

Scrutinizing Young Adult EFL Learners’ Mediation of Gamified Student Response Systems in Intensive English Foundation Courses

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As the twentieth century drew to a close, rapid advancements in technology and technical fields sparked profound changes across societies. These shifts have continued to accelerate, particularly within educational systems, which are gradually redefining their purpose and function in response to the demands of the information age. Integrating information and communication technologies into the educational process has become imperative (Candan & Başaran, 2023). Given the ongoing and significant developments in internet technologies in recent years, it is evident that these transformations are profoundly influencing the emerging generation. This generation, often referred to as the “Internet generation” (Bennett et al., 2008) or “Digital natives” (Autry & Berge, 2011), is characterized by its propensity to become easily disengaged. These students crave active participation in the classroom and are open to embracing new approaches. They also exhibit a strong tendency towards self-directed learning. Unfortunately, most traditional curricula fail to account for these tendencies, continuing to rely on outdated, non-digital teaching methods that do not align with the needs of “digital native” students. When educators integrate digital tools (Kahoot, Quizlet, Blooket) into their teaching, it becomes much easier for students who have grown up immersed in internet technologies to remain engaged and succeed.

Kerimbayev et al. (2023) highlight that traditional face-to-face instruction tends to focus on the teacher, yet effective learning is best achieved through

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student-centred approaches. This shift can be facilitated by creating learning environments enriched with digital tools. Morais and Gonçalves (2020) further emphasize the need for innovative teaching methods to foster motivation and engagement among Generation Alpha (Yurtseven and Karadeniz, 2020). One such method is gamification, which addresses challenges like boredom, low motivation, apathy, and distraction that are prevalent among students of the digital generation (Luarn et al., 2023). Gamification, an innovative instructional strategy, involves the incorporation of game-like elements into the curriculum to enhance the learning process. This approach is designed to capture students' interest and make learning more engaging. By integrating gamification into lessons, educators can significantly boost students' attention and enthusiasm (Prieto-Andreu et al., 2022). This increase in engagement often leads to improved academic performance and higher motivation among students (Ertan & Kocadere, 2022). Ultimately, gamification presents a compelling solution for the twenty-first-century learner, who may feel disconnected from conventional teaching methods (Chen & Liang, 2022). Through gamification, educational content is seamlessly woven into game formats, enhancing both knowledge and skill acquisition (Luo, 2022).

Given the demonstrated effectiveness of gamification in enhancing student engagement and improving academic outcomes, it is vital to explore the potential benefits of GSRs in pre-faculty courses, as to be successful in the prep program, students need a sustained engagement to study and involve themselves in their learning journey. The present study aims to investigate the impact of gamified student response systems (GSRs) on learner motivation. This research is significant because it seeks to provide empirical evidence on the effectiveness of the GSRs in foreign language education from students' perspectives. By understanding how gamification can be optimally integrated into the learning process, educators can better tailor their teaching strategies to meet the needs of twenty-first-century learners, thereby fostering a more interactive and effective educational environment. Given the importance of gamification and GSRs, the researcher formed the following question guided the study.

RQ1: What are the opinions and experiences of Turkish students of English as a Foreign Language in a preparatory school towards using Kahoot, Quizlet, and Blooket as digital student response systems?

Literature Review

Gamified Student Response Systems (GSRs) in Education

Traditional classroom strategies that promote interaction, such as hand-raising or the use of response cards, limit the opportunity for only a few students to respond to questions at any given time (Cakiroğlu, et al., & Gokoğlu, 2018). The advancement of technology has made it imperative to adopt innovative methods in teaching and learning processes within the classroom. In this context, gamified student response applications have gained significant popularity among students, as they enable all participants to share their answers (Cakir, 2019) simultaneously. The integration of such tools, including Kahoot and Socrative, into the learning process, offers novel approaches to transforming the learning environment into a communicative space where learners can engage with problems and interact with peers (Sık & Topkaya, 2024). There are other well-known GSRs such as Mentimeter, Quizizz, Slido and Baamboozle. For the current study, only Kahoot, Quizlet and Blooket would be under scrutiny for the engagement of students. Koçak (2022) highlighted that game-based student response systems generate a level of engagement and energy that sets them apart from traditional response systems, where students typically use handheld devices to answer questions. Dervan (2014) emphasized that Socrative, as one of the gamified student response systems, provides educators with the ability to enhance the delivery of their lectures, thereby increasing student interaction and contributing to improved learning outcomes.

