

Gamifying Language Learning: Unveiling the Motivational Power of Kahoot in ESL/EFL Classrooms

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ABSTRACT: The use of gamification in ESL/EFL settings is gaining increasing popularity due to its positive impact on the effectiveness of language classes, facilitated by the emergence of diverse learning tools. This research aims to explore the effects of gamification on students' motivation and to examine how a popular gamified learning tool—Kahoot!—contributes to learner motivation in both face-to-face and online settings. A content analysis of 22 studies from the past five years was conducted. The findings revealed no significant difference in motivational effects between these two modes of learning. Kahoot!'s ability to motivate students was identified under key themes of competition, interaction, and collaboration. One of the most significant outcomes of the research is its challenge to the prevailing assumption that gamification primarily boosts extrinsic motivation in the short term. Contrary to this belief, the findings indicate that Kahoot! can have a profound influence on students' intrinsic motivation. By transforming the learning process into an enjoyable, game-like experience, Kahoot! helps to shift students' perceptions of learning from a task-oriented activity to one of discovery and exploration. This shift fosters sustained interest and motivation, encouraging students to take ownership of their learning and engage with educational content in meaningful ways. Moreover, by creating a positive association with learning, Kahoot! not only boosts immediate classroom motivation but also helps cultivate a lasting mindset of curiosity and self-driven learning. This makes it a valuable tool not just for short-term engagement, but for shaping students' long-term attitudes toward education.

INTRODUCTION

Gamified learning applications have significantly transformed the dynamics of English language teaching in countries where English is not the official language (Huseinović, 2024; Zhang & Hasim, 2023; Wang, 2023). These tools shift the focus from the traditional emphasis on grammatical forms to using the language for real communication. By integrating game-like elements, such tools promote a more interactive and engaging learning experience, which fosters deeper student involvement (Al-Dosakee & Ozdamli, 2021). What was once regarded as a tedious and repetitive process has been reimagined into an exciting, immersive experience, akin to playing a game (Rahmani, 2020). The intrinsic appeal of game mechanics naturally draws students into the learning process, often without their conscious awareness.

My experience as an EFL teacher in Vietnam reinforces these observations. I witnessed firsthand how students became eager to participate in class activities when gamified tools were integrated. The use of games not only boosted their motivation but also led to noticeable improvements in their language skills. The cooperative nature of these games fostered collaboration and communication among students, enhancing their learning outcomes in a way that traditional methods often struggled to achieve.

Among the many gamified learning applications available, one of the most prominent is “Kahoot!” (Kıyançiçek & Uzun, 2022). Over the years, I have experienced Kahoot! from both perspectives—as a student and as a teacher—and I have seen the profound impact it has on learner engagement and motivation. Its competitive yet collaborative design, combined with the immediate feedback it provides, has made it a staple in many English classrooms worldwide (Truong & Dinh, 2024). The popularity of Kahoot! lies in its ability to make learning feel less like a classroom task and more like a shared, enjoyable experience, ultimately contributing to better language acquisition and a more positive attitude toward learning (Benhadj et al., 2019; Marsa et al., 2021; Wirani et al., 2022).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Self-Determination Theory

Students are motivated by different factors, leading to varying levels of performance. According to Self-Determination Theory (SDT), the motivation driving students' performance is rooted in their need for growth and fulfillment of three basic psychological needs: competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Competence refers to the desire to effectively engage with one's environment by tackling challenges that slightly surpass current abilities and by practicing to enhance skills. Autonomy is the

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need to experience choice, willingness, and a sense of volition in one's actions. When students perceive themselves as the originators of their actions and see their behaviors as aligned with their personal interests and values, they experience autonomy. Relatedness is the need to establish close, secure emotional connections with others and to feel a sense of belonging within a group, motivating individuals to adopt harmonious ways of interacting with others.

Ideally, students are intrinsically motivated, driven by personal interest and enjoyment rather than external pressures or rewards. Intrinsically motivated students engage in learning for the inherent satisfaction it brings, such as reading independently or participating in activities that provide a sense of psychological freedom (Komiyama & McMorris, 2017). Intrinsic motivation is seen as a natural part of human behavior, reflecting a fundamental desire to explore, seek challenges, and learn. This natural tendency is crucial for cognitive and social development and serves as a key source of enjoyment in the learning process (Ryan & Deci, 2000). When students are given choices, their emotions are acknowledged, and they have opportunities for self-direction, their intrinsic motivation is fostered, enhancing both autonomy and competence.

