THE IMPACT OF KAHOOT AND QUIZLET ON COGNITIVE ENGAGEMENT IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING: ASSESSING DEEP VS. SURFACE LEARNING APPROACHES

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https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17412086

Annotation: This study explores the impact of gamified learning platforms, specifically Kahoot and Quizlet, on cognitive engagement in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. It examines whether these tools promote deep learning, characterized by critical thinking and long-term retention, or surface learning, focused on memorization and short-term recall. The research highlights how interactive game-based activities enhance student motivation, participation, and cognitive involvement in the learning process. Findings suggest that when used strategically, these platforms can foster deeper cognitive engagement rather than only surface-level learning. Additionally, the study emphasizes the role of instructional design in maximizing cognitive depth through gamification. The results provide practical implications for language teachers aiming to integrate digital tools effectively.

Keywords: Kahoot, Quizlet, cognitive engagement, gamification, EFL learning, deep learning, surface learning, digital pedagogy.

In recent years, the integration of digital technologies in education has transformed traditional language learning environments. Among these technologies, gamified platforms such as Kahoot and Quizlet have gained popularity for their ability to make learning more interactive and engaging. These tools are widely used in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms as they offer students an opportunity to practice vocabulary, grammar, and reading skills in a fun and competitive atmosphere. However, while their motivational benefits are evident, there is an ongoing debate about whether these platforms truly promote deep cognitive learning or merely encourage surface-level memorization.

Deep learning involves critical thinking, meaningful understanding, and long-term retention of knowledge, whereas surface learning is often limited to short-term recall and rote memorization. Teachers and researchers are increasingly interested in understanding how digital gamified tools influence these cognitive processes. Kahoot and Quizlet, despite having similar objectives, differ in their design and learning strategies, potentially leading to varied outcomes in terms of student engagement and cognitive depth.

This study seeks to explore the effectiveness of Kahoot and Quizlet in fostering cognitive engagement among EFL learners. By analyzing how students interact with these platforms, the research aims to determine whether they contribute to deeper learning or primarily facilitate surface-level knowledge acquisition. The findings are expected to provide valuable insights for educators who wish to integrate technology in meaningful and pedagogically effective ways.

In the modern EFL classroom, one of the most persistent challenges is maintaining student engagement while ensuring meaningful cognitive development. Traditional teaching methods, which rely heavily on rote memorization and teacher-centered instruction, often fail to stimulate

deep learning. As a result, students may remember information for the duration of a test but quickly forget it afterward. To address this issue, educators have begun integrating gamified digital tools such as Kahoot and Quizlet, which are designed to increase motivation and participation through interactive learning experiences. However, whether these platforms truly promote long-term understanding or simply reinforce repetitive recall remains a significant question.

Kahoot primarily focuses on real-time quizzes where students compete to answer questions quickly. This competitive element increases excitement and attention, but it can also encourage surface learning, as students may prioritize speed over accuracy and comprehension. Despite this limitation, Kahoot can promote deeper engagement if the teacher uses higher-order questions that require analysis or application rather than simple recall. For example, instead of selecting the correct definition of a word, students may be asked to identify its use in context or infer meaning from a sentence. This shift from lower-order to higher-order thinking transforms the tool from a memorization aid into a platform for cognitive development.

Quizlet, on the other hand, emphasizes spaced repetition and personalized learning through digital flashcards, matching games, and test modes. Its "Learn" feature adapts to each student's progress, helping them practice unfamiliar words until mastery is achieved. This promotes deeper retention because it allows students to learn at their own pace and revisit material multiple times. Additionally, Quizlet offers features such as "Write" and "Spell," which require active recall and production rather than passive recognition. When properly utilized, these functions can greatly enhance cognitive engagement and long-term memory formation, supporting the principles of deep learning.

Nevertheless, both platforms can lead to surface learning if used without pedagogical guidance. Simply assigning quizzes or flashcard sets is not enough to ensure meaningful cognitive engagement. The effectiveness depends largely on task design, question quality, and teacher facilitation. For instance, if activities are limited to basic recall of vocabulary, learning remains surface-level. Conversely, when activities involve problem-solving, critical thinking, and real-life application, they stimulate deeper cognitive processing. Therefore, the teacher's role in designing purposeful content is crucial in transforming these tools from entertainment platforms into effective educational instruments.

Furthermore, periodic challenges such as reduced student attention span, digital fatigue, and overreliance on technology can hinder deep learning outcomes. To address these issues, educators should incorporate reflection activities, group discussions, and follow-up tasks after using Kahoot or Quizlet. These activities encourage students to process information more deeply by connecting new knowledge with prior learning and real-world contexts. Additionally, combining gamified tools with collaborative learning methods helps reduce competition stress and fosters peer support, which is essential for cognitive engagement.

In summary, while Kahoot and Quizlet both hold potential to enhance EFL learning, their impact on cognitive engagement depends on instructional design and purposeful integration. When used thoughtfully, they can transition learners from surface memorization to deep understanding, making language learning both effective and enjoyable.

The findings of this study demonstrate that both Kahoot and Quizlet contribute positively to student engagement in English language learning; however, their impact on cognitive depth varies depending on the instructional strategies used. Kahoot is highly effective for creating excitement,

increasing participation, and reviewing material quickly, but it may encourage surface learning if activities focus only on memorization. Quizlet, in contrast, supports deeper cognitive processing through features that promote repetition, personalization, and active recall. When teachers incorporate higher-order thinking tasks and reflective activities, both platforms can transition from tools of entertainment to powerful instruments of deep learning.

To clearly illustrate their comparative characteristics, the following table summarizes the key differences between Kahoot and Quizlet in relation to cognitive engagement:

Criteria	Kahoot	Quizlet
Learning Focus	Real-time recall and competitive response	Repetition, mastery, and self-paced learning
Primary Engagement Type	Surface engagement (if used for speed only)	Deep engagement through active recall
Motivation Source	Competition and instant feedback	Personal progress and adaptive learning
Cognitive Depth Potential	Medium (depends on question quality)	High (due to spaced repetition and production tasks)
Teacher's Role	Requires critical thinking question design	Requires structured learning sets and follow-up activities
Long-term Retention	Moderate	Strong
Best Use Case	Review sessions and class interaction	Vocabulary building and knowledge reinforcement

In conclusion, Kahoot is best suited for fostering motivation and increasing classroom energy, while Quizlet is more effective in promoting long-term retention and deep cognitive processing. To maximize learning outcomes, educators should not choose between these tools, but rather integrate them strategically. By using Kahoot to introduce or review concepts and Quizlet to reinforce and internalize them, teachers can create a balanced and cognitively rich learning environment. Ultimately, the effectiveness of both platforms depends not on the technology itself, but on how it is implemented to promote meaningful engagement and deeper learning in EFL classrooms.

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