University Students' Perception on the Use of Quizlet in ESL classes

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ESLクラスでのQuizletの使用に関する大学生の認識

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"While without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed."

David A. Wilkins

Abstract

This paper presents a study of the students' perception and use of Quizlet, a tool for vocabulary learning. Quizlet is an online learning tool comprising of various self-study modes. This study explores the following aspects of Quizlet use among university students who are majoring in liberal arts: (a) an attitude towards using Quizlet in language classes, (b) the usage of Quizlet. Overall students think that Quizlet was beneficial for their vocabulary learning, and almost half of the students were keen on using this application for their study in the future. Despite its potential to support vocabulary learning, students prefer tasks that were based not on recalling target words, but tasks based on recognition which are less effective for vocabulary acquisition. Although Quizlet is an effective tool for vocabulary learning, teachers should be aware what vocabulary strategies their students use and introduce the effective methods of vocabulary learning.

この論文は、語彙学習のためのツールであるQuizletに対する学生の認識と使用の研究を提示します。Quizletとは、さまざまな自習モードで構成されるオンライン学習ツールです。この研究では、リベラルアーツを専攻している大学生の間でのQuizletの使用に関する次の要素を調査します。(a) 言語クラス

でQuizletを使用することに対する態度、（b）Quizletの使用。全体的に学生は、Quizletとは語彙学習に有益であると考えており、学生のほぼ半数がこのアプリケーションを使用することに興味を持っていました。しかし、語彙学習をサポートする可能性があるにもかかわらず、学生は、対象の単語を思い出すことに基づくタスクではなく、語彙の習得にあまり効果的でない認識に基づくタスクを好みます。Quizletは語彙学習のための効果的なツールですが、教師は生徒が使用する語彙を認識し、語彙学習の効果的な方法を紹介する必要があります。

Introduction

Second language vocabulary acquisition is an essential component of foreign language learning as for the majority of ESL learners the ultimate goal of studying is to be able to communicate in a new language. Even if learners know grammar structures and basic patterns, the communication is impossible without words, of course non-verbal communication is still possible, but it is not the main target for the majority of language learners. In addition, Nation（2001）points out that mastering vocabulary can enhance other skills, such as listening, speaking, and writing because a learner can concentrate on higher level aspects of language usage without being hesitant about correct usage of the words. Therefore, teaching L2 vocabulary should be emphasized in language learning programs. Nowadays there are many ways to teach vocabulary, such as illustrations, using contrast, guessing from the context, eliciting, translation, drilling, and spelling. However, spending too much time on vocabulary learning in class is ineffective as there are many other activities that should be done during the class time that cannot be done individually, such as group discussion/ pair work or presentation. Thus vocabulary learning is usually done outside the class time, individually by students. Different students use different strategies for memorizing new vocabulary, such as using various mnemonic devises, writing and pronouncing the words multiple times, using the target words in sentences/ phrases, translation in L1, making word lists in their notebook, or creating flashcards. Nowadays, a number of vocabulary acquisition e-tools have been

developed, such as Lingro, Word Engine, Free Rice, Vocabulary Spelling City, WordSift, Padlet, as well as Quizlet which was released to the public in 2007. Quizlet claims, "It is the easiest way to study, practice and master whatever subject you're learning with over 60 million students owning their classes with Quizlet." The current study examines the usage of Quizlet among a sample of first-year and second-year students enrolled at a tertiary college.

Literature review

Vocabulary learning can be a time-consuming and tedious process, and for proper acquisition consistency in vocabulary learning is a must. Studies by Nation (2001) and Schmitt (2008) show that repetition or recycling of language is a necessary step for language acquisition. One approach to learning vocabulary can be named a passive approach when words are learned incidentally. However, for a learner it is necessary to encounter the words multiple times before learning can occur. This learning process can take much time of limited-term university-level language training because such passive noticing and learning occur too slowly. As Schmitt (2008) points out, the practice of explicitly repeating the vocabulary should be incorporated into a course in order to ensure sufficient vocabulary acquiring. Quizlet, one of the e-learning tools, can be used to enhance vocabulary learning, as it provides the users with sufficient number of repetitions thus ensuring reliable acquisition.