Furthermore, Dervan (2014) reported that the majority of students concurred that Socrative enhanced interaction during lectures. The potential disadvantage of Socrative, it is not being used in classes or academic research, and there have been newer gamified response systems. Last but not least, similarly, Nadem et al. (2023) found that students utilizing one of the gamified response applications perceived this method as beneficial to their learning experience and believed it helped them achieve higher grades.

Kahoot It is used as an interactive vocabulary and grammar practice tool. Kahoot's live quiz format is excellent for practising vocabulary and grammar in a dynamic, engaging environment. The immediate feedback helps reinforce learning, and the competitive element can motivate students to participate actively (Öden et al.,2021). Kahoot is particularly effective in group settings where the focus is on quick recall and reinforcing previously learned material in intensive language courses (Tao and Zou, 2023). The classroom environment can be enhanced through the use of Kahoot, a

versatile platform accessible via any internet-enabled device. Kahoot's framework is structured around a question-and-answer format, offering an engaging approach to assessment. Educators can design interactive learning activities, referred to as "Kahoots," within four distinct categories: quiz, discussion, survey, and combination. These Kahoots can incorporate various multimedia elements, including videos, images, and diagrams, to support learning objectives. Additionally, the interactive nature of the Kahoot! platform allows users to access and utilize games created by other educators, fostering a collaborative learning experience.

Quizlet It is used for vocabulary building and teamwork activities. Quizlet is highly effective for EFL learners who need to build and reinforce vocabulary. The flashcard system, with the ability to include images and audio, helps learners associate words with their meanings and correct pronunciations. The "Learn" and "Spell" modes are particularly useful for reinforcing spelling and understanding word usage in context. Quizlet's adaptability to individual learning paces makes it ideal for self-study for high-stakes tests such as the DELTA Module 1 exam or vocabulary test using flashcards. It is deemed beneficial for EFL learners, particularly for building vocabulary and reinforcing language concepts at their own pace. The combination of visual, auditory, and interactive elements makes it highly versatile and effective for language acquisition. Quizlet provides learners with a range of game modes to enhance their study experience. However, certain features, such as Spell, Gravity, and Live modes, are not available on mobile applications. English vocabulary can be effectively studied through the Learn and Flashcards modes. The Learn mode evaluates students' knowledge of terms and tracks their mistakes, subsequently displaying both the correct answers and the errors made by the learners. Flashcards enable students to review essential vocabulary, reinforcing their understanding. Additionally, the Write mode requires students to actively engage by writing out the definitions of terms or corresponding images.

Blooket is used for gamified learning with a focus on reinforcement. Blooket's gamification approach can be highly engaging for young adult EFL learners or those who benefit from a more playful, less traditional learning environment. The variety of games can help reinforce vocabulary and grammar in a fun, low-pressure setting. Blooket's ability to make learning feel like a game can be particularly effective for keeping students engaged over longer periods. There are some modes that language games can be played in different modes such as monster brawl, deceptive dinos, gold quest, crypto hack, fishing frenzy, blook rush, battle royale, tower defence, cafe, factory, racing, and classic. For comprehensive EFL learning,

combining these tools could provide a balanced approach that caters to different aspects of language acquisition.

Methodology

Research Design

The research employed a qualitative method with narrative design, both focus group interviews and semi-structured interviews to gather in-depth data from participants. This approach was chosen to explore participants' perspectives, experiences, and insights in a flexible yet guided manner.

Focus group interviews were conducted to facilitate dynamic discussions among participants, encouraging the exchange of ideas and allowing for the emergence of shared and contrasting views regarding GSRs. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted to complement the data gathered from focus groups. This method provided the flexibility to explore specific topics in greater depth while maintaining a consistent structure across interviews. The interview questions were presented in the Appendix.