On the other hand, external rewards, threats, deadlines, and imposed goals can weaken intrinsic motivation by shifting the perceived source of control to external factors, thereby reducing autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2000). This shift can lead to extrinsic motivation, where behavior is driven by external incentives rather than by inherent interest. SDT identifies different types of extrinsic motivation, varying in their level of autonomy. These range from external regulation, where behavior is controlled by external demands or rewards, to more autonomous forms like introjected regulation, identified regulation, and integrated regulation (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Externally regulated behaviors are the least autonomous, often driven by external demands or rewards, which can make individuals feel controlled and disconnected. For example, a student might complete homework solely to earn stickers, rather than out of genuine interest in the subject. Introjected regulation represents a more internalized but still controlled form of extrinsic motivation, where individuals act to avoid guilt or to boost self-esteem, such as when a student works on a project mainly to receive praise from teachers and peers, motivated by a desire to maintain a positive self-image. Identified regulation is a more autonomous form of extrinsic motivation, where individuals consciously value a behavior and recognize it as personally important, such as a student choosing to learn a second language because they see the professional opportunities it offers. The most autonomous form is integrated regulation, where the identified behaviors are fully assimilated into one's values and needs.

Kahoot! as a gamification platform

Kahoot! is an adaptable platform designed to boost classroom engagement and interaction through the use of technology. Since its launch in 2013, Kahoot! has revolutionized traditional quizzes by turning them into interactive, game-like experiences suitable for both online and in-person learning environments. The platform operates a two-tier model, offering both free and paid versions, with the free version being widely accessible to educators. It allows teachers to conduct real-time quizzes, discussions, and surveys, with students participating via smartphones, tablets, or computers. This not only saves time and resources but also fosters a more collaborative classroom atmosphere (Artati, 2021).

One of the Kahoot!'s key advantages is its ability to blend game-based learning with gamification, making it an effective educational tool for learners of all ages. Game-based learning focuses on incidental learning through gameplay, while gamification involves incorporating game elements into non-game contexts to engage students in purposeful learning. By combining these approaches, Kahoot! boosts student motivation, turning learning goals into competitive challenges that students are eager to meet. The platform's use of visuals, sound, and social interaction further enhances its effectiveness, making it a popular choice for fostering motivation and engagement (Allran et al., 2021).

Kahoot! also promotes increased student interaction, a critical aspect of student-centered learning. Unlike traditional quizzes, where students often work individually and in silence, Kahoot! Creates a dynamic, collaborative environment where students can interact with one another's responses in real time, whether in person or online. This interaction not only makes learning more enjoyable but also improves information retention, benefiting students across various academic levels through its engaging format (Ergulec & Misirli, 2022; Thach & Diem, 2022).

Moreover, research consistently highlights that the "fun" factor of Kahoot! significantly enhances student motivation and learning outcomes. Students who may struggle with conventional learning methods often find themselves more engaged and motivated in the gamified environment that Kahoot! provides. This increased motivation leads to better academic performance across diverse student groups, making Kahoot! an invaluable tool in a variety of classroom settings (Nurhadianti & Pratolo, 2020; Zajda, 2018).

Gamification elements in Kahoot!

According to Game Element Hierarchy proposed by Werbach & Hunter (2020), the gamification elements in Kahoot! Can be categorized into three primary dimensions: dynamics, mechanics, and components, each playing a crucial role in the overall learning experience.

Components in Kahoot! are the specific elements that contribute to the game's structure and objectives. Leaderboards are a prominent feature, displaying the top performers in real-time and motivating students to improve their rankings. Points are awarded for correct answers and the speed at which they are given, incentivizing both accuracy and quick thinking. The reward system with

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audio and points have a significant impact as a positive stimuli (Stahl, 2021). At the end of the game round, students are ranked based on their performance, with the top three scores prominently displayed on the screen in a podium-like format. This ranking system not only adds an element of competition but also serves as a motivational tool, encouraging students to strive for excellence. The visual presentation of the top three scorers on a virtual stage creates a sense of achievement and recognition, which can boost students' confidence and reinforce their learning efforts.

Mechanics in Kahoot! refer to the rules and processes that drive gameplay. Challenges are presented to students in the form of questions that test their knowledge, making the learning process more stimulating and engaging. Competition is a central mechanic, with students striving to achieve the highest score on the leaderboard, which serves as a strong motivational factor. Kahoot! also promotes cooperation in its team mode, where students work together to answer questions, encouraging teamwork and collective problem-solving. Feedback is provided immediately after each question, allowing students to learn from their mistakes and reinforcing correct answers. Chance also plays a role in the game, with elements such as random question order or bonus points adding unpredictability and maintaining student interest.