Recently a number of studies have been conducted on the use of Quizlet. The studies show that Quizlet has a positive effect on vocabulary acquisition. For example, studies by Dizon (2016), Montaner-Villalba (2019), Al-Malki (2020) found students' performances in vocabulary acquisition significantly increased after using Quizlet. Similarly, Platzer (2020) finds out that Quizlet has a positive influence on vocabulary acquisition. However, not all activities were equally valuable: more challenging recall tasks were significantly more contributing to vocabulary acquisition than just recognition tasks. Regarding the student's attitude to Quizlet, most research reported that learners liked

using it（Tran, 2018; Lander, 2016; Dizon, 2016; Chien, 2015）. Some studies have proved Quizlet has also increased learners autonomy（Kálecký, 2016; Nguyen Thi Hanh Hong, Nguyen Trong Du, 2021; Vaclavik, 2020）.

What is Quizlet?

Quizlet is a digital learning tool that contains a large number of study sets created by other users that range in topics. These study sets are free to use, so users can search and find the sets they are interested in, customize them and use them, or alternatively they can create their own sets. It is easy to use Quizlet, as it can be accessed either on the web or via a mobile app. Quizlet also supports many international keyboards, so students can add Japanese translation of the word together with its definition if they wish. Using Quizlet can be motivating for language learners, as the vocabulary learning can be done in a variety of ways: by using flashcards, quizzes, or games. In addition to the text, users can add images to the words. Also audio is included in the study materials, so the learners can check the pronunciation of the words they study.

Based on the created sets, Quizlet generates the following self-study activities or self-tests that are described below.

Flashcards mode

Studying with Flashcards mode is free. A user can sort the flashcards into *Still learning* and *Know* groups which makes it possible for the user to focus on the vocabulary they find challenging.

Spell

Spell mode is available to Quizlet Plus and Quizlet Plus for teachers subscribers. Also it is possible to study with limited access to *Spell* mode through *Learn* mode. *Spell* mode helps learners to practice spelling terms by prompting them to type what they hear. This type of activity is recognition-based.

Write

Users can write the words of the given definitions. This activity is for Quizlet Plus and Quizlet Plus for teachers subscribers with limited access to *Write* mode through *Learn* mode. This type of activity is recognition-based.

Learn

There are three task types that are available: flashcards, multiple choice, and typing. It can be easily customized. *Learn* task provide learners with a mixture of recognition and recall-based tasks.

Test

This mode includes four test methods: typing the answer, matching, multiple-choice, and true/false questions. Users can customize this activity: they can choose the number of items to be tested, de-select any of these choices or de-select images. *Test* mode is available for Quizlet Plus and Quizlet Plus for teacher subscribers. It is possible to use this mode only once for free. *Test* is a mixture of recognition and recall-based tasks.

Match

Match is a game like activity in which a learner races against the clock to match terms and definitions, and compete against others to get the top score. *Match* shows only six pairs per game, so for studying a larger set, a user plays several games to review all material. This type of activity is recalled-based. *Match* mode is free.

The study

The following research questions were examined in this study: 1) To what extent did the students make use of Quizlet outside of class? 2) What were the students' perceptions of Quizlet as a tool for learning L2 vocabulary? 3) What types of activates were the most preferable? 4) Would the students like to continue using this application after the course?

Methodology

Forty participants took part in this Quizlet-based study. For all classes, students were asked to bring a laptop or smartphone to perform Quizlet activities and take the on-line tests. The first ten minutes of each class were spent on the Quizlet activities, after each study unit a Quizlet test that included 20 questions was given to the students. The Quizlet flashcard sets were made by the researcher. The sets have both the words and their definitions, in some cases explanation of cultural context was given, as well as for the ease of understanding illustrations/pictures were also added. The students were encouraged to modify the study sets as they felt needed: they could add Japanese translation, synonyms, add/remove pictures, add phrases/sentences where a target word can be used, add any grammar notes.

A nine-item internet-based questionnaire was created by the researcher in order to learn the students' views of Quizlet. The survey was distributed by Google forms. The first two items of the questionnaire were related to the students' awareness of the importance of vocabulary in language learning, as well as their vocabulary study preferences. The subsequent seven items were based on their attitude/use of Quizlet.

Results and discussion

Q. 1 Do you think learning vocabulary is important?

The majority of the students (97.5%) think that vocabulary is important, with 85% answering that vocabulary is very important. That shows that students understand that vocabulary is essential to language learning because without sufficient vocabulary they cannot understand others or express their own ideas clearly.

