

EXPLORING QUIZLET'S ROLE IN TECHNOLOGY-ENHANCED ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

This systematic literature review critically evaluates the impact of Quizlet, a widely used digital flashcard tool, on English language learning outcomes, specifically focusing on vocabulary retention, learner engagement, and motivation. A comprehensive search across multiple electronic databases (Google Scholar, PubMed, SpringerLink, Elsevier, IEEE Xplore, ProQuest, JSTOR, and ResearchGate) yielded 25 peer-reviewed studies published between 2010 and 2025, meeting predefined inclusion criteria. The findings indicate that Quizlet significantly enhances vocabulary retention, especially through spaced repetition and multiple retrieval practices, showing moderate to large effect sizes for both immediate and delayed vocabulary recall. Most studies reported positive outcomes in learner engagement, with participants demonstrating higher intrinsic motivation and increased study frequency compared to traditional learning methods. However, the review also identifies substantial heterogeneity in study designs, outcome measures, and learner contexts, limiting the ability to make robust causal inferences. The majority of studies employed non-randomized, quasi-experimental designs, reducing the strength of conclusions drawn from these findings. Furthermore, issues such as inconsistent reporting of participant demographics and sampling methods, as well as reliance on self-reported engagement and motivation, add to the variability of results. Despite these limitations, Quizlet's potential in promoting autonomous learning, enhancing motivation, and improving language retention is evident. The review recommends future research to address methodological gaps, particularly through randomized controlled trials with diverse participant samples and standardized outcome measures, and suggests investigating Quizlet's effectiveness in broader language domains beyond vocabulary acquisition.

Keywords: Quizlet, vocabulary retention, learner engagement, motivation, technology-enhanced learning

INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, the incorporation of technology into English language instruction has transitioned from a supplemental practice to a fundamental pedagogical approach. Technology-enhanced language learning (TELL) utilizes digital platforms to facilitate language acquisition by enhancing accessibility, providing tailored instruction, and offering multimodal input (Reinders & Benson, 2017; Stockwell, 2022). Research within the fields of computer-assisted language learning (CALL) and mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) has consistently demonstrated the efficacy of mobile applications in facilitating flexible, self-directed study and promoting learner autonomy (Godwin-Jones, 2018; Nation, 2013).

Among the tools that have gained prominence, Quizlet, created in 2007, has become one of the most frequently utilized digital flashcard platforms, boasting over 60 million monthly active users worldwide (Quizlet Inc., 2023). The platform integrates evidence-based learning principles, such as retrieval practice, which enhances long-term memory (Karpicke & Blunt, 2011; Roediger & Butler, 2011), and distributed (spaced) practice, which promotes lasting retention across various learning contexts (Cepeda et al., 2006; Zhang & Lu, 2022). Quizlet integrates multimodal content (text, audio, visuals) with gamification and adaptive learning strategies, aligning with dual coding theory and facilitating both formal and informal language learning contexts (Dizon & Tang, 2017; Nguyen & Le, 2023).

Empirical research indicates that Quizlet can improve vocabulary retention, elevate learner motivation, and promote engagement in English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings. Structured classroom integration and independent assignment utilization have demonstrated substantial vocabulary improvements across various competence levels and educational contexts (Nguyen & Le, 2022; Tran, 2016).

These data demonstrate that Quizlet's versatility enables it to enhance many instructional methodologies and learning requirements.

Nonetheless, the research foundation remains disjointed. The majority of studies concentrate specifically on short-term vocabulary results, typically spanning intervention durations of merely two to six weeks, with less exploration of long-term retention or further language competencies, including grammar, reading, listening, speaking, and writing (Özdemir & Seçkin, 2024). Moreover, methodological inconsistencies—such as diverse comparator designs and insufficient analysis of learner- and context-related moderators—complicate the generalization of findings and the identification of specific conditions under which Quizlet is most effective (Dizon & Tang, 2017; Nguyen et al., 2022).

