Using Quizlet for Academic Vocabulary Acquisition

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Abstract

This study investigates whether the use of Quizlet improved learning of AWL vocabulary, and if the presence of an image on the electronic flashcards further helped vocabulary acquisition and retention. Twenty international students in a college-level English as an international language class were randomly assigned to two groups. They spent 20 minutes studying previously unknown words from the Academic Word List on Quizlet, either with or without an image. The Post-Test showed significant improvement of vocabulary knowledge in both groups. The Delayed Test still showed improvement, even though to a lesser extent. The use of pictures only had immediate positive effects on vocabulary retention. In the long term, students who studied with no pictures had better retention than those who studied with pictures. Participants also expressed determination to continue using Quizlet in the future and believed the tool was beneficial for increasing their vocabulary proficiency.

Introduction

For language learners and educators, it is not a secret that vocabulary is an essential factor in building the foundation of second language acquisition. Indeed, vocabulary has rightfully been called the building block of a language (Chappelle & Jamieson, 2008, p. 11). If knowing the words of a language is important, what can teachers do to help learners succeed in mastering vocabulary? Is it enough to have them read literature and textbooks, hoping that the more they read, the more they will understand the text? Or are there faster and more effective ways of learning vocabulary? This paper aims to find out whether using Quizlet and adding an image to an electronic word card on Quizlet will improve vocabulary acquisition.

Mobile-Assisted Vocabulary Learning

Implementing technology for vocabulary acquisition makes this sometimes-tedious task more enjoyable and motivates students to be engaged in learning (Köse et al., 2016). A wide variety of mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) has been used in helping learners master vocabulary. Some of these are short message services (SMS); multimedia message services (MMS) (Lin & Lin, 2019); apps such as WhatsApp, CollocatApp, and Baicizhan (Klimova, 2021); and free websites such as Vocabulary.com, Visuwords.com, Online Etymology Dictionary, Free Rice, Word Sift, and many more. In their meta-analysis of 33 studies conducted between 2005 and 2018, Lin & Lin (2019) found that using electronic devices in the classroom increased students' vocabulary

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Lukov, T. S. (2022). Using Quizlet for academic vocabulary acquisition. TESOL Working Paper Series, 20, 34-52.

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learning skills and second language acquisition word retention. Another great advantage of mobile applications is that students can practice outside the classroom, where learning is more autonomous and personalized (Klimova, 2021).

Electronic flashcard-facilitated vocabulary learning has gained significant popularity in recent years (Nakata, 2011). Quizlet, a free online site and a downloadable mobile app, is among the many currently available computer tools. Anyone can sign up for a free account and create electronic flashcards. Teachers can add students to their class and provide focused vocabulary learning with specific word cards they have created. Students can generate their own or add information to existing cards, including definitions, example sentences, audio recordings of the word, images, and even links to short videos. Quizlet also provides assessment options allowing teachers to generate quizzes, tests, and games. After studying the effectiveness of nine online flashcard sites, Nakata (2011) found that they "maximize vocabulary learning."

Multiple studies have been conducted on the effectiveness of Quizlet. In 2016, nine university students in Japan showed statistically significant improvement in the Post-Test, compared to the Pre-Test, in their Academic Word List vocabulary knowledge after using Quizlet for ten weeks. The students also indicated (in the end-of-study survey) that using the application was easy and helped them be more motivated to study academic vocabulary (Dizon, 2016).

In a more recent study, researchers compared how vocabulary learning was affected when using traditional paper-made flashcards versus Quizlet. The participants were 39 high school students in Vietnam, divided into two groups, which alternated halfway through Quizlet, then paper flashcards, and vice versa. The study lasted for four weeks. An initial vocabulary test was administered to all students, followed by a vocabulary proficiency test at the end of each study period. The results showed that both paper and Quizlet flashcards significantly improved vocabulary acquisition. However, Quizlet was more effective because it created a more holistic environment, making it a more desirable tool for the learners (Ho & Kawaguchi, 2021).

Research Questions

The present study was designed to answer the following questions:

- 1. Does studying academic vocabulary through the online tool Quizlet improve vocabulary acquisition and retention for college English as an International Language (EIL) students?
- 2. Does adding an image to the electronic word cards on Quizlet help vocabulary learning?