Dynamics in Kahoot! involve elements that shape the overall structure and emotional engagement of the game. Progression is a key dynamic where students advance through different levels or rounds of questions, providing them with a clear sense of improvement and achievement. Emotions are another significant dynamic, as Kahoot! creates an environment of excitement and anticipation through real-time feedback, countdown timers, and a competitive atmosphere, which heighten student engagement. Additionally, relationships are fostered within the game, particularly in team-based quizzes where students collaborate, thereby enhancing the interpersonal connections and sense of community (Le Nguyen et al., 2021).

By integrating these gamification elements within the dynamics, mechanics, and components framework, Kahoot! effectively transforms traditional learning activities into an engaging, interactive, and competitive experience for students.

Kahoot! application in online classes versus face to face learning

Kahoot! has proven to be an effective tool in both online and face-to-face learning environments, offering unique benefits that enhance student engagement and learning outcomes in different settings.

In face-to-face classrooms, Kahoot! Serves as a dynamic platform that boosts student motivation and participation. This interactive nature of the quizzes, which can be administered at various points during the lesson, allows students to engage actively with the material (Boden & Hart, 2018).

During online classes, especially in the context of the COVID-19 lockdowns, Kahoot! demonstrated its versatility and effectiveness in maintaining student attention and motivation. According to research by Martín-Sómer et al. (2021), the use of Kahoot! during online sessions helped keep students engaged, which in turn improved their learning outcomes and final grades. The platform's adaptability to online learning environments, through video conferencing tools like Zoom or Microsoft Teams, allows for seamless integration into remote teaching. Students can participate in Kahoot! quizzes in real-time, just as they would in a physical classroom, benefiting from the same interactive and competitive elements that drive engagement and learning. The ability to create and share custom quizzes or use pre-existing ones that further supports teachers in delivering comprehensive and relevant content, ensuring that the learning experience remains interactive and effective, even from a distance.

How Kahoot! impacts ESL students' motivation

Kahoot! has emerged as a valuable tool in enhancing student motivation and engagement in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. Research by Artati (2021) and Darma et al. (2022) demonstrates that Kahoot! effectively boosts student motivation through its interactive and game-based features. This tool creates a dynamic learning environment that captivates students' attention, promoting active participation and making learning more enjoyable. By leveraging its competitive quizzes and instant feedback mechanisms, Kahoot! fosters a more engaging and motivating classroom atmosphere.

In addition to its motivational benefits, Kahoot! has been shown to enhance learning outcomes. Öden et al. (2021) highlight that Kahoot! improves students' attitudes towards EFL courses and reduces exam anxiety, although these effects may not always be statistically significant. Similarly, Kamarulzaman and Abdul Mutalib (2023) emphasize that Kahoot! contributes to better language proficiency by making grammar learning more engaging and stimulating. This dual role as both a motivational tool and a learning enhancer underscores Kahoot!'s effectiveness in various educational settings.

Kahoot! also serves as a practical assessment tool, allowing teachers to evaluate students' knowledge through quiz results and provide immediate feedback (Artati, 2021). This capability supports the monitoring of students' progress and helps in identifying areas that need further attention, making it a valuable resource for both formative and summative assessments.

However, Kahoot! is not without its limitations. Yunus et al. (2019) and Chiang (2020) note that the competitive nature of the platform may lead students to focus more on winning than on learning, potentially detracting from the educational value of the tool. Furthermore, Öden et al. (2021) caution that extreme competition could negatively impact learning if not managed carefully. Another significant challenge is Kahoot!'s dependency on a stable internet connection, which can be a barrier for students with unreliable access (Kiiashko & Yashkina, 2021).

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Additionally, Chiang (2020) explores gender differences in students' perceptions of Kahoot!, suggesting that these differences can affect how the tool is utilized. This indicates that a one-size-fits-all approach may not be effective, and tailoring Kahoot! usage to address these differences could enhance its impact.

METHOD & METHODOLOGY

This qualitative research emphasizes the richness of contextual settings, bridging the researcher's personal experiences with the study focus (Yin, 2015). Qualitative research is particularly powerful in understanding the meanings people construct, offering in-depth insights into educational phenomena, considering individual cases, and accounting for dynamic contexts (Mulisa, 2022). This study employs a constructivist paradigm, which seeks to uncover the complexity of views to better understand the world in which individuals live and work (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Within this perspective, people construct their subjective meanings through social interactions, historical influences, and cultural norms (Creswell & Poth, 2016). According to Creswell (2009), given the varied meanings and understandings that individuals hold, the researcher must remain reflexive to accurately interpret the analyzed data. Therefore, my background in EFL teaching will shape the interpretation of the data.