Given these limitations, a systematic study is necessary to consolidate and critically evaluate the evidence regarding Quizlet's involvement in technology-enhanced English language learning. This study brings together empirical studies published since 2010, analyzing learning results, instructional techniques, and identified advantages and disadvantages. This study seeks to delineate the existing literature and pinpoint research deficiencies, so offering educators, curriculum developers, and researchers empirically grounded insights into the pedagogical advantages and constraints of Quizlet across various English language learning environments.

To guide the review process and ensure a systematic analysis of the literature, the following research questions were formulated:

RQ1: What effects does the use of Quizlet have on vocabulary retention in English language learning?

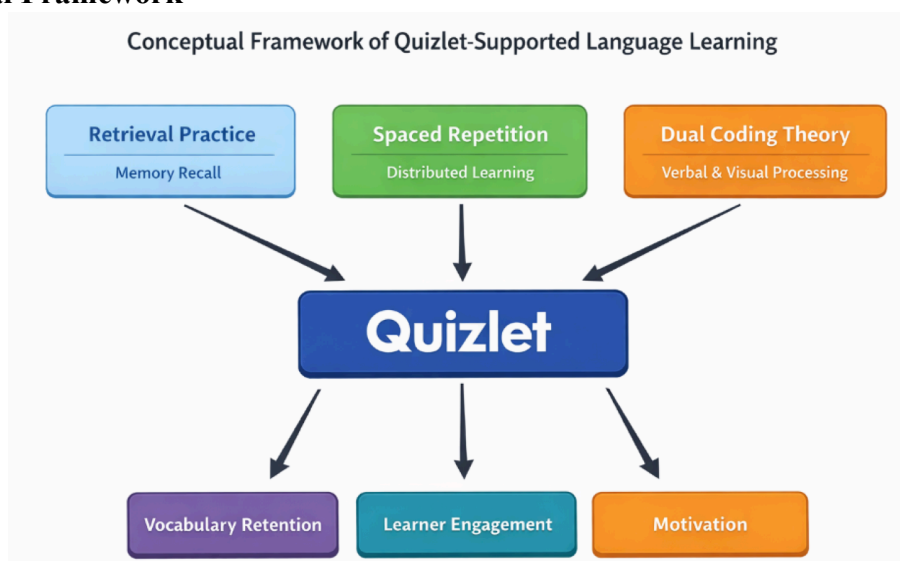
RQ2: How does Quizlet influence learner engagement in English language learning contexts?

RQ3: How does Quizlet affect learner motivation in English language learning?

RQ4: What research designs and methodological trends characterize studies investigating Quizlet in English language learning?

These research questions guide the identification, analysis, and synthesis of the studies included in this systematic review.

Theoretical Framework



The conceptual framework illustrates the theoretical basis for using Quizlet in English language learning. It integrates retrieval practice, spaced repetition, and dual coding theory, which explain how repeated recall, distributed learning, and multimodal input support vocabulary learning. Through these mechanisms, Quizlet contributes to improved vocabulary retention, learner engagement, and motivation.

METHODOLOGY

This study is a systematic literature review (SLR). A **systematic literature review (SLR)** is a transparent, protocol-driven synthesis of research on a focused question that uses comprehensive searches, predefined inclusion/exclusion criteria, and critical appraisal of study quality to summarize and, where possible, quantitatively integrate findings. This study was conducted as follows:

1. Reviewing Protocol and Reporting Guidelines

This systematic review was conducted in accordance with the 2020 guidelines of the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) (Page et al., 2021). The technique was developed using the Population–Intervention–Comparison–Outcome (PICO) framework and guided by established best practices for evidence synthesis in educational technology research.

