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Exploring Kahoot's Potential to Foster Close Reading and Student Engagement

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Abstract
The integration of digital learning technologies has become increasingly important in English language education to improve students' reading comprehension and classroom engagement. However, many elementary school students continue to experience difficulties in maintaining attention and actively participating in reading activities, particularly when conventional instructional methods are applied. This study aimed to investigate the potential of Kahoot!-based learning in encouraging close reading and enhancing student engagement during descriptive text learning among sixth-grade elementary school students. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed involving 24 sixth-grade students at Elementary School. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and vocabulary reflection sheets. The data were analyzed using the interactive qualitative analysis model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, including data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing through triangulation. The findings revealed that Kahoot!-based learning increased students' behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement during reading activities. Students actively reread descriptive texts, identified textual evidence before answering questions, and participated enthusiastically throughout the learning process. Furthermore, vocabulary reflection activities enabled students to identify unfamiliar words independently and strengthened their vocabulary development. The study concludes that integrating Kahoot!-based close reading with vocabulary reflection creates a more engaging, interactive, and student-centered learning environment that supports reading comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and digital literacy development in elementary English classrooms..

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of digital technology has transformed educational practices, encouraging teachers to integrate innovative learning media that enhance students' engagement and literacy skills. In English language learning, reading comprehension remains one of the most essential competencies because it enables students to construct meaning, develop vocabulary, and strengthen critical thinking. However, many elementary school students still experience difficulties in maintaining concentration and actively participating in reading activities, particularly when conventional teacher-centered methods are employed. Therefore, integrating digital learning technologies into literacy instruction has become increasingly important to create meaningful and student-centered learning experiences (Reddy et al, 2023).

Reading comprehension requires students not only to recognize information explicitly stated in a text but also to analyze details, infer meaning, and connect ideas critically. One instructional approach that facilitates these processes is close reading, which encourages learners to reread texts carefully and pay attention to textual evidence before drawing conclusions. In addition, the integration of gamification into language learning has received considerable attention because game-based environments can increase motivation, participation, and learning enjoyment. Among various digital platforms, Kahoot! has become one of the most widely used educational applications due to its interactive quizzes, immediate feedback, and competitive learning atmosphere, which promote active learning and student engagement (Wang & Tahir, 2020).

The integration of digital technology into language education is closely associated with the development of digital literacy, which extends beyond the ability to operate technological devices. Digital literacy encompasses the competencies required to access, evaluate, interpret, and communicate information effectively through digital media (Reddy et al., 2023). In English language classrooms, digital literacy enables students to interact with authentic learning resources while simultaneously developing critical reading skills. Rather than functioning solely as a technological aid, digital learning platforms can transform the learning environment by encouraging active participation, collaboration, and immediate feedback. Consequently, teachers are increasingly expected to integrate digital tools that not only improve students' technological competencies but also strengthen higher-order thinking skills and reading comprehension. This perspective is particularly relevant in elementary education, where students require meaningful and engaging learning experiences to establish strong literacy foundations. Therefore, selecting appropriate digital media becomes an essential pedagogical decision that influences students' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement throughout the learning process (Reddy et al., 2023).

Student engagement has consistently been recognized as one of the strongest predictors of successful learning outcomes. Educational researchers generally classify engagement into three interrelated dimensions: behavioral engagement, emotional engagement, and cognitive engagement. Behavioral engagement refers to students' active participation during learning activities, emotional engagement reflects students' enthusiasm and interest toward learning, while cognitive engagement represents students' willingness to invest mental effort in understanding learning materials. These three dimensions are particularly important in reading instruction because students are required to sustain attention, analyze textual information carefully, and construct meaning from written discourse. (Wang & Tahir, 2020) reported that Kahoot! significantly enhances these dimensions of engagement by creating interactive learning experiences characterized by competition, instant feedback, and enjoyable classroom interactions. Similarly, (Rojabi et al, 2022) found that game-based learning environments positively influence students' motivation, vocabulary acquisition, and learning performance by encouraging learners to participate actively in classroom activities. These findings indicate that digital gamification can create a more supportive learning atmosphere that motivates students to engage deeply with reading tasks.