Content Analysis

Content analysis is a method used to make replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful content) to the context in which they are used (Krippendorff, 2018). By examining trends and patterns in documents, content analysis allows researchers to draw meaningful conclusions from both the text and its context (White et al., 2006).

For this research, data was sourced from Google Scholar, a comprehensive database that indexes scholarly articles across various disciplines. Google Scholar was chosen due to its extensive access to peer-reviewed journals, conference papers, and other academic resources pertinent to educational technology and ESL learning.

The search focused on articles published in the last five years, written in English, and containing one or more key search terms relevant to the research topic. Key search phrases included various combinations of terms such as 'Kahoot!,' 'ESL students,' 'motivation,' 'online learning,' and 'face-to-face learning.' These terms were adjusted to ensure a thorough search across different contexts and settings.

Each article identified through Google Scholar was meticulously reviewed for relevance to the research question. Articles were selected based on their focus on the use of Kahoot!, motivational aspects of learning, and the comparison between online and face-to-face environments. A total of 22 articles were reviewed in detail, with insights from these articles analyzed and synthesized to contribute to the research findings and discussion. The full list of analyzed journal articles is provided in [Appendix](#).

Analytical Process

Thematic analysis is a qualitative research method that systematically describes and provides insights into the phenomenon under study by interpreting data, coding, and identifying themes (Downe-Wambolt, 1992; Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). This approach was selected because it is an effective technique for making valid and replicable inferences from texts, helping to connect them to their contextual use (Krippendorff, 2013). Thematic analysis was deemed the most suitable method to identify themes that explain the effects of Kahoot on motivation in ESL students in both online and face-to-face learning environments, based on feedback from students and teachers.

Thematic analysis involves identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A systematic process is essential to capture enough detail to interpret the various aspects of the research topic. Naeem et al. (2023) outline a six-stage process for analyzing, coding, and categorizing data into themes, allowing the researcher to draw and synthesize connections between the data and the research question. The six stages, as applied to this study, are outlined below:

Step 1: Familiarization with the Data

The first stage of thematic analysis involves transcribing and thoroughly reviewing the data. Researchers immerse themselves in the content to identify preliminary themes and key sections, selecting quotes that vividly illustrate the data and capture a range of perspectives relevant to the research goals. This study begins by carefully reading and re-reading the collected data, including student survey responses, observational notes, and interview transcripts, while noting initial impressions and potential patterns related to motivation in online and face-to-face learning contexts.

Step 2: Selection of Keywords

This phase involves systematically coding interesting features of the data across the entire dataset, applying labels to segments of text relevant to the research question. For instance, codes such as "engagement," "competition," "autonomy," and "interaction" may be used to reflect different aspects of motivation as experienced by students using Kahoot in either learning environment.

Step 3: Coding

In the third step, initial codes are grouped into broader themes that capture significant patterns in the data. Keywords play a critical role in this process, serving as the foundation of the analysis and enabling the transformation of raw data into meaningful, organized

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units. Themes generated from keywords might include "enhanced participation," "peer collaboration," and "learning satisfaction," each representing different dimensions of how Kahoot influences motivation in the two learning settings.

Step 4: Theme Development

Theme development involves reviewing and refining the themes to ensure they accurately represent the data. This includes checking whether the themes align with both the coded extracts and the entire dataset. These themes are not just repetitive elements but rather patterned meanings that connect the research questions with the data. Adjustments may be made to merge, split, or discard themes that do not sufficiently capture the data's essence.

Step 5: Conceptualization through Interpretation of Keywords, Codes, and Themes

This step involves defining the essence of each theme and determining what aspect of the data each theme captures. Clear and descriptive names are assigned to each theme to convey their significance in relation to the research question. For example, a theme named "Engagement Through Competition" might describe how Kahoot's competitive elements differently affect student motivation in online versus face-to-face settings.

Step 6: Development of Conceptual Model

The final step involves compiling a report that presents a coherent narrative on how Kahoot influences ESL students' motivation across online and face-to-face environments. This includes detailed analysis and examples that demonstrate how the identified themes are linked to the overall research question.