2. Deciding Eligibility Criteria

The inclusion and exclusion criteria were determined using the PICO framework and adapted from the pre-specified research framework. The criteria in this study can be seen in the following table:

Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for Study Selection

Category	Inclusion	Exclusion
Population (P)	English language learners of any age, proficiency level, and educational context.	Learners of languages other than English or populations outside ELL/ESL/EFL contexts.
Intervention (I)	Use of the Quizlet platform (primary or secondary instructional tool) to enhance English learning.	No use of Quizlet; interventions focused on other tools only; purely technical/engineering work on Quizlet without learning focus.
Comparison (C)	Traditional methods, paper flashcards, other digital tools, blended approaches, or no comparator.	— (Not a basis for exclusion by itself).
Outcomes (O)	Learning outcomes (e.g., vocabulary retention, comprehension, grammar), engagement, motivation, academic performance, or pedagogy.	No clear learning/affective outcomes; outcomes unrelated to English learning.
Study design	Empirical research (quantitative, qualitative, mixed-methods).	Editorials, commentaries, book reviews, or pieces lacking empirical data.
Publication type	Peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings, or doctoral theses/dissertations.	Non-peer-reviewed opinion pieces; grey literature without adequate methods/reporting (unless a doctoral thesis).
Publication period	January 2010 – November 2025.	Published before 2010 or after November 2025.
Language	English.	Non-English publications.

Context	Formal and informal English learning environments.	Non-educational contexts or settings unrelated to language learning.
Methodology reporting	Clear methodology and outcome measures reported.	Studies without clear methodology, instruments, or outcome measures.
Duplicates	Unique study version retained (most complete/peer-reviewed).	Duplicate publications of the same study.
Scope specificity	Focus on English learning with Quizlet as a tool within instruction.	Purely technical analyses of Quizlet with no learning outcome focus.

3. Deciding Information Sources

To ensure comprehensive coverage of relevant literature, multiple academic databases and scholarly repositories were searched. The primary databases included Google Scholar, SpringerLink, Elsevier (ScienceDirect), and PubMed. In addition, complementary searches were conducted in IEEE Xplore, ProQuest, JSTOR, and ResearchGate to identify potentially relevant studies that might not appear in the primary databases.

To further enhance the completeness of the search process, backward citation tracking (examining the reference lists of included studies) and forward citation tracking using Google Scholar's "Cited by" feature were also performed. The final database search was conducted on 30 November 2025.

4. Developing Search Strategy

The search strings combined three key concept groups:

1. Technology terms: Quizlet, flashcard*, digital learning, mobile learning, CALL, MALL, educational technology
2. Language learning terms: English language learning, vocabulary, language acquisition, second language, ESL, EFL
3. Outcome terms: effectiveness, achievement, retention, engagement, performance, outcomes

A representative Boolean search string was:

(Quizlet) AND ("English language learning" OR "vocabulary learning" OR "language acquisition" OR "ESL" OR "EFL") AND (effectiveness OR outcomes OR achievement OR retention OR engagement) Filters applied: 1) Peer-reviewed publications only, 2) Date range: 2010–2025, 3) Language: English.

5. Screening Study Selection

All detected records were transferred to Mendeley for reference management, and duplicates were eliminated before screening. The study selection procedure was executed in two phases:

- 1) Screening of titles and abstracts according to inclusion criteria.
- 2) Comprehensive text evaluation to ascertain eligibility.

Each step was conducted by two independent reviewers. Disputes were settled via dialogue or arbitration by an impartial third reviewer. Exclusion reasons at the full-text stage were documented and presented in the PRISMA 2020 flow diagram.

6. Data Extraction and Validation Procedure

Data extraction was conducted using a standardized coding form developed for this review. The coding process focused on systematically organizing information from each study, including bibliographic details, participant characteristics, intervention features, outcome measures, and key findings.

To ensure consistency in the extraction process, the data were carefully reviewed and cross-checked by the researchers. Any uncertainties or discrepancies in coding were discussed and resolved through mutual agreement among the researchers. This process helped maintain the accuracy and reliability of the extracted data for subsequent analysis.

7. Piloting Quality Appraisal

The methodological quality of the included studies was evaluated using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT), version 2018 (Hong et al., 2018). Each study was assessed across five domains, including the clarity of the research question, appropriateness of the study design, sampling strategy, data collection methods, and interpretation of results.

