A CLASSROOM STUDY ON HOW GAME-BASED DIGITAL PLATFORMS INFLUENCE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' MOTIVATION AND INVOLVEMENT IN VOCABULARY REVIEW

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Abstract: *Vocabulary revision plays an essential role in reinforcing language understanding, but it is often regarded as a secondary task in EFL university classroom. Traditional review methods rely heavily on repetition and passive memory recall, which make it difficult for students to gain motivation and retention over time. Considering these circumstances, this study investigates the utilization of game-based digital platforms (Kahoot, Bamboozle, Blooket) which were used for warm- ups, reviews, and wrap-ups stages. These tools are considered as different approaches for vocabulary review and the research is to look further at how they affect students' enthusiasm and involvement in class. The research was implemented in a university EFL class over a period of six weeks, and this environment is the best fit for this research because students have their own digital devices and they are allowed to use them in class. A qualitative approach based in the classroom was utilized and data was collected through organized classroom observations and semi-structured interviews with students to capture differences in participation, emotional responses, and involvement during revision activities. The results indicate notable improvements in students' engagement and willingness to take part in vocabulary review activities. Many students reported feeling more assured and confident when participating on game-based platforms, and the findings suggest that competitive elements must be managed carefully to avoid negative emotional effects.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary checking is a routine yet essential task in English classes, especially at university level where students face complex texts and academic demands that require broad, flexible lexical knowledge. Although new terms are often introduced with explanations and contextualized examples, vocabulary revision is frequently neglected because of limited class time and the large volume of content. Common assessment formats quick oral checks or worksheet-based tasks may feel uninteresting, causing students to disengage even though revision supports long-term retention (Nation, 2001). Since learner motivation strongly shapes effort and persistence (Dörnyei, 2001), repetitive review styles can create monotony and encourage short-term recall rather than deeper, transferable understanding.

To respond to these challenges, teachers increasingly integrate game-based digital platforms such as Kahoot, Bamboozle, and Blooket in warm-up, revision, and wrap-up stages. These tools turn conventional questions into interactive activities featuring competition, immediate feedback, and visual stimulation, which can enhance attention and willingness to participate (Deterding et al., 2011; Hamari et al., 2014). Prior studies report improved enjoyment, participation, reduced anxiety, and more learner-centered classrooms (Wang & Tahir, 2020; Reinders & Wattana, 2015). However, further classroom research in university contexts is needed, particularly on students' motivational responses and observable engagement. This study examines how these platforms affect university students' motivation, engagement, participation, and perceptions during vocabulary review, offering practical guidance for effective and comfortable vocabulary retention.

II. RESEARCH CONTENT

2.1. Literature review

2.1.1. The Importance of Vocabulary Review in University EFL Learning

Vocabulary knowledge is widely recognized as a fundamental component of second and foreign language proficiency. Although the introduction of new vocabulary often receives considerable emphasis in classroom instruction, the systematic revision of previously learned lexical items is equally essential for promoting retention and effective use. Nation (2001) emphasizes that repeated exposure to vocabulary across varied contexts plays a critical role in strengthening memory and deepening lexical knowledge. Without consistent review, vocabulary knowledge may rapidly diminish, regardless of the effectiveness of initial instruction.

In tertiary education contexts, vocabulary revision is generally regarded as an indispensable instructional practice; however, it is frequently

implemented in an unsystematic manner due to limited instructional time. Common revision activities often consist of brief oral questioning or short worksheet-based tasks that prioritize recognition over productive use. As noted by Schmitt (2010), such approaches tend to foster passive vocabulary knowledge rather than active language use. Consequently, learners may demonstrate adequate comprehension in assessment settings while having trouble recalling or applying vocabulary in communicative situations. This discrepancy underscores the importance of review activities that extend beyond surface-level reinforcement and actively engage learners in meaningful language use.

Effective vocabulary revision involves more than mere repetition; it contributes significantly to learners' ability to retrieve and apply lexical items in contextually appropriate ways. Research in vocabulary acquisition indicates that active recall is more effective in promoting long-term retention than passive exposure or recognition-based exercises (Nation, 2001). When learners are required to retrieve vocabulary under conditions such as time constraints or varied task formats, lexical knowledge becomes more readily accessible for communicative purposes.

For undergraduate learners, the need for efficient and effective vocabulary practice is increasingly evident, particularly considering graduation requirements that often include achieving standardized test scores on examinations such as IELTS or TOEIC. Students are expected to engage with academic texts, participate in discussions, and convey information using accurate and appropriate language. However, constraints on instructional time limit opportunities for comprehensive vocabulary review. As a result, revision practices may become routine or superficial, highlighting the need for instructional approaches that are both time-efficient and cognitively demanding.