This thematic analysis will provide a nuanced understanding of the motivational impacts of Kahoot in different learning environments, contributing to a broader understanding of its effectiveness in ESL education.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The use of Kahoot! as a gamified learning tool in English language classrooms has gained significant popularity over the past decade. Due to its gamified nature, it has the potential to enhance both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation over time. The integration of technology, particularly gamification elements, in educational settings presents an ongoing opportunity for educators to explore and leverage. To gain deeper insights into how Kahoot! fosters motivation in English language learners, it is essential to examine key factors. The thematic areas identified in this context include competitiveness, interaction, and collaboration.

COMPETITIVENESS

Competitiveness is a key factor in enhancing student motivation that Kahoot has successfully made the most out of. The platform's competitive elements—such as real-time scoring, leaderboards, and time-limited quizzes—create an engaging and challenging environment (Saari & Varjonen, 2021). These features drive students to outperform their peers and improve their individual performance.

While competition is often associated with extrinsic motivation because it revolves around external rewards, many studies argue that it also fosters intrinsic motivation. This shift from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation occurs as students internalize the value of the task itself, not just the outcome. In the case of Kahoot, which initially serves as an extrinsic motivator by offering scores and rankings, the tool has the potential to promote intrinsic motivation over time (Korkmaz & Öz, 2021). Kahoot's gamified elements may initially appeal to external desires, like outperforming peers or earning high scores, it gradually builds a deeper, more personal connection to the learning process. Starting from the basic intuition to compete, Kahoot creates opportunities for students to develop positive perceptions towards learning English (Ahmed et al., 2022; Korkmaz & Öz, 2021). The intense excitement generated by competition also plays a crucial role in sustaining intrinsic motivation (Alawadhi & Abu-Ayyash, 2021). This competitive dynamic encourages students to see their progress as a personal achievement, which later promotes a more intrinsic motivation to keep learning. When students feel a sense of accomplishment after improving their quiz scores or climbing the leaderboard, they start associating these successes with their personal effort and growth, rather than just the competitive outcome. This shift also supports long-term engagement with the learning material (España-Delgado, 2023).

Moreover, competition in Kahoot is believed to create positive pressure, which plays a crucial role in sustaining students' engagement and motivation. The platform's immediate feedback and ranking system after each question generates a sense of urgency and excitement, keeping students focused and alert (Alawadhi & Abu-Ayyash, 2021). This type of pressure is not simply stress-inducing but is framed as constructive. The sense of competition it generates encourages students to push their boundaries, tackle difficult content, and view mistakes as learning opportunities rather than setbacks. When students receive immediate feedback—whether positive or critical—it allows them to reflect on their knowledge and quickly correct errors, making learning more immediate and impactful (Kim, 2019; Kasap, 2023; Yürük, 2020). The leaderboard system in Kahoot, as explored by Saari and Varjonen (2021), is another key gamification element that amplifies the competitive atmosphere in the classroom. The rankings motivate students to improve not just their accuracy but also their speed, as they strive to perform better in each round. This focus on both precision and quick thinking promotes a deeper commitment to the learning material, as students are driven to master it in

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order to climb higher on the leaderboard. This competitive dynamic can lead students to not only engage more actively during the lesson but also review and reinforce the content outside of class to maintain or improve their ranking.

Kahoot's use of a Student Response System (SRS) reinforces active student engagement by allowing learners to take a more hands-on role in their performance. The competitive element, where students appear on the leaderboard after each question, motivates them to take charge of their learning and remain engaged throughout the session (Kim, 2019; Kohnke & Moorhouse, 2022). This feature helps students not only focus on their own progress but also fosters a sense of accomplishment when their efforts are recognized on the podium. Additionally, this immediate recognition can improve confidence and encourage more active participation over time.

The instant feedback and leaderboard rankings provided by Kahoot significantly drive students to enhance their vocabulary recall and retention. Instant feedback, a core feature of Kahoot, allows students to receive immediate responses to their answers during quizzes. This rapid response mechanism is crucial for reinforcing learning as it enables students to quickly identify and correct errors, which helps solidify their understanding of new vocabulary. By immediately showing whether an answer is correct or incorrect, students can learn from their mistakes and reinforce their knowledge right away, leading to more effective retention of new words (Ahmed et al., 2022; Saari & Varjonen, 2021).

In addition to fostering retention, the competitive elements in Kahoot have been directly linked to improvements in academic performance across various language skills. Studies by Alharthi (2020), Ali and AbdAlgane (2022), and Idris et al. (2020) show that the motivation to outperform peers in a competitive setting plays a key role in enhancing students' mastery of specific language skills, including vocabulary recall, grammar usage, and reading comprehension. This competitive drive pushes students to not only engage with the content more actively but also to seek out ways to improve their performance in these areas. For instance, in the case of vocabulary recall, students are motivated by the desire to score higher on quizzes and outperform their peers. This pressure encourages them to review and memorize new words more diligently, resulting in stronger vocabulary acquisition.