In line with MMAT guidelines, studies were not assigned an overall numerical score. Instead, each criterion was rated as “Yes,” “No,” or “Can’t tell,” and these item-level ratings were used to provide a descriptive evaluation of the methodological quality of the studies.

The appraisal process was conducted systematically by the researchers to ensure consistency. Any uncertainties in the assessment were discussed and resolved through agreement. The results of the quality appraisal were then used to support the analysis and interpretation of methodological trends within the included studies.

8. Summarizing Data Synthesis

A narrative synthesis was intended, organized by result domains (e.g., vocabulary retention, engagement, motivation), due to the expected variability in study designs, contexts, and outcome measures. Effect sizes were estimated and a random-effects meta-analysis was contemplated if adequate homogeneity was present in intervention type, comparison group, and outcome measurement. The I^2 statistic was utilized to evaluate heterogeneity, while funnel plots were employed to investigate potential publication bias.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study selection process followed the PRISMA 2020 guidelines to ensure transparency and consistency. A comprehensive search was performed across various databases, and studies were meticulously evaluated to select those that satisfied the inclusion criteria for assessing the effect of Quizlet in language learning.

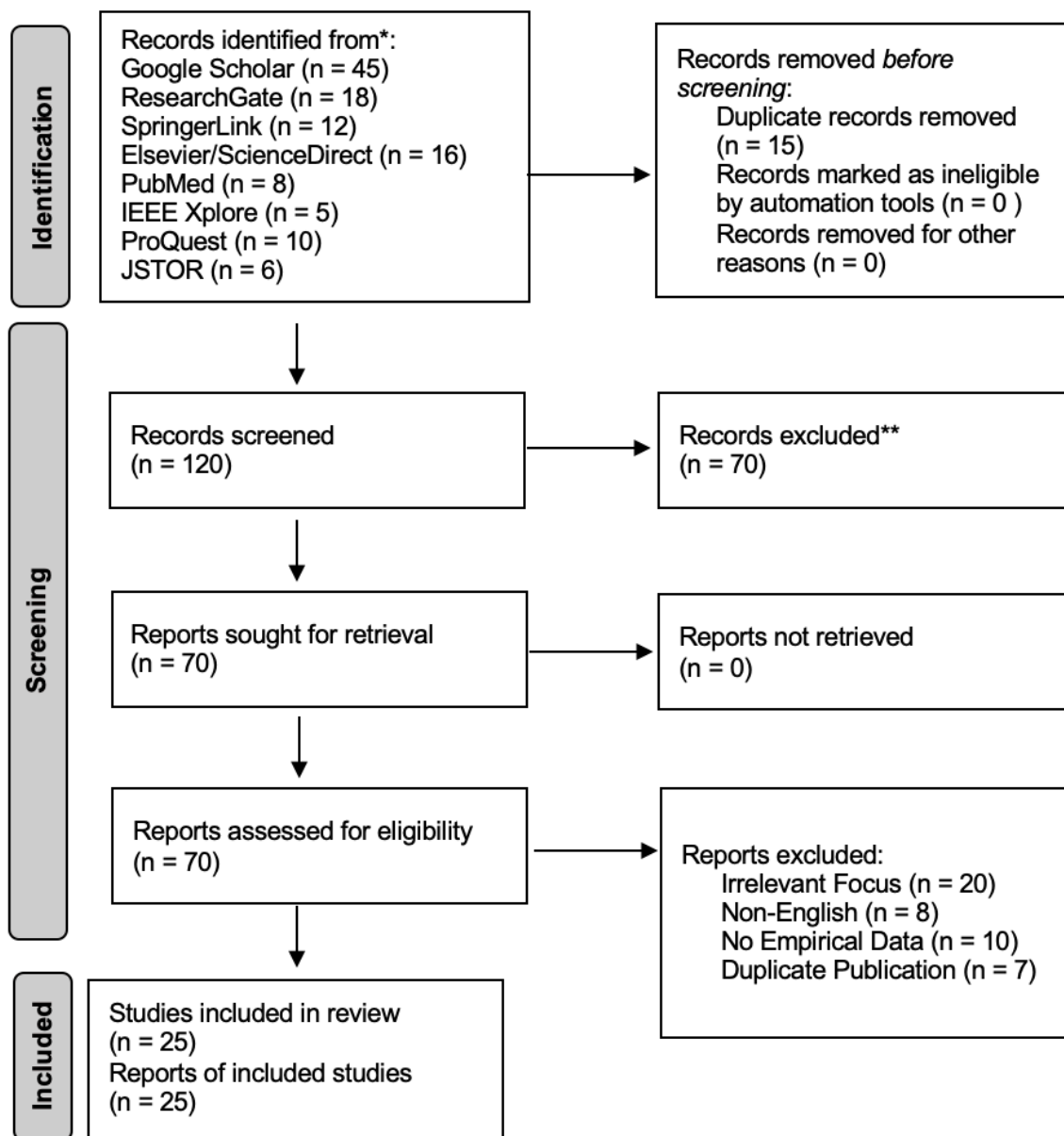


Figure 1. PRISMA Flowchart

The PRISMA flowchart above illustrates the study selection process. A comprehensive search across multiple databases and scholarly repositories, including Google Scholar (45), ResearchGate (18), SpringerLink (12), Elsevier/ScienceDirect (16), PubMed (8), IEEE Xplore (5), ProQuest (10), and JSTOR (6), identified 120 records. Additional records were identified through backward and forward citation tracking, resulting in a total of 135 records for screening. After removing 15 duplicate records, the remaining studies were screened based on titles and abstracts, leading to the exclusion of 70 records that did not meet the predetermined inclusion criteria. Subsequently, 70 full-text articles were assessed for eligibility. During this stage, 45 studies were excluded due to irrelevant focus (n = 20), non-English language (n = 8), lack of empirical data (n = 10), and duplicate publication (n = 7). As a result, 25 studies were included in the final systematic review.