2.1.2. Motivation and Engagement in Language Learning

Motivation has long been recognized as a critical factor influencing success in language learning. According to Dörnyei (2001), motivated learners are more likely to invest effort, persevere through challenges, and engage more deeply with learning activities. In the context of vocabulary acquisition, motivation influences the frequency with which learners interact with lexical items, the level of attention devoted to revision tasks, and their confidence in using newly acquired vocabulary.

Closely related to motivation is the concept of learner engagement, which refers to students' active involvement in learning processes. Engagement is commonly understood as comprising emotional, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions (Fredricks et al., 2004). In classroom contexts, engagement may be observed through behaviors such as active participation, preparedness, and sustained attention. During vocabulary revision activities, however, low levels of engagement are often evident, as reflected in limited student responses or reliance on a small group of highly active participants. Enhancing both motivation and engagement during revision activities is therefore particularly important in university settings, where disengagement and passivity are frequently observed.

Motivation in learning is not static and may fluctuate depending on task characteristics and classroom conditions. Dörnyei (2001) emphasizes that learners tend to be more motivated when tasks are perceived as meaningful, attainable, and enjoyable. Traditional and repetitive approaches to vocabulary revision may undermine learners' intrinsic motivation, resulting in reduced effort and superficial learning. Consequently, the selection of appropriate review methods is of considerable importance, particularly for learners who value activities that offer academic relevance or intellectual stimulation.

Engagement serves as a key indicator of students' responses to instructional activities. As argued by Fredricks et al. (2004), engagement extends beyond mere participation to include emotional commitment and cognitive investment. In vocabulary review tasks, engagement may be demonstrated through students' willingness to respond, attentiveness, and readiness to accept challenges. Instructional strategies that foster both motivation and engagement are therefore likely to lead to more effective and sustained vocabulary reinforcement.

2.1.3. Learning Through Games as an Educational Method

Game-based platforms have been developed as instructional tools designed to increase learner involvement by incorporating elements commonly associated with games, such as competition, challenge, and immediate feedback. Deterding et al. (2011) defines gamification as the use of game design elements in non-game contexts to enhance user experience and motivation. Within educational settings, these elements are believed to increase interactivity and promote emotional engagement in learning activities.

In language education, game-based learning has been shown to create a more relaxed and enjoyable learning environment. Reinders and Wattana (2015) found that digital games can reduce learners' anxiety and enhance their willingness to use the target language. Similarly, Hamari et al. (2014) suggest that game elements such as points, scores, and leaderboards can motivate learners to participate more actively in repetitive tasks, including vocabulary practice. These findings indicate that game-based approaches may effectively address motivational challenges commonly observed in language classrooms.

From a pedagogical perspective, game-based learning aligns with constructivist principles, which emphasize active, learner-centered participation. The integration of game elements into classroom activities provides learners with opportunities to receive immediate feedback and to adjust misunderstandings in real time. Such features promote cognitive engagement, even in tasks that require repetition.

In language learning contexts, game-based activities can also contribute to a more supportive classroom atmosphere. When learners perceive tasks as enjoyable rather than evaluative, they may experience reduced performance pressure. This lowering of affective barriers is particularly beneficial in vocabulary revision, where anxiety about making errors often inhibits participation. Consequently, game-based learning has the potential to enhance not only learner motivation but also confidence and willingness to engage in sustained practice.

2.1.4. Digital Platforms Utilizing Games for Vocabulary Enhancement

In recent years, digital platforms such as Kahoot, Bamboozle, and Blooket have gained increasing popularity in EFL classrooms, particularly for use in warm-up, review, and concluding activities. These platforms enable instructors to transform traditional review questions into interactive quizzes that require rapid responses and active learner participation. Wang and Tahir (2020) report that Kahoot is frequently employed for review purposes and is associated with increased learner enjoyment and classroom engagement.

A growing body of research suggests that game-based platforms are especially effective for vocabulary practice, as they provide immediate feedback and allow learners to identify errors independently while being rewarded for participation and performance. By incorporating competitive elements and time constraints, these tools help sustain learners' attention and encourage involvement from a wider range of students. However, some studies caution that excessive competition may lead to anxiety, time pressure, or disengagement among certain learners, particularly those with lower language confidence. In such cases, learners may focus on completing game levels rather than attending to language learning itself (Stockwell & Hubbard, 2013). This suggests that game-based platforms should be implemented thoughtfully and aligned with pedagogical objectives rather than used solely for entertainment.

From an instructional perspective, game-based digital platforms offer several advantages for vocabulary practice in university contexts. They allow instructors to present a substantial amount of lexical content efficiently, making them well suited for brief revision activities such as warm-ups or wrap-up tasks. In addition, automated scoring and immediate feedback reduce teachers' workload while still enabling the monitoring of learner progress.

