

THE APPLICATION OF WEB TOOLS TO IMPROVE VOCABULARY FOR ENGLISH MAJORED STUDENTS: AN ACTION STUDY

ỨNG DỤNG CÁC CÔNG CỤ WEB NHẪM NÂNG CAO VỐN TỪ VỰNG CHO SINH VIÊN CHUYÊN NGÀNH TIẾNG ANH: NGHIÊN CỨU HÀNH ĐỘNG

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ABSTRACT: *Vocabulary, an essential part of any language, plays a crucial role in the language learning process. The most important aspect of learning a language is acquiring vocabulary and practicing its use. This article focuses on the reality of vocabulary learning among students and their awareness of the role digital tools play in vocabulary acquisition. Additionally, the article presents several digital tools that can be implemented to support both students and teachers in learning vocabulary effectively, as well as conducting action research to assess the effectiveness of these tools in teaching and learning vocabulary.*

Keywords: *Vocabulary, learning, technology, tools, action study.*

Tóm tắt: *Từ vựng, một phần không thể thiếu của một ngôn ngữ, đóng một vai trò quan trọng trong quá trình học ngôn ngữ. Điều quan trọng nhất trong việc học một ngôn ngữ là việc tiếp thu từ vựng và thực hành sử dụng nó. Bài viết này tập trung vào thực tế việc học từ vựng của học sinh và nhận thức của học sinh về vai trò của các công cụ số trong việc học từ vựng. Ngoài ra, bài viết đã trình bày một số công cụ kỹ thuật số có thể triển khai để hỗ trợ cả sinh viên và giáo viên học từ vựng một cách hiệu quả và thực hiện nghiên cứu hành động để kiểm tra tính hiệu quả của các công cụ đó trong việc dạy và học từ vựng.*

Từ khóa: *Từ vựng, học, công nghệ, công cụ, nghiên cứu hành động.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Schmitt and McCarthy (1997) have pointed out that vocabulary learning has been regarded as one of the most important parts in second or foreign language acquisition. Vocabulary, as an integral part of a language, plays a crucial part in the language learning process. The primary thing in learning a language is the acquisition of a vocabulary, and practice in using it. Vocabulary is the basic factor necessary for mastering a language. The purpose that I learn second language is for communication. When I learn a language, I

need to master four skills, which are listening, reading, speaking, and writing. Meanwhile, vocabulary knowledge is fundamental to them. One cannot understand a sentence without knowing what most of the words mean. The lack of vocabulary knowledge affects all the four language skills.

Unfortunately, many students find it hard to acquire vocabulary. Lack of adequate vocabulary knowledge is an obvious and serious obstacle for many students who learn English as a second language. Learners themselves readily

admit that they experience considerable difficulty with vocabulary, and most learners identify the acquisition of vocabulary as their greatest single source of problems (Meara, 1980).

Because of the idea above, this article helps us know the reality of students' learning vocabulary and student's awareness of the role of digital tools in learning vocabulary. Furthermore, the article chose some digital tools which can be implemented to support both students and teachers in learning vocabulary effectively and carried out an action research to check the effectiveness of those tools in teaching and learning vocabulary.

2. THE APPLICATION OF TECHNOLOGY IN TEACHING VOCABULARY

2.1. Benefits of using technology in learning vocabulary

Applications of technology do not only provide opportunities to study language, but to use language. With social media tools, learners can connect, collaborate, and problem-solve with other learners. As students move toward their prospective careers, knowing how to use technology to accomplish tasks is seen as a necessity for most of us in the 21st century.

Furthermore, technology can make learning vocabulary much more funnier. This is because some vocabulary games are available for free on the Internet. Games include crossword puzzles, picture-word matches, word scrambles, and 8 Letters in Search of a Word (a game that can draw you in unexpectedly as you race to create as

many words as possible from eight letters within the time limit). The games are supplemented with themed word lists, test preparation items, and activities on prefixes and suffixes. These sites can be bookmarked for students' independent practice and can provide a basis for whole-group instruction.

2.2. Some effective technology used in learning vocabulary

With the era of technology 4.0, there are many tools to support learners to learn vocabulary effectively, however, in this research, some digital tools are focused to make it convenient, simple and effective in students' vocabulary learning. They are Wordwall, Kahoot, Quizlet, Mindmap and Visuwords.