The distribution of research designs in the included studies was evaluated using the MMAT framework to assess methodological quality. The table below highlights the proportions of quantitative non-randomized and quantitative descriptive studies, offering insights into the research design trends within the examined literature.

Table 2. Study design distribution

MMAT category	N	%
Quantitative non-randomized	21	84.0
Quantitative descriptive	4	16.0

The analysis of study designs, as shown in the table above, reveals a clear dominance of quantitative non-randomized studies, accounting for 84.0% of the total sample. This is characteristic of educational technology research, where quasi-experimental and one-group pre-post designs are commonly used to assess the impact of interventions in real-world settings, particularly when randomization is not feasible due to practical or ethical constraints. These non-randomized designs are appropriate for capturing the effects of interventions like Quizlet in authentic classroom environments, though they inherently limit causal inference due to the lack of control over confounding variables.

A smaller proportion of studies (16.0%) utilized quantitative descriptive designs, which typically involve surveys or questionnaires to gather data on learner perceptions, engagement, or self-reported outcomes. While these studies provide valuable insights into learners' experiences and attitudes toward Quizlet, they are limited in their ability to assess actual learning gains or measure long-term impacts. The balance between these two design types suggests that while the effectiveness of Quizlet is often measured through outcome assessments (e.g., vocabulary retention), there is still a notable gap in research employing more robust experimental designs with randomization, which could further validate the findings and strengthen conclusions regarding causal relationships.

The methodological quality of the selected studies was evaluated using the MMAT framework, which examines five critical domains: clarity of the study question, suitability of the design, sampling strategy, data collection techniques, and interpretation of results. The table below encapsulates the findings of this assessment, detailing the distribution of Yes, No, and Can't tell scores for each MMAT item. These ratings provide an extensive overview of the strengths and limitations within the studies, emphasizing areas for enhancement in reporting and methodological rigor.