A key feature of these platforms is their flexibility. Instructors can adjust question formats, task length, time limits, difficulty levels, and participation modes to align with specific lesson objectives. Vocabulary activities may focus on meaning recognition, word forms, collocations, or contextualized usage. This adaptability allows educators to design activities that closely reflect course content rather than relying on generic game templates. Nevertheless, previous research emphasizes the need for careful balance to ensure that competition enhances, rather than undermines, the learning process (Stockwell & Hubbard, 2013).

2.1.5. Research Gap

While recent studies emphasize the benefits of game-based learning and digital resources, additional classroom-focused research on vocabulary reinforcement in higher education is needed. Many earlier studies examine overall learning outcomes or concentrate on younger learners, particularly in elementary and high school, leading to insufficient attention to university students' experiences. Furthermore, a limited number of studies investigate how game-based platforms influence students' motivation and observable engagement during review activities, compared to their initial vocabulary learning.

Therefore, this study aims to investigate the effect of those game-based platforms on university's students' vocabulary revisions.

2.2. Methodology

2.2.1. Research Design

The research aims to employ a classroom-focused qualitative and quantitative method to explore the impact of game-based digital platforms on university students' motivation and engagement in vocabulary revision. A classroom investigation was the most appropriate tool because it allowed the educator to observe the students' responses in a real learning environment. Moreover, the research concentrated on using the three most common platforms, like Kahoot, Bamboozle, and Blooket, integrated into three different stages, like warm-up, review, and conclusion, to ensure that the study reflected authentic classroom practices.

2.2.2. Participants and contexts

The participants are sophomores who take the General English class at a university in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. The class consisted of around 40-45 students, aged 19-20, with English skills ranging from lower-intermediate to upper-intermediate levels. Most participants had previous experience with conventional vocabulary acquisition techniques, such as word lists, rote memorization and textbook exercises, but had little experience with game-based digital platforms in prior classes. The class is convened once a week, and vocabulary review was a consistent component of every lesson. The educator played the role as the instructor, allowing ongoing observation of student behavior and interaction throughout the duration. Reflective notes were recorded every session to capture the positive and difficult aspects of the implementation so that some potential bias can be minimized.

2.3. Current situation and analysis

2.3.1. Observed Changes in Students' Motivation Toward Vocabulary Review

This section aims to present the study's findings stemming from data obtained through classroom observations and semi-structured interviews. The findings are structured according to the research inquiries, focusing on the effects of game-based digital platforms on students' motivation and involvement during vocabulary revision tasks. Classroom observations throughout six weeks indicated a stable improvement in students' enthusiasm during vocabulary review. As normal, when the traditional review activities like calling a random student, then the teacher says a Vietnamese word, and that student will answer in English, they seemed disengaged and had little voluntary involvement in that activity. Then, the vocabulary reviewing stage becomes a mundane task instead of an interesting aspect of the lesson. Following that activity, the teacher introduced Bamboozle, and students explicitly showed heightened engagement after that. This was clear through faster response times, increased willingness to engage, and noticeable excitement when game-related activities appeared even though motivation wasn't assessed numerically. The observation patterns express that students found the Bamboozle more attractive than the traditional delivery. This observation supports Dörnyei's (2001) argument that learners showcase greater motivation when tasks are enjoyable and meaningful.

2.3.2. Increased classroom engagement and participation

Compared to the traditional tasks, the students' behavioral participation significantly increased during the execution of game-oriented revision activities. Specifically, platforms like Kahoot and Blooket seemed more suitable to promote engagement for students who have been remaining silent during class time. Using personal devices for answering vocabulary checking questions appeared to lessen the anxiety linked to speaking before the entire class, enabling students to engage more confidently. They performed constant concentration, active use of their devices to respond to questions, and had greater interactions with their peers throughout the task. All these positive responses demonstrated better engagement during the learning process. Consequently, classroom engagement became more inclusive, with a reduced number of activities controlled by the same limited group of vocal students. These findings align with Fredricks et al.'s (2004) concept of behavioral engagement, emphasizing observable participation and involvement as crucial signs of student engagement.