When it comes to grammar usage, the competition in Kahoot drives students to focus on accuracy and precision. As students answer questions in a timed environment, they are motivated to internalize grammatical rules and apply them correctly, knowing that mistakes will affect their rankings. This encourages students to become more mindful of grammar patterns and structures, improving their ability to use them correctly in both written and spoken contexts.

However, there are drawbacks to the use of competition in Kahoot, particularly regarding its impact on student well-being and engagement. Mahbub (2020) cautions that while competition can be a powerful motivator for some students, it can also induce anxiety and stress for others. Students who struggle with the pressure of timed quizzes or those who consistently find themselves at the lower end of the leaderboard may experience feelings of inadequacy and frustration. These negative emotions can diminish their confidence, leading to a decrease in motivation to participate actively in class (Kim, 2019). Instead of feeling empowered by competition, these students may perceive it as a source of discouragement, which could ultimately undermine their overall learning experience.

Competitiveness in Kahoot acts as a double-edged sword in ESL/EFL learning environments. On one hand, it boosts student motivation, engagement, and performance by tapping into their intrinsic desire for achievement and peer recognition. On the other hand, it may increase anxiety for some students, highlighting the need for educators to manage the balance between competition and support. By fostering both individual and collaborative competitiveness, Kahoot proves to be a dynamic tool for enhancing learning outcomes in a gamified classroom.

Finally, it is important to consider that competitiveness does not exist in isolation. Its effectiveness is tied to the interactive nature of the platform.

INTERACTION

The platform fosters different types of interactions, including peer-to-peer, student-to-teacher, and student-to-content interactions. These interactions play an essential role in creating an active learning environment, where students are more involved in the learning process and are able to work collectively to achieve better outcomes.

Peer-to-Peer Interaction

One of Kahoot's most significant contributions is its ability to foster peer-to-peer interaction within the classroom. The platform's competitive and multiplayer nature encourages students to engage with one another, discussing answers, sharing strategies, and celebrating successes. This social aspect promotes a collaborative atmosphere where informal discussions about the material become a natural part of the learning experience (Alawadhi & Abu-Ayyash, 2021; Kıyançık & Uzun, 2022). Through these interactions, students not only enhance their comprehension of the content but also develop a sense of community and belonging, which can increase their motivation and enthusiasm for learning.

Kahoot's structure of friendly competition further supports this peer interaction, as students are motivated to learn from one another through cooperative experiences. The shared goal of answering questions correctly fosters both competition and collaboration, which can enhance language skills and other learning outcomes (Aidoun et al., 2022; Ahmed et al., 2022; Husin & Azmuddin, 2022; Idris et al., 2020). By working together and exchanging knowledge, students reinforce their understanding in a way that

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complements traditional teaching methods, while simultaneously developing social skills and peer connections (Ahmed et al., 2022; Aidoune et al., 2022).

Additionally, Kahoot provides a sense of psychological safety for students who may feel hesitant to participate in traditional classroom settings. The anonymity it offers allows students to "hide" behind their screens temporarily, enabling them to choose answers without fear of judgment or being singled out by the teacher (Alawadhi & Abu-Ayyash, 2021; Kim, 2019; Kohnke & Moorhouse, 2022). This feature empowers more introverted or insecure students to engage fully, reducing the pressure associated with verbal responses in front of peers and making the learning experience more inclusive.

In online classrooms, peer-to-peer interaction can be more limited due to physical separation and technological constraints. However, studies indicate that Kahoot successfully overcomes these barriers by providing a complete collaborative experience, even in virtual environments (España-Delgado, 2023; Husin & Azmuddin, 2022; Kiiashko & Yashkina, 2021). The platform's capacity to support group work and student collaboration in both in-person and online settings underscores its versatility as an educational tool, making it an effective method for fostering peer engagement across different learning contexts.

Through these mechanisms, Kahoot not only enhances peer interaction and comprehension but also contributes to a more positive, inclusive, and motivating classroom environment.