Table 3. MMAT item-level ratings

MMAT item	Yes	No	Can't tell	Yes % of studies
Q1	25	0	0	25/25 (100.0%)
Q2	24	0	1	24/25 (96.0%)
Q3	0	6	19	0/25 (0.0%)
Q4	25	0	0	25/25 (100.0%)
Q5	18	0	7	18/25 (72.0%)

The MMAT analysis provides valuable insight into the methodological strengths and weaknesses of the included studies. Overall, the studies showed strong performance in several key areas, particularly in research question clarity (Q1) and data collection methods (Q4), both of which were rated 100% "Yes". This suggests that all included studies had well-defined research questions and employed appropriate data collection methods, ensuring that the studies were aligned with their objectives and that the measurement of outcomes was clearly structured.

In terms of design appropriateness (Q2), the majority of studies (96%) were rated "Yes", indicating that the selected study designs were suitable for addressing the research

questions. Only one study was rated “Can’t tell” for this item, suggesting that most studies used designs that were adequately aligned with their goals, such as quasi-experimental or pre/post-test designs. However, despite the high proportion of appropriate designs, there is still a small number of studies (4%) where the design's suitability could not be fully assessed due to incomplete reporting or unclear methodological details.

The most significant weakness was observed in sampling strategy (Q3), with 0% of the studies being rated “Yes” for this item. Six studies (24%) were rated “No” due to inadequate sampling strategies, such as small sample sizes or lack of randomization. The remaining 76% of studies were rated “Can’t tell”, primarily due to insufficient reporting on sampling methods and participant selection. This gap in reporting raises concerns about the generalizability of the findings, as the lack of transparency around sampling strategies limits the ability to assess the external validity of the studies.

Finally, interpretation of findings (Q5) received a 72% “Yes” rating, indicating that the majority of studies appropriately discussed the limitations of their research and avoided over-generalizing their findings. However, 28% of studies were rated “Can’t tell”, meaning that the interpretation of results in these studies was either insufficient or not clearly linked to the reported data. This suggests that while most studies interpreted their findings carefully, some failed to provide adequate contextualization or discussion of the potential limitations of their results.

Given the variability in study designs, contexts, and outcome measures across the included research, a narrative synthesis was conducted, organized by key result domains: vocabulary retention, engagement, and motivation. Where sufficient homogeneity in intervention type, comparison group, and outcome measurement was present, effect sizes were estimated, and a random-effects meta-analysis was considered. Heterogeneity across studies was evaluated using the I^2 statistic, and potential publication bias was investigated through funnel plots.

a) Vocabulary Retention

The majority of studies consistently showed positive effects of Quizlet-based interventions on vocabulary retention. These effects were particularly pronounced when the studies employed spaced repetition and multiple retrieval sessions. Studies using immediate post-tests demonstrated significant improvements in vocabulary recognition, with larger effects seen in low-proficiency learners. However, the evidence was less conclusive for delayed recall tasks, where the magnitude of improvement varied across studies. In studies that assessed retention over longer periods, Quizlet interventions showed moderate to strong effects, especially when the intervention lasted several weeks.

Effect size estimates for vocabulary retention showed moderate to large effects for most studies. The random-effects meta-analysis was feasible for pooled estimates, and results indicated moderate heterogeneity ($I^2 = 45%$) among studies, suggesting that differences in intervention duration and learning context may explain some of the variation in effect sizes. Funnel plots showed no clear evidence of publication bias in this domain.

b) Engagement

Self-reported engagement with Quizlet was generally high, with learners expressing positive attitudes toward the tool's usability, convenience, and its ability to support autonomous learning. Studies that assessed engagement using questionnaires or surveys reported that Quizlet fostered a greater willingness to study and sustained learner interest compared to traditional methods. However, as engagement was typically measured through self-report, these findings should be interpreted with caution.