2.2.1. Wordwall

Wordwall is a free online tool for creating learning activities. With this tool, teachers can enter the topic that they would like to cover in class into the Word Wall and receive a variety of ready-made, fully customizable activities such as quizzes, word games, maze chases and much more. You also can create your own activity from scratch. Moreover, most activities on Word Wall can be used in both interactive and printable formats.

Wordwall is a quick and easy to use tool to create interactive activities for your class. This tool offers a wide variety of activities to choose from and makes learning much more fun. Moreover, it is available in many different languages. A drawback is that with the free account one can only create up to 5 activity types. After

that, you will have to delete activities to create new ones.

Kahoot!

Kahoot! are fun, interactive game-based learning application helping learners practice their English and build their language skills. Our free Kahoot! includes music and images to engage learners and make learning exciting and enjoyable. Kahoot! is a digital learning platform that uses quiz-style games to help learners learn more effectively.

As one of the biggest names in quiz-based learning, it's impressive that Kahoot! still offers a free-to-use platform, which makes it highly accessible for teachers and students alike. It's also a helpful tool for a hybrid class that uses both digital and classroom-based learning.

Kahoot! is a cloud-based quiz platform that is ideal for students and teachers. Since the game-based platform allows you to create new quizzes from scratch, it's possible to be creative and offer bespoke learning options for students. (Luke Edwards, 2022)

Kahoot! can be played in player-vs.-player or team-vs-team modes or individuals. They can be used on computers, laptops, tablets, or smartphones, and give teachers the flexibility to use them in online lessons, in face-to-face classrooms, or at home.

2.2.2. Quizlet

Quizlet is an IBM-based tool that allows users to create study tools such as interactive flashcards, tests, and study games. With Quizlet, students can choose

their own "Study Mode." This allows activity content to be migrated from flashcards to matching games to other types of study games easily and responsively. Quizlet activities can also be embedded easily into course management systems.

Quizlet is an interactive game-based learning tool used to study information. This tool uses a variety of engaging studying techniques including interactive digital flashcards, matching, and multiple-choice activities. Quizlet is compatible and accessible using most devices and can be accessed on the Website or using apps. Teachers and Students can easily upload information to create study sets by adding terms and definitions using a combination of words and pictures. Quizlet would then create a study section and play section for the set. This tool is easy to navigate and provides feedback to the learners as they engage in the different modes of learning.

2.2.3. Mind map

A Mind map is an easy way to brainstorm thoughts organically without worrying about order and structure. It allows you to visually structure your ideas to help with analysis and recall.

Mind map is a diagram for representing tasks, words, concepts, or items linked to and arranged around a central concept or subject using a non-linear graphical layout that allows the user to build an intuitive framework around a central concept. A Mind map can turn a long list of monotonous information into a colorful, memorable, and highly organized diagram that works in line with your brain's

natural way of doing things.

Mind maps provide a structured way to capture and organize ideas and information. They help users to understand concepts by breaking them down into their component parts. The technique is used to develop new ideas, or to break down and better understand existing information.

Whether developing new ideas or organizing existing information, mind maps help you see how information fits together. Mind maps provide an expansive and flexible structure to support your thinking.

3. ACTION RESEARCH COMPONENT

3.1. Research context

The author held an action research in a 3rd year class and 4th year class. The classes consisted of 30 English major students who had already completed the fourth and fifth semester. The students in the class perform at C1 or above a C1 level according to the CEFR scale.

3.2. Research focus

The main goal of the research was to create tasks and activities for the students in

which they had to use the chosen digital tools with each other to learn their vocabulary. The research questions are as follows:

1. What is the reality of students' learning vocabulary?
2. How do students perceive the role of digital tools in learning vocabulary?
3. How is technology used to enhance students' vocabulary effectively?

The steps of the action research project included identifying the problem, thinking of a solution, implementing the assignment, evaluating the results, and creating modifications to improve the next implementation of the project.

3.3. Procedure

3.3.1. Participants

The participants of this study are students of the English Language Department at Quang Binh University. Despite the differences in ages, level, and background knowledge, all these selected participants of the action research are very confident, enthusiastic, and responsible during the investigation.