Participants

The study participants were students enrolled in both state and foundation universities in Türkiye. At the foundation university, all students in the class participated in the interviews. However, due to the larger class sizes at the state university (18 students), participation was voluntary, and a subset of learners was invited to take part. A total of 24 students participated in the study, with 12 from the foundation university and 12 from the state university. The sample consisted of 8 female and 16 male students, all of whom were studying at the A2 proficiency level and were between the ages of 20 and 21 years old.

Data Collection

The researcher had semi-structured interviews (face-to-face) and focus group interviews(online). By utilizing both face-to-face semi-structured interviews and online focus group interviews, the researcher was able to gather rich, bi-dimensional data that provided a deeper understanding of how game-based learning platforms impact students' learning experiences. The combination of these interviews ensured that both individual and group perspectives were captured, contributing to the trustworthiness of the findings.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process followed a systematic approach, beginning with the transcription of the semi-structured and focus group interviews. After transcription, a preliminary review of the data was conducted to gain familiarity and identify initial patterns. The researcher used the code-recode technique to increase reliability. The data was then subjected to bottom-up content analysis, where it was carefully coded in Excel to capture recurring ideas and concepts. These codes were grouped to form broader themes that represented the key insights from the interviews. The researcher used peer-debriefing technique as he was the teacher of a class where the data was collected. Then, the themes were compared and contrasted across the different interview formats to ensure a comprehensive and consistent understanding of the data. Finally, these themes were synthesized into a coherent narrative, providing a detailed interpretation of the findings and their implications for understanding students' experiences with the game-based learning platforms. When the results were out, they were shared with voluntary students and a member-check was done to increase reliability.

Results

The results from the interviews are shown in the table below.

Table 1: Qualitative Results and Themes from Focus Group Interviews and Semi-structured Interviews.

Categories	Kahoot	Quizlet	Blooket
Effectiveness to Practice	realize our mistakes with the explanations of the teacher. Not for learning but revising(n=5)	We can learn from each other. revise many times collaborative many opportunities to learn (n=)	Coursebook specific Unit-specific Current themes Many question (import)
Engagement (Social and Behavioral)	Teachers can add clips to it, and the music and leaderboard are engaging (n=11) Prefer to play other games on my phone(n=3)	Seeing the progress on the board. The music is engaging. New groups all the time	Modes(crypto-hack, coffee, Christmas) Getting money from others, predicting passwords
Collaboration or Competition	The same students became winners, and some experience failures (n=13) Only competition (n=2)	Cooperation mainly and some competition(n=6)	Can be played with virtual learners(n=3) Good for homework (n=1)

Current Challenges	Pseudo-names (n=7) Same exercises, not coursebook specific(n=4) Challenges with student's internet speed (n=6), time limit, loud music	Being in a weak group (n=3) Unwanted classmates (n=5) Questions from other languages. (n=2) Notifications from other apps (n=6)	Not easy to navigate at first (n=9) Distraction to win, not content (n=2) Limited teacher control (n=3) Last longer than others (n=10)
Desired Additional Features	Teachers should assign it as homework, multiple attempts, and classroom on the platform.	Screen freezer when playing (n=4) Report at the end (n=2)	More modes to play, team modes (n:8), feedback at the end (n:10)

The analysis of the data collected on the use of game-based learning platforms—Kahoot, Quizlet, and Blooket—revealed several key insights across the categories of effectiveness in teaching, engagement, collaboration or competition, challenges, and additional features.

Kahoot was found to be effective in helping students realize their mistakes, especially with teacher explanations, though it was primarily seen as a tool for revising content rather than for learning new material. Quizlet was appreciated for its ability to facilitate peer learning and revision, with its coursebook-specific and unit-specific content being particularly beneficial. Blooket was recognized for its collaborative opportunities and the variety of learning experiences it offers, with some students noting that it provided many opportunities to learn through repetition and collaboration.