Student-to-Teacher Interaction

Kahoot facilitates enhanced student-teacher interaction by enabling educators to monitor real-time responses and provide immediate feedback (Mahbub, 2020; Kasap, 2023). This feature allows teachers to quickly gauge students' comprehension and adapt their instruction accordingly, leading to more targeted learning experiences (Sinnivasagam & Hua, 2023). The real-time feedback loop not only helps clarify misunderstandings promptly but also fosters a deeper connection between students and teachers, as students receive personalized, responsive input throughout the learning process (Alawadhi & Abu-Ayyash, 2021; Mahbub, 2020; Yürük, 2019).

The interactive nature of Kahoot encourages dynamic communication in the classroom. By breaking the ice, it promotes participation from even the most hesitant students, encouraging them to ask more questions and share opinions during gameplay. This environment makes the classroom more inclusive and participatory, particularly in settings where students may initially be reluctant to engage (Kiiashko & Yashkina, 2021).

Incorporating Kahoot into lessons also supports differentiated learning, as educators can adapt the content to suit various levels of proficiency, ensuring that all students remain engaged and challenged. By providing immediate feedback and opportunities for self-assessment, Kahoot helps learners reflect on their own understanding, fostering a more student-centered learning environment.

Student-to-Content Interaction

Another kind of interaction in the classroom that Kahoot fosters is the direct engagement between students and the content. Kahoot presents content in a dynamic and interactive way, making it more engaging and lively compared to traditional textbook presentations.

Unlike passive reception of information, Kahoot's format encourages active participation, requiring students to interact with the material by answering questions in real time. This dynamic engagement reinforces learning through repetition and the practical application of knowledge (Kasap, 2023).

Features like time-bound questions and instant feedback compel students to actively process the information rather than simply memorizing it (Saari & Varjonen, 2021). This type of engagement leads to higher retention rates and a deeper understanding of key language concepts (Ahmed et al., 2022; Aidoune et al., 2022; Ali & AbdAlgane, 2022; Korkmaz & Öz, 2021).

The interactive, game-based structure of Kahoot also encourages repeated exposure to challenging topics such as grammar and vocabulary, which enhances mastery over time. By gamifying the learning process, Kahoot promotes continuous engagement with the content, increasing students' motivation to revisit difficult areas until they achieve fluency (Alharthi, 2020). This approach transforms what might otherwise be considered dry or complex material into an engaging and rewarding learning experience.

Kahoot's design not only promotes student interaction with peers but also facilitates deep engagement with the content itself (Alawadhi & Abu-Ayyash, 2021). The quiz format, particularly in vocabulary instruction, has been found to improve student-content interaction significantly. Rojabi et al. (2022) argue that using Kahoot quizzes in vocabulary lessons enhances students' grasp of the material, as evidenced by improvements in exam scores. This suggests that integrating quizzes as part of content delivery can be an effective strategy for reinforcing knowledge and ensuring students' active involvement with the learning material.

COLLABORATION

Learners have different preferences when it comes to learning styles—some thrive in group settings, while others prefer working independently. Nevertheless, it's clear that group collaboration tends to motivate students to work together to complete tasks, with peer learning being an equally effective approach.

Kahoot, as a game-based learning tool, fosters opportunities for collaboration, where students share knowledge and strategies to succeed. In this context, teamwork and peer learning become critical for promoting deeper understanding and cultivating a sense of

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community. This collaboration can be further examined through sub-themes such as how teamwork, social learning, and peer interaction contribute to increased motivation and engagement in the classroom.

Team-based learning

Kahoot's team-based features play a significant role in enhancing student motivation through engagement and collaboration. The platform's interactive nature, particularly in its team modes, encourages students to work together, discuss answers, and make collective decisions. This collaborative decision-making process helps students develop communication skills as they justify their choices and share diverse perspectives (Ahmed et al., 2022; Yürük, 2020). Through this exchange, students gain a deeper understanding of the material while fostering mutual respect and confidence within the team.

One of the key factors that boosts motivation is the enjoyment students find in working with their peers. Collaboration not only makes the learning experience more engaging but also creates a sense of shared responsibility. When students recognize the benefits of teamwork, they are more likely to stay motivated and show increased interest in participating in similar tasks in the future. The accountability to peers in a team setting often leads to higher levels of participation, as students feel driven to contribute meaningfully to the group's success (Ahmed et al., 2022).

Research shows that students perceive Kahoot as a tool that fosters collaboration, providing a supportive environment where every team member can contribute (Mahbub, 2020; Korkmaz & Öz, 2021; Sinnivasagam & Hua, 2023). This sense of shared responsibility and collective achievement enhances student motivation and encourages them to focus on learning outcomes (Ali & AbdAlgane, 2022; Kiiashko & Yashkina, 2021). The team-based play in Kahoot cultivates a collaborative and engaging classroom atmosphere, motivating students to engage actively and work together toward shared goals (Alawadhi & Abu-Ayyash, 2021).

