post-test scores, supported by a very large effect size ($d = 2.03$). These findings confirm that integrating Kahoot! in vocabulary instruction substantially enhances student engagement and vocabulary acquisition compared to traditional methods.

Discussion

This study examined the effects of using Kahoot on students' vocabulary mastery and learning motivation by organizing the discussion around key themes: vocabulary acquisition, learner engagement, theoretical grounding, practical implications, and study limitations. The study found that students' vocabulary mastery improved significantly when taught using Kahoot compared to traditional instruction.

The experimental group gained 21.25 points on average, while the control group gained only 9.30 points, indicating a substantial difference in learning outcomes. This finding is consistent with cognitive load theory, which suggests that interactive and multimodal learning environments can reduce extraneous cognitive load and promote deeper processing of information (Sweller, 2011). Kahoot's real-time quizzes, instant feedback, and game-based features actively engaged students in meaningful repetition and retrieval of vocabulary items.

From the perspective of behaviorism, immediate feedback functions as positive reinforcement that strengthens memory associations, helping learners quickly correct errors and retain accurate word forms. In cognitive science, the spacing and retrieval effects are critical—frequent opportunities to recall vocabulary enhance long-term memory consolidation. Therefore, Kahoot's interactive design not only increases engagement but also facilitates effective cognitive rehearsal, leading to higher retention compared to passive learning or rote memorization.

Students in the Kahoot group displayed consistently higher motivation and active participation than those in the control group. Active learning theory posits that engagement in tasks requiring interaction, competition, and self-assessment fosters deeper involvement and emotional connection to learning (Bonwell & Eison, 1991). Kahoot's playful format, point-based competition, and instant rewards created an enjoyable learning atmosphere that encouraged participation, including from students who were typically less confident.

This observation aligns with previous research (Devitriana & Wijirahayu, 2025; Latifah et al., 2024; Alsswey et al., 2024; Afifah & Atmazaki, 2024; Salsabila & Apoko, 2024; Ilmudinulloh et al., 2024; Petrusly et al., 2024) showing that digital gamification enhances student motivation and promotes a positive classroom

climate. However, alternative explanations such as the novelty effect should be considered—students may have been particularly motivated because Kahoot was a new and exciting tool rather than because of its pedagogical features alone.

Future studies with longer interventions are necessary to determine whether these motivational effects persist over time. The gain of 21.25 points in the experimental group compared to 9.30 in the control group is relatively higher than average vocabulary improvements reported in similar game-based learning studies (typically ranging between 10–15 points; see Alsswey et al., 2024; Afifah & Atmazaki, 2024). This suggests that Kahoot's structured integration and teacher facilitation in this context may have amplified its effectiveness.

Nonetheless, some unexpected results were observed—certain students expressed feelings of pressure or anxiety during competitive rounds, indicating that gamification may not benefit all learners equally. For implementation, schools need reliable internet access, digital devices (such as smartphones or tablets), and stable classroom Wi-Fi. Teachers should receive training not only on Kahoot's technical operation but also on how to align quiz design with learning objectives and balance competition with collaboration.

Cost considerations are relatively low for basic Kahoot use, as the platform offers a free version; however, premium features that allow for detailed analytics or larger class participation may require institutional support. Pedagogically, the results demonstrate that integrating game-based tools like Kahoot into language classrooms can transform traditional vocabulary lessons into interactive, student-centered learning experiences. Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the Hawthorne effect may have influenced results, as students were aware they were being studied, possibly increasing their motivation temporarily.

Second, there was no long-term follow-up to measure whether vocabulary gains persisted beyond the study period. Third, teacher effect cannot be fully ruled out—the instructor's enthusiasm and delivery may have impacted outcomes. Finally, generalizability is limited due to the study's small sample size and rural setting. Future research should explore longitudinal designs to assess retention over time, investigate potential moderating factors such as student personality or digital literacy, and compare different game-based learning platforms to evaluate differential impacts on language skills beyond vocabulary, including speaking, writing, and listening. Overall, this study contributes to the growing body of evidence supporting digital game-based learning in EFL contexts.

It demonstrates that Kahoot not only enhances vocabulary acquisition through cognitive and behavioral reinforcement but also fosters motivation and engagement through active learning principles. Nevertheless, sustained implementation and careful pedagogical planning are essential to ensure equitable participation and long-term learning impact.

Conclusion

This study intended to examine the influence of the Kahoot app on students' vocabulary acquisition in an EFL context. The results demonstrate that integrating Kahoot into vocabulary instruction leads to significant improvements in students' vocabulary mastery compared to traditional classroom practices. This improvement was reflected not only in higher post-test scores but also in increased engagement and motivation during the learning process. The findings suggest that game-based digital platforms like Kahoot create an interactive and stimulating learning environment that enhances vocabulary development more successfully than traditional techniques.

The study further indicates that Kahoot can serve as a practical and pedagogically valuable tool for EFL teachers, particularly in contexts where vocabulary learning is often passive and teacher-centered. By promoting active participation, repetition, and immediate feedback, Kahoot helps students retain new vocabulary more effectively. These results provide both practical and theoretical insights into how digital tools grounded in constructivist learning theory can be strategically implemented within language teaching to enhance learning outcomes, especially in vocational school settings.

However, this study has some limitations. The research was conducted at a single vocational school with a small sample size of 64 students, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. Furthermore, the study focused solely on vocabulary acquisition, so the results may not directly extend to other language skills such as reading, writing, or speaking. Studies should address these limitations by involving larger and more diverse samples, exploring multiple language skills, and examining long-term learning effects to build on the theoretical framework established in this study.

Overall, the findings highlight the growing significance of digital game-based learning tools like Kahoot in advancing Indonesian EFL education, emphasizing the need for innovative pedagogical integration that aligns with the nation's evolving educational goals.

Suggestion

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that EFL teachers integrate gamified learning resources like Kahoot into vocabulary instruction to increase student engagement and vocabulary retention. By combining interactive digital tools with other pedagogical strategies, teachers can create a more dynamic and learner-centered classroom environment that encourages active participation and meaningful practice.

Recommendations for Practitioners:

EFL teachers are encouraged to use Kahoot as a supplement to traditional vocabulary instruction rather than a replacement.  Implementing Kahoot

activities one to two times per week  can provide consistent engagement while maintaining balance with other instructional methods such as reading comprehension and communicative tasks. Teachers should also ensure that each session includes opportunities for reflection or follow-up discussion to reinforce learning beyond the game format.

Recommendations for Researchers:

Future studies could examine Kahoot's long-term effects on vocabulary retention and explore its impact on other language skills, including speaking, writing, and reading comprehension. Researchers should also investigate the comparative effectiveness of Kahoot when combined with other digital platforms (e.g., Duolingo, Quizizz, or Quizlet) to identify the most impactful technology-enhanced learning strategies. Expanding research across multiple schools and involving more diverse participant groups would strengthen the generalizability of the findings.

Recommendations for Policymakers and Curriculum Designers:

Educational policymakers and curriculum developers should consider integrating gamified digital tools like Kahoot into national or institutional EFL frameworks. Providing professional development and teacher training programs focused on digital pedagogy will help educators effectively utilize these tools. Additionally, ensuring adequate infrastructure, such as reliable internet access and sufficient technological resources (computers, projectors, or mobile devices), is essential to support smooth classroom implementation.

All of these combined efforts can help educators, researchers, and policymakers harness the potential of digital game-based learning to transform traditional EFL classrooms into more interactive, inclusive, and engaging learning environments.

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