Q. 2 How do you usually study vocabulary?

Many students (47%) think that translating words into Japanese and pronouncing a word multiple times are effective methods of memorizing the

words. 40% of the students think that using flashcards is a good method, while 35% of students believe that reading simplified texts (readers) is a good way to remember the words. As for memorizing words in context (making sentences/phrases) only 22% of the students used this way to study vocabulary. Finally, only 11% think using special textbooks for vocabulary learning is an efficient way to memorize the vocabulary. The results have clearly showed that students rely heavily on rather an unproductive method of learning the words – translation in their L1. While only some students use the effective way of vocabulary learning – memorizing the words in context.

Learning of isolated vocabulary item is certainly helpful for learning its meaning (or at least the main one), pronunciation, spelling, and forms. However, the main problem with this approach is that it does not help students with understanding how the words can be actually used. Learners need to know how words can be used contextually (Coxhead, 2008). Knowing only a Japanese equivalent is not enough as learners need to know typical collocations, the ways in which words regularly occur near each other (Diegnan et al., 1998). Throughout the course the students were constantly encouraged to use a dictionary of collocations to see how a word can be used, as well as they were motivated to use monolingual dictionaries for learners that provide simplified definitions with sample phrases/sentences where the word can be used.

Q. 3 What activities of Quizlet do you like the most?

The majority (49%) of students prefered *Flashcards,* 25% chose *Learn,* 18% chose *Test*, and only 7% chose *Match*. Of course *Flashcards* is the main, mostly used, activity of Quizlet, however, when students use only this activity they use their recognition skills, which is inferior to recalling skills in term of vocabulary learning. It would be more efficient to use *Learn* and *Test* tasks, as they are both recognition and recall-based tasks. Interestingly, *Match,* a fun and competitive game-like task, was not used as much as other study modes, as only 7% of students used it.

Q. 4 How often did you use Quizlet?

More than half of the students（57%）answered they used Quizlet only in a class, while 43% said they used Quizlet a few times a week. There were no students who used Quizlet every day or never. That results show that all students use Quizlet at least twice a week（as the class meetings were held twice a week）, thus Quizlet provided some vocabulary retention by this constant repetition.

Q. 5 Where did you mostly use Quizlet?

41% of students use Quizlet at home. This result shows that even it was not required from students to use Quizlet, they use it either as a tool for vocabulary learning, or as a method of preparing for their vocabulary test. 36% of students use it mostly as a part of classroom activities. Also 20% of students use it while commuting.

Q. 6 Do you think Quizlet helps with vocabulary learning?

The majority of students（90%）believe that Quizlet helped them with vocabulary learning, and 10% of the students are not so sure, as they chose the answer 'Maybe', and no one chose the answer 'No'. The results clearly suggest that the students found Quizlet as one of the ways that helped them with vocabulary learning.

Q. 7 Do you use Quizlet for other classes?

The majority of the students（72%）answered negatively. Although the students who participated in this study are majoring in two foreign languages, even if they think that Quizlet helps with the vocabulary acquisition, they do not use Quizlet for other courses（language or others）. One explanation is that they were required to use Quizlet as a part of their classroom activities, and the vocabulary tests were mainly based on the tests from Quizlet, so they were extrinsically motivated to use Quizlet for this course, but not for others. Another possible explanation is that the flashcards were already prepared by the researcher, so what the students had to do

was just to import them, slightly modified them if they wanted and used them. However, if the students have to make flashcards by themselves, it may seem to them as a time-consuming and mundane activity.

Q. 8 How did you modify the Quizlet sets?

More than half of the students (60%) answered they did not make any changes to the sets and used them as they were: a word and its definition. 32% of students added Japanese translation. Some students added pictures, comments, collocations. However, the number of the students who made changes that would facilitate more effective vocabulary acquisition was rather small, less than 2%.

Q. 9 Will you continue using Quizlet after this course?

More than half of the students (53%) were not sure that they would continue using Quizlet after this course. 45% who answered positively intended to continue using Quizlet for other courses. 2% of the students answered negatively, even if they agree that Quizlet is effective for vocabulary learning (as there were negative answer to Q. 6), they do not think it beneficial for them to use Quizlet.

Conclusion

In summary, Quizlet was viewed by the students as a useful, easy, and effective method for learning vocabulary. Almost half of the students showed their intention to use Quizlet in their future studies. However, it is necessary to mention that students chose the tasks that were less effective for vocabulary learning, as they prefer tasks that were based not on recalling target words, but tasks based on recognition. In addition, more explanation should be given to the students about the importance of learning words not in isolation. Learners should also know typical collocations, words that usually go together with the target words. Thus introducing good collocation dictionaries helps students use the words naturally and convincingly.

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