Methodology

The study was conducted during the Fall semester of 2021 at a university in Hawaii. The participants were enrolled in an elective English as an international language course. The total number of students was 20, nine (45%) female and eleven (55%) male. They came from various countries in Asia or the South Pacific: Japan - 6 (30%); Indonesia, Korea, Tahiti, and Taiwan - 2 from each country (10%); and one student (5%) each from China, Fiji, Hong Kong, Mongolia, the Philippines, and Tonga. The student's current EIL placement also varied: for 5 of them (25%), this was the last EIL class they had to take (C2 level according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages scale), while most of the participants, 13 (65%), were at the equivalent of level C1. Only 2 (10%) were at the B2 level (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, n.d.).

A Pre-Test was conducted (Appendix A) to assess participants' knowledge of 18 randomly selected academic vocabulary items from Sublist 5 of the Academic Word List (Coxhead, 2000). The reason for choosing that specific sublist was that most of the vocabulary tested would not be completely familiar or entirely unfamiliar for most students but is somewhat in between. The test assessed both the receptive and productive acquisition of the words and was on paper to eliminate cheating (students could not check the meaning of the words using the internet). The time limit was 10 minutes. Then, students were randomly divided into two groups of 10 and used computers to access 18 electronic flashcards explaining the 18 selected vocabulary words on Quizlet. The flashcards were identical, except for an image added to the cards for Group 2 (Appendices B and C). To minimize possible interfering factors, students were not allowed to use Quizlet's audio option (they could not listen to the word). After 20 minutes of individual study time, the students took the same vocabulary test as a Post-Test. All students also took a short survey on Canvas later that day, answering four questions about what they did/did not like in learning vocabulary on Quizlet and if they felt the application helped them acquire the academic vocabulary faster or more easily (Appendix D). The vocabulary test was also administered one month later to assess long-term retention of the academic vocabulary. The participants were not informed of the follow-up test to minimize outside interference, so they would not spend extra time studying the 18 words outside class. No additional practice on Quizlet or instruction of the tested words was done in class during that month. Collected data were analyzed using an Excel spreadsheet.

Results

Quizlet's Effect on Vocabulary Learning and Retention

As anticipated, both groups of students improved their academic vocabulary knowledge after studying on Quizlet and kept some of that knowledge one month later. On the Pre-Test, students knew, on average, 59% of the words. Right after using Quizlet, that average knowledge became 88%, and one month later, it went down to an average of 71%. The substantial improvement of 29% between the Pre- and Post-Test is a clear indication of the effectiveness of using the online tool Quizlet for studying academic vocabulary. Even more interesting is that after one month, with no practice or studying of the tested words, in the Delayed Test, students still retained

almost half of the improvement from the Pre-Test to the Post-Test (down 17% from the 29% gain) (Figure 1). T-test analysis comparing the Post-Test and Delayed Test results with the Pre-Test shows that the differences are statistically significant (Table 1).

Figure 1Whole-Class Average Scores

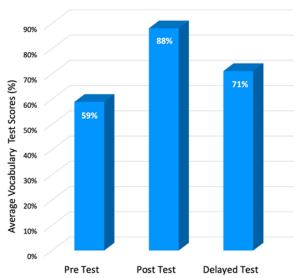


Table 1Vocabulary Test Results and Comparisons

	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Delayed-Test
Average score	59%	88% (+29% from Pre-Test, p = 0.0000001)	71% (+12% from Pre-Test, (p = 0.0003)
			(-17% from Post-Test, p = 0.000009)

At the same time, images on the electronic flashcards had a slightly positive effect overall on vocabulary retention, but only on the immediate Post-Test (Figure 2). Group 1, who studied the words on Quizlet without a picture, started at 62% accuracy, compared to group 2 at 56%. An explanation for the difference is most likely the students' proficiency levels. Both students at level B2 happened to be in Group 2. On the Post-Test, both groups improved their knowledge of the words (the p-value in both cases was statistically significant), with those who studied with the image scoring 2% higher (30%) than the group without the image (28%). This result is somewhat encouraging because group 2 had the students from the lowest EIL level, whose overall language