Table 1. Participants

No	Classes	Number
1	English language K61	16
2	English language K62	14
3	TOTAL	30

The lecturer chose 30 students and divided them into two groups. The course book CAE Result was selected. Group 1 was asked to study all vocabulary in the course book in their traditional ways

without the help of technology. Meanwhile group 2 was allowed to use some digital tools like quizlet, kahoot, mindmap... while learning the vocabulary

Table 2. Vocabulary chosen in CAE Result

No	Unit	Vocabulary	Digital tools
1	1	Mature, decisive, motivated, sensitive, inquisitive, ambitious, conscientious, introverted, extrovert, self-reliant	Wordwall
2	2	Earshot, kick - starting, infancy, commercialism, put up with, ritual, devastate	Kahoot
3	3	Sacrifice, inheritance, spontaneous, exploration, incentive, investment, geology, inspirational	Quizlet
4	4	weather, hot, rain, cold, sunny, foggy, rainy, cloudy, snowy, warm, windy	Mindmap
5	10	Reluctant, convey, inadequacy, disruption, portrait, salutary, mesmerizing, inadequate, impersonal	Visuwords

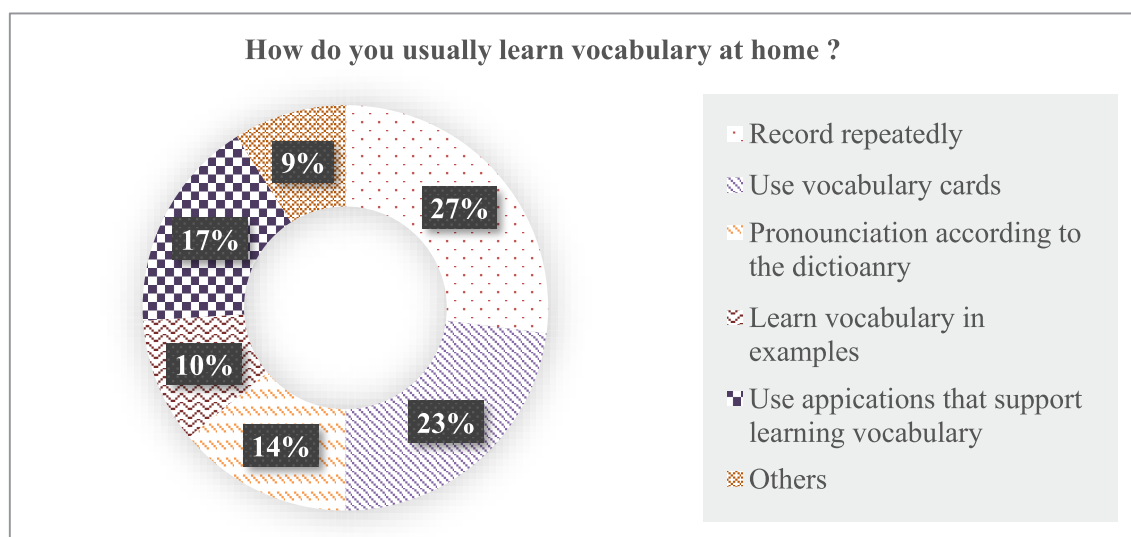
After the full assignment had been finished, the teacher provided a questionnaire to the students regarding their experience with learning vocabulary. The questionnaire was completed in class.

3.4. The findings

To find out students' awareness of learning vocabulary as well as their learning methods, a short questionnaire was designed with the following questions:

1. How long do you study vocabulary at home every day?
2. How many words do you learn maximum per day?
3. How do you usually learn vocabulary at home?
4. How often do you use technology to learn vocabulary?
5. In your opinion, what are the benefits of learning vocabulary through technology in the process of learning English?

As can be seen from the findings, even though the number of participants is rather small, all of them are aware of the importance of learning vocabulary. The given data shows that 2 - 3 hours is an average amount of times a day to learn vocabulary, therefore many students spend that time learning (accounting for more than 50%), many students spend less than 1 hour a day (accounting for 41,8%) and very few people learn vocabulary 3 hours a day (accounting for 7,3%). Moreover, the maximum number of words students learn each day is also quite varied. It can be seen from Figure 1 that more than half of the students can learn from three to five words per day. A noteworthy number of students (30,9%) would probably learn from five to seven words per day and a paltry number of students (16,4%) learn from seven to ten words per day.