2.3.3. Reducing fears of making mistakes and willingness to participate

A prominent discovery of the study was the willingness of students to engage voluntarily in a vocabulary revision task. Classroom observations revealed that many students who had previously shied away from speaking up or volunteering in any class activities became more eager when they provided the answers through games. This alteration might be associated with the diminished

pressure in these tasks because the incorrect responses were presented as a component of the gaming experiences instead of being considered as individual shortcomings. Findings from student interviews further confirmed this observation. The feelings of safety when students don't have to expose themselves in front of their classmates motivate them to take chances and interact more openly with the vocabulary being practiced. Therefore, many participants conveyed that they felt more comfortable trying to answer during game-based activities since their errors were not prominently highlighted. These results support Reinders and Wattana's (2015) claim that digital game-based learning settings can reduce learners' anxiety and enhance their readiness to use language. In this research, the diminished fear of making errors seemed to enhance a more inclusive classroom environment. A greater range of pupils participated in review activities since participation was no longer limited to a small number of confident individuals. This change suggests that, in university EFL settings, game-based platforms can significantly encourage equitable involvement in vocabulary revision.

2.3.4. Emotional Responses and Classroom Atmosphere

Students' emotional reactions to vocabulary review activities expressed significant changes. They described these game-based activities as "fun", "relaxing". and "more enjoyable" in comparison to the old "tedious" and "stressful" tasks. Throughout the game-based reviewing sessions, the classroom appeared explicitly livelier and more supportive when the students tried to focus on the task and interact with their peers. These positive emotional responses are more than expected; they appeared to influence the whole classroom atmosphere. Simultaneously, findings illustrate that the incorporation of game elements significantly impacted students' emotional experiences. While most students found eager in competitive environment eager, the others expressed discomfort with features like leaderboards, especially when they often ranked near the bottom. For these students, the regular low grades occasionally led to feelings of apprehension instead of enjoyment. This tendency is linked to the previous findings, indicating that competition may serve as both a motivating and demotivating element, shaped by the personality and confidence

of individual learners. As a instructor, patterning games as chances for practice and collaborative learning instead of serious competition can help foster a supportive emotional atmosphere that boosts motivation and continual engagement.

2.3.5. Proposed Solutions and Learning Outcomes

The findings of this study centered on the classroom indicate several educational considerations regarding the use of game-based digital platforms for vocabulary revision in university EFL environments. The results show that when used carefully, tools such as Kahoot, Bamboozle, and Blooket can boost student motivation and participation while preserving academic integrity.

First, game-based platforms should serve as supplementary tools rather than replacements for traditional vocabulary instruction. The findings indicate that these platforms are most effective when used during specific stages of lessons, such as warm-ups, reviews, or final activities. Short, focused gameplay sessions helped maintain students' attention and strengthened previously learned vocabulary, aligning with the notion that regular exposure improves vocabulary retention (Nation, 2001). Consequently, teachers are encouraged to deliberately incorporate game-based activities, ensuring that the game content is directly connected to the lesson objectives.

Second, the level of competition present in game-oriented platforms must be handled cautiously. Competition was demonstrated to improve energy and involvement for many students, there are still some problems about overemphasis on rankings or leaderboards, which could negatively affect those learners who are less self-assured or more susceptible to stress. Therefore, teachers must investigate collaborative strategies, emphasize collective achievements or turn the competition into an enjoyable process rather than a measurement of performance. These methods can reduce potential emotional influences and foster ongoing motivation, as shown by previous research of (Reinders & Wattana, 2015). on learner emotions in a digital environment.

Third, the study emphasizes the significance of involving all participants during vocabulary revision activities. Game- based platforms seem to reduce engagement obstacles by allowing students to answer by their own digital devices instead of speaking out loud. This function is advantageous in manty university classes where engagement can

be various. As a result, teachers can utilize these platforms to trigger quieter students to take part in the activities more, fostering a fairer and more vibrant classroom atmosphere.

Consequently, the results indicate that incorporating game-based platforms doesn't make big alterations to the course curriculum or need any technological investments from an institutional viewpoint. Many online platforms are readily available and work well with students' current devices. Conversely, effective execution depends mainly on the teaching choices made by instructors instead of the technology. Consequently, professional development programs can focus on helping teachers design effective game-based review activities that align with learning goals and student needs.

III. CONCLUSION

This study examined the use of game-based digital platforms such as Kahoot, Bamboozle, and Blooket for vocabulary revision tasks among EFL university students. The results indicate that integrating these can boost students' engagement and motivation in the classroom when combined with traditional teaching approaches. Game-based activities encouraged participation, particularly among students who typically took less part in conventional review methods. These platforms can create a more supportive environment by reducing the anxiety associated with public speaking, which promoted voluntary participation and encouraged risk-taking in language use. The student also reported more positive emotional reactions to vocabulary review, rating it as enjoyable and less stressful. Finally, diligent oversight of duties and a thorough education are required. While little competition might boost motivation, placing too much focus on rankings may have a negative impact on some students. While mild rivalry can boost motivation, placing too much focus on rankings may have a detrimental impact on some students.

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