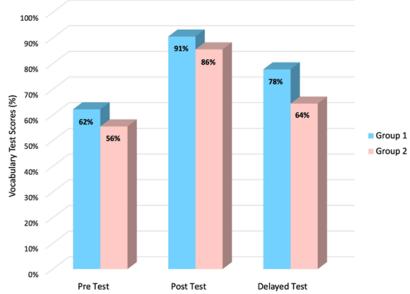
proficiency was lower than the rest. However, on the Delayed Test a month later, Group 1 went from 91% proficiency down to 78% (a decrease of 13%). In comparison, Group 2 (despite studying the words with an image on the flashcards) went from 86 % to 64 % proficiency (a decrease of 21%). The overall retention was also higher for Group 1, at 16%, which was statistically significant (p = 0.0001), compared to only 9 % for Group 2, which was not statistically significant (p = 0.1) (Table 2 and Figure 2).

Table 2Difference in Average Test Scores Between
Group 1 (Flashcards without Pictures) and Group 2 (Flashcards with Pictures)

	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Delayed Test
Group 1	62%	91% (+28% from Pre-Test, p = 0.0002)	78% (-13% from Post-Test, p = 0.00013)
Group 2	56%	86% (+30% from Pre-Test, p = 0.0006)	64% (-21% from Post-Test, p = 0.112)

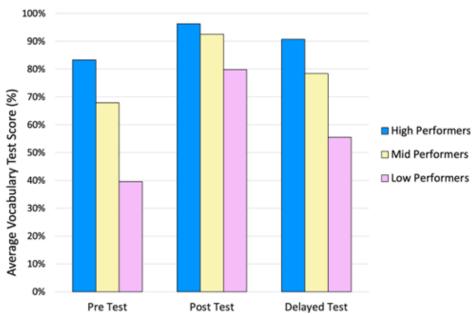
Note. Percentages were rounded to the nearest "1," which means some numbers do not add up perfectly.

Figure 2Average Test Scores of Group 1 (Flashcards without Pictures) and Group 2 (Flashcards with Pictures)



Further, to investigate the effects of the learning tool on different students, their scores were analyzed in 3 groups, according to the results of the Pre-Test: High Performers (3 students who scored 75% or above); Mid Performers (9 students who scored between 50% and 75%); and Low Performers (8 students who scored 50% or below) (Figure 3).

Figure 3Average Test Scores of High, Mid, and Low Performers



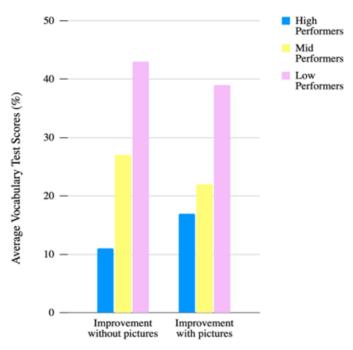
The results show that the Low Performers benefited the most from studying vocabulary on Quizlet. From initially scoring an average of only 40%, that group doubled their score in the Post-Test, achieving 80% accuracy (p = 0.0001). In comparison, the Mid Performers only increased their scores by 25% (p = 0.0004). The High Performers' improvement of 13% was not statistically significant (p = 0.07). It should be noted that there is not much room left for improvement among the Mid and High Performers since their scores were, on average, 96% and 93%, respectively. In the Delayed Test a month later, all groups showed a comparable (40-50%) loss of proficiency compared to the Post-Test. Nevertheless, the Low Performers still showed the most improvement from the starting point, scoring 16% higher than on the Pre-Test (p = 0.026), while the Mid Performers scored only 10% higher (p = 0.023). The High Performers' gain of 8% was not statistically significant (p = 0.057) (Table 3). Overall, Quizlet proved very beneficial for low- and mid-level students but not so much for high-level students, perhaps because they already scored high.