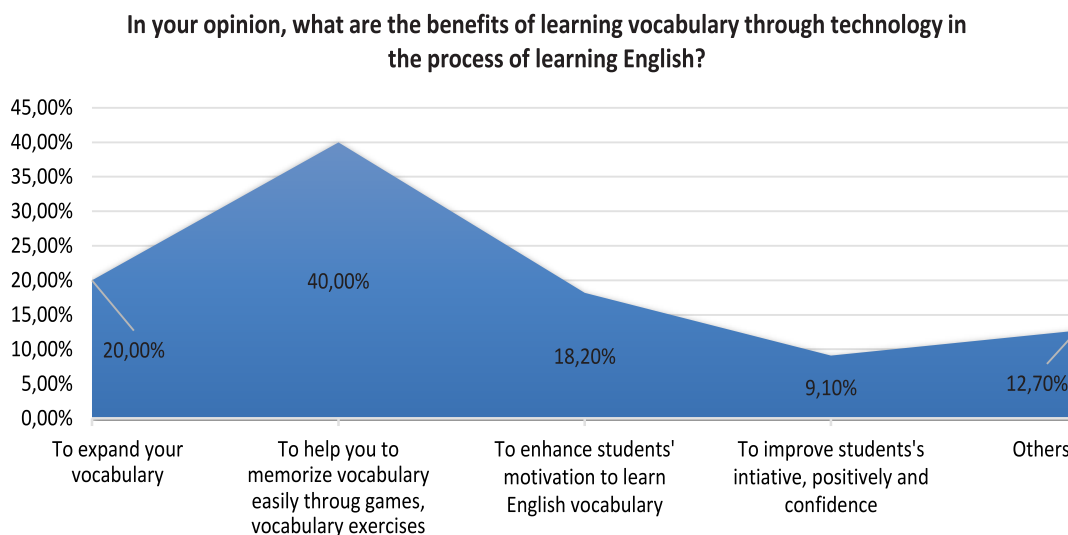
Figure 1. Students' learning methods

Answers to question 3 from Group 1, who was not let to use technology in learning vocabulary are various. From the Figure 1, we can see that the majority of students who learn by recording repeatedly (more than 30 percent), other students learn by using applications that support learning vocabulary (20%), Practicing pronunciation as transcribed in the dictionary and learning vocabulary through examples accounted for 16.4% and 12.7% respectively. Group 1 who didn't use tools to support their learning also said that they found difficulties in learning vocabulary. They admitted that it took a lot of time to learn by heart those words. Moreover, they tended to forget the vocabulary time by time. Whereas, the other Group found it easier and more relaxed to learn vocabulary by using tools.

The data reveals that most of them think that it is important to use technology to learn vocabulary (45,5 %) and a considerable number of students think that it is very important (41,8%). It is indicated from the finding that technology has had a

crucial role in increasing the level of learning and has promoted imagination in learners. Currently, technology has become useful devices to help improve vocabulary. Users can utilize these tools as a strategy for learning English vocabularies. It is believed that technology helps motivate students' vocabulary learning, consequently, adjust the ways to learn vocabulary. Using technology is one of the factors which make the learners interested and motivated.

In brief, learning English through apps is becoming more and more popular. From the data, it can be realized that most participants believed that technology brings a lot of benefits to them in the process of learning English, Particularly in learning vocabulary. Those apps are quite convenient and quite efficient for learners. Indeed, writing vocabulary repeatedly will make you bored; however, with the digital tools with applications and games provided, learning vocabulary will become easier and funnier.

Figure 2. Student's awareness of the benefit of using technology in learning vocabulary

4. IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

It could be concluded from the findings and discussion that students' vocabulary learning encounters many difficulties and shortcomings. As vocabulary becomes a big obstacle in English learning and students' speed of vocabulary improvement is quite slow. Besides that, many students think that they

can achieve vocabulary by looking up new word in dictionary, which is marked with phonetic transcription and its Vietnamese meaning, however, this way of learning is not highly effective. To overcome these difficulties, it is necessary to find some other technology applications that helps students learn vocabulary better.

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