Peer-Assisted Learning and Social Learning

Kahoot promotes both peer-assisted learning and social learning, creating a collaborative and supportive environment where students help each other grasp complex concepts. In peer-assisted learning, stronger students naturally assist their peers during gameplay, explaining ideas in more relatable ways than traditional teacher-led instruction (Kasap, 2023). This peer-to-peer support enhances understanding, as students often gain clearer insights when concepts are explained by their classmates. The cooperative atmosphere fostered by Kahoot encourages students to seek help from one another, promoting a culture of collaboration and shared responsibility (Yürük, 2019). This form of learning leads to improved retention, as students are more likely to remember material they have discussed and explained within their groups.

In addition to peer-assisted learning, Kahoot taps into social learning and constructivist learning theories, emphasizing the importance of learning through observation, interaction, and collaboration (Alawadhi & Abu-Ayyash, 2021; Alharthi, 2020). The platform's game-based exercises, particularly in vocabulary learning, create opportunities for social interaction as students work together to find the best responses. This collaborative process not only reinforces language skills, such as vocabulary recall and grammar, but also reduces anxiety by shifting the focus from individual performance to group success (Ahmed et al., 2022). The social nature of Kahoot helps students feel supported and fosters an inclusive learning environment where they are more comfortable participating.

Working in groups also encourages students to challenge each other's thinking, enhancing critical thinking skills and providing opportunities for clarification of misunderstandings. This dynamic interaction is especially beneficial in language learning, where students can actively apply their knowledge during real-time discussions. Through these collaborative efforts, students not only improve their linguistic abilities but also develop a sense of camaraderie, which boosts engagement and motivation to succeed.

LIMITATIONS

Despite the valuable insights gained from this study, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the content analysis was based on a relatively small sample of 22 studies conducted within the past five years. While these studies provide a broad overview of how Kahoot impacts motivation in ESL/EFL contexts, the limited number of sources may not fully capture the nuances of its effects across diverse educational settings. Expanding the scope of research to include a larger pool of studies could provide a more comprehensive understanding.

Second, the research primarily focused on Kahoot as a single gamified tool, and while it is a popular choice in educational contexts, it represents only one aspect of gamification in language learning. Other platforms, such as Quizizz, Quizlet, Duolingo, may offer different affordances and limitations that were not explored in this study.

Third, the research does not address specific variations in student demographics, such as age, proficiency level, cultural background, or individual learning preferences. These factors can significantly influence how students respond to gamified learning environments. Future research could benefit from a more detailed examination of how these variables impact the effectiveness of Kahoot in motivating learners.

Finally, the research predominantly examined studies in face-to-face and online settings, but it did not account for hybrid learning environments, which have become increasingly prevalent. Exploring how Kahoot functions in blended learning contexts would provide a more complete picture of its role in modern classrooms.

CONCLUSION

The paper highlights the significant role that gamified learning tools, particularly Kahoot, play in enhancing student motivation in ESL/EFL settings. By fostering a dynamic and interactive environment, Kahoot transforms the traditional language learning process into an engaging experience that captivates students' attention. The platform's ability to encourage competition, interaction, and collaboration has been shown to significantly boost both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, facilitating a deeper connection to the material and a more enjoyable learning experience overall.

One of the key findings from this study is that Kahoot's impact on student motivation is consistent across both face-to-face and online settings, underscoring its versatility and adaptability in diverse learning environments. The evidence suggests that Kahoot is not only effective in driving short-term engagement through competition but also has the potential to foster intrinsic motivation, helping students develop a lifelong interest in language learning.

Furthermore, the collaborative features of Kahoot, such as team modes and peer-assisted learning, contribute to a sense of community and shared responsibility among students. This social aspect of the platform aligns with constructivist and social learning theories, reinforcing the importance of learning through interaction with peers. However, while the platform promotes inclusivity and teamwork, educators must remain mindful of potential challenges, such as ensuring all students feel supported in competitive environments.

In conclusion, Kahoot proves to be an effective tool for increasing student motivation, enhancing language comprehension, and promoting active learning in ESL/EFL contexts. Future research should further explore its application across different learner demographics, educational settings, and compare it with other gamified tools to provide a broader perspective on its effectiveness in language education. By continuing to refine and integrate such tools, educators can significantly enhance the learning experience and inspire greater student engagement in language acquisition.

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