In addition to improving engagement, recent studies have highlighted the importance of integrating vocabulary development into reading instruction. Vocabulary knowledge plays a fundamental role in reading comprehension because students cannot fully understand a text without sufficient lexical knowledge. During close reading activities, students frequently encounter unfamiliar words that require contextual interpretation before complete comprehension can be achieved. Consequently, encouraging students to identify, record, and revisit newly learned vocabulary has become an effective strategy for strengthening both vocabulary retention and reading comprehension. (Devitriana, 2025) demonstrated that Kahoot! significantly improves students' vocabulary mastery while increasing their learning motivation through interactive learning experiences. Likewise, (Rojabi, 2022) found that sixth-grade students showed better vocabulary acquisition after participating in Kahoot!-based learning activities. Although these studies confirmed the effectiveness of Kahoot! in vocabulary learning, they mainly focused on vocabulary achievement as the primary outcome. Comparatively fewer studies have investigated how vocabulary reflection activities conducted immediately after game-based learning can complement close reading strategies and contribute to students' deeper comprehension of descriptive texts. This unexplored relationship provides an important opportunity for further investigation, particularly within elementary English language classrooms where vocabulary growth and reading comprehension are closely interconnected. Despite these advantages, reading instruction in elementary schools continues to face several challenges. Students often lose interest during reading activities, demonstrate limited participation

in classroom discussions, and encounter difficulties in identifying important information from descriptive texts. These problems reduce the effectiveness of literacy instruction and frequently result in limited vocabulary acquisition. Previous studies have also reported that insufficient student engagement negatively influences reading comprehension achievement, indicating the need for more interactive instructional strategies (Kurnia., 2020; Bond et al. 2020; Fredricks et al. 2024; Kusumaningrum & Pramudiani, 2021)

One promising alternative to address these challenges is the implementation of Kahoot! as a game-based learning platform. Through competitive quizzes, immediate scoring, and instant feedback, Kahoot! encourages students to read more carefully before selecting answers. This learning environment not only increases behavioral and emotional engagement but also motivates students to participate actively throughout the lesson. Moreover, digital gamification provides opportunities for students to strengthen vocabulary mastery through repeated exposure to meaningful language contexts (Rojabi, 2022; Wang & Tahir, 2020). Previous research has demonstrated various educational benefits of Kahoot!. (Wang & Tahir, 2020), through a comprehensive literature review, concluded that Kahoot! positively affects learning performance, motivation, classroom interaction, and engagement across different educational contexts. (Kusumaningrum & Pramudiani, 2021) reported that Kahoot! significantly increased elementary students' learning interest, while (Mala, Mustofa, & Jihad, 2023) found that the platform effectively improved students' skimming and scanning abilities in reading instruction. Furthermore, (Anggraeni, 2024) showed that Kahoot! positively contributed to reading literacy development among elementary school students, whereas (Rosdy & Yunus, 2021) emphasized its effectiveness as a formative assessment tool that provides immediate feedback during learning.

Although the effectiveness of Kahoot! has been extensively investigated, previous studies have primarily focused on improving students' motivation, general reading comprehension, formative assessment, or specific reading strategies such as skimming and scanning. Only limited attention has been given to the use of Kahoot! as a medium for promoting close reading in descriptive text learning while simultaneously encouraging students to independently identify and record newly acquired vocabulary after the learning activity. Consequently, empirical evidence regarding this integrated instructional approach in elementary school contexts remains limited.

The novelty of this study lies in integrating Kahoot!-based close reading activities with independent vocabulary reflection following game-based learning sessions. Unlike previous studies that mainly evaluated students' engagement or reading achievement, this study explores how Kahoot! facilitates close reading behavior while encouraging learners to construct vocabulary knowledge through reflective note-taking activities after gameplay.

Therefore, this study aims to investigate the potential of Kahoot! in encouraging close reading and enhancing student engagement during descriptive text learning among sixth-grade elementary school students. Specifically, this study explores how Kahoot!-based learning promotes careful text analysis, active classroom participation, and independent vocabulary development. The findings are expected to provide practical implications for English teachers by offering an innovative digital learning strategy that supports literacy development and creates more engaging, student-centered learning environments in elementary schools.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to explore how Kahoot!-based learning facilitates close reading activities and enhances students' engagement during English learning. A qualitative design was selected because the study aimed to obtain an in-depth understanding of students'

learning experiences, classroom interactions, and perceptions during the implementation of game-based learning rather than examining causal relationships through statistical analysis. This approach enabled the researcher to investigate how Kahoot! supported students in carefully analyzing descriptive texts while encouraging active participation and vocabulary development throughout the learning process (Creswell, J. W., & Poth, 2018).