Kahoot’s engagement was boosted by its multimedia features, including the ability to add video clips, music, and a competitive leaderboard, making it particularly engaging for students. However, some students preferred other mobile games over Kahoot. Quizlet engaged students by allowing them to track their progress on the leaderboard and through its use of engaging music and frequent new group formations. Blooket stood out for its variety of modes, such as “crypto-hack” and “coffee,” which included elements like predicting passwords and collecting money, keeping students engaged through diverse and interactive gameplay.

Kahoot was primarily associated with competition, with some students feeling discouraged by the repetitive winners and the focus on competition. Quizlet was noted for its emphasis on cooperation, with some elements of competition, which was generally well-received by students. Blooket offered both collaborative and competitive elements, and its ability to be played with virtual learners made it versatile. It was also highlighted as a good tool for homework assignments.

Kahoot faced challenges such as the use of pseudo-names by students, lack of coursebook-specific exercises, and issues related to students' internet speeds, time limits, and loud music during the game. Quizlet had issues with students being placed in weak groups, having unwanted or unsuccessful classmates, encountering questions in other languages, and receiving notifications from other apps during gameplay. Blooket was identified as being initially difficult to navigate, leading to a focus on winning rather than content learning and limited teacher control over the game. Additionally, Blooket sessions were noted to last longer than those on other platforms. Participant Student 8 noted that “although Blooket games last longer than others, which sometimes we prefer, we enjoy it thanks to the modes in it.”

Students suggested that Kahoot could be more effective if teachers assigned it as homework with options for multiple attempts and classroom integration within the platform. For Quizlet, a screen-freeze feature during play and a report at the end of sessions were recommended. There are other useful recommendations from Cinar & Ari, 2019. Blooket was highlighted as needing more modes, team-playing options, and feedback at the end of sessions to enhance its utility further and provide feedback to the player.

Overall, while each platform had its strengths and challenges, the data suggest that a combination of these tools, tailored to specific classroom needs and learning objectives, could provide a well-rounded and engaging learning experience for students.

Discussion

The findings from this study provide valuable insights into the effectiveness, engagement, collaboration, and challenges associated with using Kahoot, Quizlet, and Blooket as game-based learning platforms in the classroom. These insights highlight both the strengths and areas for improvement in each platform, offering a nuanced understanding of how they contribute to the learning experience. Regarding the effectiveness of Kahoot, while recognized for helping students identify their mistakes through teacher explanations, it was primarily seen as a revision tool rather than a means for learning new content, as suggested in the same vein by Kurtoğlu (2021). This suggests that Kahoot may be more suitable for reinforcing previously learned material rather than introducing new concepts. In contrast, Quizlet's coursebook-specific and unit-specific content, combined with its collaborative features, made it a more versatile tool for both learning (Waluyo & Bukol, 2021) and revising. Blooket's variety of collaborative opportunities also indicates its potential for fostering peer learning, although its primary focus appears to be on engaging students through repeated practice (Huynh, 2024)

Engagement emerged as a critical factor in the effectiveness of GSRs in the study of Mykytka (2013) and similarly in this study. Kahoot's multimedia features, such as video clips and music, were particularly engaging for students. However, some noted a preference for other mobile games, suggesting that while Kahoot is engaging, it may not fully meet the entertainment expectations of digital-native students. It is advisable that Kahoot should start adding modes to the games to make it more appealing. Quizlet's leaderboard and music were also effective in keeping students engaged, but the platform's constant formation of new groups may help maintain student interest over time. Blooket's diverse game modes were a standout feature, offering students a variety of ways to engage with the material. This variety likely contributed to sustained student interest, particularly through modes that incorporate elements of prediction and competition.