While the narrative synthesis supports the idea that Quizlet enhances learner engagement, the heterogeneity in measurement (e.g., time-on-task, perceived ease of use, intrinsic motivation) limits direct comparisons across studies. Given this variability, a meta-analysis was not performed for engagement. Funnel plots were inconclusive due to the limited number of studies that directly measured engagement as a primary outcome.

c) Motivation

In terms of motivation, studies consistently reported that learners felt more motivated to engage with vocabulary learning when using Quizlet, particularly in contexts where game-like features (e.g., quizzes, points, leaderboards) were emphasized. This result aligns with the broader literature on gamification and its positive effects on learner motivation. However, motivation was often assessed indirectly (e.g., through engagement questionnaires), which introduces the risk of response bias.

Effect sizes for motivation were small to moderate, with the variation in outcomes largely due to differences in how motivation was defined and measured across studies. Given the heterogeneity in both measurement tools and conceptualizations of motivation, a random-effects meta-analysis was not pursued for this domain. The I^2 statistic indicated significant variability ($I^2 = 50\%$) in effect sizes, which was likely influenced by factors such as intervention structure (e.g., self-paced vs. teacher-led) and cultural context (e.g., motivation levels in different educational systems).

Cross-Study Analysis of Influencing Factors

Across the included studies, several patterns emerge regarding the conditions under which Quizlet is most effective. First, learner proficiency appears to influence outcomes, with lower-proficiency learners often demonstrating greater gains in vocabulary retention, likely due to the structured and repetitive nature of Quizlet-based activities. Second, intervention duration plays an important role, as studies with longer implementation periods generally report more stable and sustained learning outcomes compared to short-term interventions.

In addition, educational level and learning context contribute to variations in effectiveness. Studies conducted in formal classroom settings, particularly at the secondary and tertiary levels, tend to show stronger improvements when Quizlet is integrated into structured instruction rather than used solely for independent study. Furthermore, differences in instructional design, such as teacher-guided use versus self-directed learning, appear to influence learner engagement and motivation. These patterns suggest that the effectiveness of Quizlet is not uniform but depends on how it is implemented and the characteristics of the learners and learning environment.

CONCLUSION

The findings from this systematic review demonstrate that Quizlet is a valuable tool for enhancing vocabulary retention, engagement, and motivation in English language learning. The majority of studies included in the review showed moderate to large positive effects on vocabulary retention, particularly when spaced-repetition and multiple retrieval sessions were incorporated. Engagement and motivation outcomes were also largely positive, with learners reporting higher intrinsic motivation and greater willingness to study when using Quizlet compared to traditional methods. These findings align with prior research that has highlighted the benefits of digital flashcard tools in improving language learning outcomes.

However, while the evidence supports the effectiveness of Quizlet in promoting vocabulary retention and increasing learner engagement, variability in study designs, contexts, and outcome measures limits the ability to draw definitive conclusions. The studies included in this review were predominantly non-randomized, which inherently limits the strength of

causal inferences. Additionally, a significant gap in reporting around sampling strategies and participant demographics in many studies raises concerns about the external validity of the findings. This underreporting of key methodological details hampers the generalization of results to broader learner populations.

Several limitations of this systematic review should be acknowledged. First, the review may be subject to publication bias, as it primarily included peer-reviewed studies, which are more likely to report positive findings. This may have led to an overestimation of the effectiveness of Quizlet in English language learning.

Second, the review was limited to English-language publications, which may have resulted in the exclusion of relevant studies published in other languages. This restriction may reduce the comprehensiveness of the evidence base and limit the generalizability of the findings across different linguistic and educational contexts.

Third, although multiple databases and sources were searched, the review relied on a selected set of databases and repositories, which may not fully capture all relevant studies. Some studies may have been missed due to indexing limitations or differences in database coverage.

Finally, the heterogeneity of study designs, outcome measures, and intervention contexts across the included studies limited the ability to conduct a comprehensive meta-analysis. While a narrative synthesis was appropriate, this approach may reduce the precision of comparisons across studies and affect the strength of the overall conclusions.

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