The study was conducted at one of the Elementary Schools in Central Java, Indonesia, during the second semester of the 2024/2025 academic year. The participants consisted of 24 sixth-grade students selected using purposive sampling. Sixth-grade students were chosen because they had previously studied descriptive texts in English and were considered capable of participating in digital learning activities using Kahoot!. The researcher acted as the primary research instrument, while observation sheets, vocabulary reflection sheets, and semi-structured interview guidelines served as supporting instruments to collect comprehensive qualitative data.

The research was implemented in several stages. Prior to the classroom activities, the researcher prepared descriptive reading materials and designed Kahoot! quizzes that encouraged students to apply close reading strategies by identifying explicit information, making simple inferences, and paying close attention to textual details before answering each question. During the learning process, students first read descriptive texts individually and subsequently completed Kahoot!-based quizzes using digital devices. The application provided immediate feedback and displayed students' scores after each question, creating an interactive learning environment that encouraged active participation and sustained engagement. After completing the quizzes, students independently recorded unfamiliar vocabulary encountered during the reading activities together with the meanings of the words on vocabulary reflection sheets. Finally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected students to obtain further information regarding their learning experiences, reading strategies, motivation, and perceptions toward the implementation of Kahoot! in descriptive text learning.

The data collected in this study consisted of observation field notes, students' vocabulary reflection sheets, and interview transcripts. Classroom observations focused on students' behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement during the implementation of Kahoot!-based learning. Vocabulary reflection sheets were analyzed to identify students' awareness of newly acquired vocabulary and their ability to recognize unfamiliar lexical items encountered during close reading activities. Interview data were used to explore students' perceptions regarding the effectiveness of Kahoot! in promoting careful reading, classroom participation, and vocabulary learning.

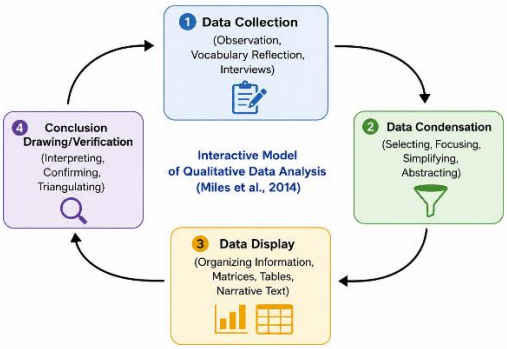

Figure 1. Interactive Model of Qualitative Data Analysis Adapted from Miles et al. (2014)

The collected data were analyzed using the interactive model proposed by (Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, 2014) which includes data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. All qualitative data obtained from classroom observations, vocabulary reflection sheets, and interviews were first organized and coded according to emerging themes. Similar codes were then

grouped into broader categories representing students' engagement, close reading behaviors, and vocabulary development. The categorized findings were interpreted by comparing evidence from different data sources through data triangulation to enhance the credibility of the results. This analytical procedure enabled the researcher to obtain a comprehensive understanding of how Kahoot!-based learning supported close reading practices and promoted students' engagement in English descriptive text learning.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The implementation of Kahoot!-based learning during descriptive text instruction revealed three major findings related to students' engagement, close reading behavior, and vocabulary development.

First, classroom observations indicated that students demonstrated high levels of behavioral and emotional engagement throughout the learning activities. Most students actively participated in the Kahoot! quizzes by carefully reading the descriptive texts before selecting their answers. They showed enthusiasm during the competition, responded immediately to each question, and remained focused until the end of the learning session. Unlike previous classroom observations using conventional instruction, students were more willing to participate in classroom discussions and expressed greater confidence when answering reading comprehension questions. Interview responses also revealed that the competitive features and immediate feedback provided by Kahoot! increased students' motivation to pay closer attention to the reading materials. These findings are consistent with (Wang & Tahir, 2020) who concluded that Kahoot! positively influences students' engagement, motivation, and classroom interaction across various educational contexts. Similarly, (Licorish, S. A., Owen, H. E., Daniel, B., & George, 2018) reported that immediate feedback and competitive game elements encourage students to participate more actively and remain engaged throughout the learning process. The observed behavioral and emotional engagement in this study also reflects the dimensions of student engagement proposed by (Fredricks, J. A., Blumenfeld, P. C., & Paris, 2024), namely behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement.