Participants learners in the study were well aware of the fact that they played the games to recall the information and use it, as suggested by Sevigny (2024). Kahoot's competitive nature, while motivating for some, led to feelings of discouragement among students who did not frequently win, highlighting a potential downside of competition-heavy platforms. Quizlet's mix of cooperation and competition appears to strike a better balance, promoting a more inclusive learning environment. Blooket's ability to incorporate both collaborative and competitive elements and its flexibility for virtual learning suggests that it could be particularly useful in hybrid or online learning environments. However, the feedback regarding competition and its impact on student morale should be considered when using these platforms (Mohd et al., 2023). Teachers' autonomy comes into play while deciding which GSRs to use and when. Each platform poses specific challenges that could hinder their effectiveness, but as the researcher with an insider perspective, the researcher believes that most of the issues may be solved with the involvement of teachers, such as Kahoot's issues with pseudo-names or lack of course-specific exercises. Quizlet's challenges, such as unwanted classmates, may be solved with better forming of groups and irrelevant questions, indicating that there is room for improvement in customization or that the teacher should upload his or her questions. Blooket's initial complexity could be addressed by some formative tasks by the teacher. However, challenges stemming from the platforms are beyond the current control of the teacher.

Pedagogical Implications

The suggestions for additional features provide practical recommendations for enhancing the platforms. Kahoot could benefit from integrating more homework-related functionalities, and English teachers could assign similar activities to their school learning management systems. Quizlet's suggested screen-freeze feature and end-of-session reports would enhance its utility as a learning tool, providing more structured feedback to both students and teachers. This suggestion is also achievable in Moodle-based learning management systems. Blooket's potential improvements, such as adding more game modes, team-play options, and end-of-game feedback, would further diversify its offerings and make it a more robust tool for both individual and collaborative learning.

Most importantly, we as teachers could hinder many problems during the games with advanced planning. For example, if you have very strong or very weak learners, instead of Kahoot, Quizlet should be used for cooperative learning. Otherwise, teachers may get the same winners or losers. If you have many teaching hours in a pre-EMI (English as a medium of instruction) context, Blooket could be used for well-rounded and focused practice.

Last but not least, teachers feel that there are some students grouping in the classroom and they do not want to be friends with others, you can use Quizlet for more mingling and get to know different class peers. As educators, our emphasis should not be on game elements such as winning, competition, scoring, racing against time, or badges. We should also avoid overemphasizing feedback or cooperation. Instead, we must keep our primary goal in mind, which is to teach English or any other content in a way that promotes learner autonomy (İnci, 2020).

In conclusion, while Kahoot, Quizlet, and Blooket each offer unique advantages for game-based learning, their effectiveness is highly dependent on the context in which they are used. Teachers should carefully consider the specific needs of their students and the learning objectives of their courses when selecting and implementing these platforms. We cannot guarantee that the GSRSs we are using now will still be in action in ten years. However, addressing the challenges and incorporating the suggested additional features could significantly enhance the educational value of these upcoming GSRS, making them more effective and engaging for a diverse range of learners.

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Appendix

The first questions were used as the main prompt, and the second questions were used when necessary.

1. How do you feel about using game-based platforms like Kahoot, Quizlet, and Blooket for studying? Can you provide specific examples of how these platforms have influenced your learning experience?

Which of these platforms (Kahoot, Quizlet, Blooket) do you find most engaging, and why? What features of this platform make it stand out for you?

How do these platforms help you retain information and collaborate with others? Can you describe any particular strategies you use with these platforms to improve your learning?

Have you encountered any challenges or limitations while using Kahoot, Quizlet, or Blooket? How did you overcome these challenges, or what improvements would you suggest?

In what ways do you think the use of these platforms could be improved to support your learning better? Are there any additional features you would like to see on these platforms?

Focus Group Interview Questions

1. How do you compare the effectiveness of Kahoot, Quizlet, and Blooket when it comes to preparing for exams? Are there specific subjects or topics where one platform works better than the others?

2. What are your favourite game modes or features on each platform, and why do you prefer them? How do these features contribute to your engagement and learning?

3. How do you collaborate with your classmates when using these platforms, and does this collaboration impact your learning? Are there differences in collaboration experiences across the different platforms?

4. Do you think using these game platforms changes the way you approach studying? If so, how?

How do these platforms fit into your overall study routine?

5. How would you describe the role of competition in your learning experience when using Kahoot, Quizlet, and Blooket? Does competition motivate you, and if yes, how does it differ between these platforms?