Second, the findings showed that Kahoot! encouraged students to apply close reading strategies while completing the quizzes. During classroom observations, students frequently reread the descriptive texts before deciding on the correct answers, especially when questions required them to identify specific details or infer information from the passages. Several students were also observed discussing textual evidence with their peers before submitting their responses. These behaviors indicate that the learning activities promoted careful text analysis rather than superficial reading. The immediate feedback provided after each question also encouraged students to review incorrect answers and revisit the relevant parts of the text. This finding supports the systematic review conducted by (Wang & Tahir, 2020), which demonstrated that Kahoot! facilitates active learning by encouraging students to process information more carefully before responding. Furthermore, (Bond, M., Bedenlier, S., Marín, V. I., & Händel, 2020) emphasized that educational technology promotes meaningful learning when learners actively interact with instructional content instead of passively receiving information. The implementation of close reading activities through Kahoot! in this study illustrates how digital technology can support higher-order thinking and reading comprehension.

Third, vocabulary reflection sheets demonstrated that students were able to identify unfamiliar vocabulary independently after completing the Kahoot! activities. Most students successfully recorded new words encountered in the descriptive texts together with their meanings based on contextual understanding or teacher guidance. During the interviews, several students stated that writing down unfamiliar vocabulary helped them remember the words more easily and increased their confidence when reading English texts. This finding suggests that integrating vocabulary reflection into Kahoot!-based

learning supports not only vocabulary acquisition but also students' awareness of their own learning process. These findings are in line with (Rojabi, 2022), who found that Kahoot!-based gamification significantly enhances vocabulary learning, learner engagement, and academic achievement. Likewise, (Reddy et al., 2023) argued that digital literacy development should involve learners' ability to access, interpret, and utilize digital information effectively to improve learning outcomes. Therefore, combining Kahoot!-based activities with vocabulary reflection may strengthen students' reading comprehension by integrating digital literacy practices with vocabulary learning.

Table 1. Summary of the Min Findings

Theme	**Observation Findings**	**Suporting Data Source**
Student engagement	Students actively participated, showed enthusiasm, and remained focused during Khoot! Activities.	Classroom Observations, Interviews
Close Reading Behavior	Students reread descriptive texts, identified textual evidence, and discussed answers before responding.	Classroom observations
Vocabulary Reading	Students independently identified unfamiliar words, recorded meanings, and applied them in sentences.	Vocabulary reflelction sheets, interviews

Overall, the findings indicate that Kahoot!-based close reading activities created an engaging learning environment that promoted active participation, encouraged careful reading behavior, and supported independent vocabulary development among sixth-grade students during descriptive text learning. These findings reinforce previous evidence that game-based learning can enhance student engagement, meaningful learning experiences, and literacy development when integrated with appropriate instructional strategies (Bond, M., Bedenlier, S., Marín, V. I., & Händel, 2020; Rojabi, 2022; Wang & Tahir, 2020).

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Kahoot!-based learning has considerable potential to encourage close reading and enhance student engagement during descriptive text learning among sixth-grade elementary school students. The implementation of interactive quizzes motivated students to participate actively in classroom activities, carefully reread texts before answering questions, and demonstrate greater behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement throughout the learning process. In addition, the vocabulary reflection activity conducted after the Kahoot! session supported students in identifying unfamiliar words independently and strengthening their vocabulary knowledge. These findings indicate that integrating Kahoot! with close reading activities creates a more meaningful, interactive, and student-centered learning environment that supports both reading comprehension and vocabulary development.

This study also contributes to the existing literature by integrating Kahoot!-based close reading activities with independent vocabulary reflection, an instructional approach that has received limited attention in previous studies. Nevertheless, this research was conducted in a single elementary school with a relatively small number of participants, limiting the generalizability of the findings. Future studies are recommended to involve larger participant groups, different educational levels, or mixed-methods and experimental designs to examine the effectiveness of this instructional approach more comprehensively. The findings of this study are expected to provide practical guidance for English

teachers in utilizing digital game-based learning to improve literacy instruction and promote active student engagement in elementary classrooms.

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