Table 3T-Test Analysis of Average Test Scores of High, Mid, and Low Performers

	Pre-Test Average	Post-Test Average	Delayed-Test Average
Low Performers	40%	80% (+40% from Pre-Test, p = 0.0001)	56% (+16% from Pre-Test, p = 0.026)
Mid Performers	68%	93% (+25% from Pre-Test, p = 0.0004)	78% (+10% from Pre-Test, p = 0.023)
High Performers	83%	96% (+13% from Pre-Test, p = 0.07)	91% (+8% from Pre-Test, p = 0.057)

Proficiency levels also led to differences in the immediate improvement after using Quizlet with or without an image (Figure 4). The mixed results indicate no substantial difference or advantage to using images in the electronic flashcards. The High Performers were the only ones who showed a gain when studying with an image versus without an image (17% and 11%, respectively). The statistical significance within the High Performers group could not be determined meaningfully because of the low number of participants (n=3). The Mid Performers benefited the least from the image on the flashcards—the initial improvement on the Post-Test without a picture was higher (27%) than with an image (22%). The use of images also seemed to have negatively affected Low Performers' vocabulary retention. The Low Performers showed the most improvement on the Post-Test (43% for those without an image and 39% for those with an image). Overall, the use of pictures in learning vocabulary did not seem to be a decisive factor for learners with varying levels of proficiency.

Figure 4
Improvement of High, Mid, Low Performers Without or With Image



Students' Views on Quizlet

To assess if the students found Quizlet useful and whether they would use this service in the future, a survey was administered later on the same day as the Post-Test. The complete responses to the survey are available in Appendix D. The survey showed that most students (88%), regardless of whether they used the flashcards with or without an image, liked using Quizlet for academic vocabulary learning and are planning to continue using it in the future. Only two students were not sure if they would use Quizlet on their own in the future (12%).

In the survey, students were also asked to describe their reasons for liking Quizlet and its features (Table 4).

Table 4Survey Responses to Question 1

What did you like about Quizlet?	Simple and easy to use	Helped me learn faster	Easy to understand definitions	Convenient - all I needed was there	The pictures
# of students	6	5	4	3	2

Percent (out of	35%	29%	24%	18%	12%
17 students)					

The students' reasons were categorized into the following groups: simple and easy to use (35%); it helped in acquiring the AWL vocabulary faster (29%); the definitions on the electronic flashcards were easy to understand (24%); convenience - everything needed was already there (18%); and 12% of students really liked having the image accompany the vocabulary they were learning.

In response to the more specific question about how Quizlet was helpful for faster vocabulary learning, 40% of students said that it was the "flippable" feature of the flashcards - because they could quickly switch between the word and its definition (Table 5).

Table 5How did Quizlet help you learn vocabulary faster?

How did Quizlet help you learn vocabulary faster?	I could quickly flip (flashcards)	I didn't need to look up definitions	Good, short definitions	Helped me remember spelling	Helped me with pronunciation
Number of students	6	6	3	1	1
Percentages (N = 15)	40%	40%	20%	7º/o	7º/o

The same number of students, 40%, felt that because they did not need to look up the definitions of the AWL vocabulary words, they learned faster when using Quizlet. Twenty percent of the participants also believed that the "good, short" definitions helped them acquire the words faster. The rest of the students who answered that question also felt that they learned the pronunciation and spelling of the words they studied faster because of Quizlet (1 student each or 7%). It is interesting that students mentioned pronunciation, although the audio was not involved. I believe students mentioned improvement in pronunciation because by studying the words intensely, they paid more attention to all details, including the sounds comprising each word; therefore, they believe their pronunciation was positively affected.

Eight students (40% of the class) indicated that there was something they did not like about Quizlet. (The other 60% either left that question blank or wrote "nothing.") Of the eight respondents, three (38% of the respondents) said that they did not like the requirement of signing up to use Quizlet, two (25%) of the respondents) said that they did not like having ads on the website, and two (25%) of the students who studied without an image wished they had pictures accompanying the vocabulary.

Discussion

The present study's first aim was to find out if studying academic vocabulary through the online tool Quizlet will improve vocabulary acquisition and retention for college EIL students. The results indicate that Quizlet had a positive impact on vocabulary acquisition and considerable retention of that knowledge one month later (Figure 1). These findings align with previous studies on using Quizlet for vocabulary (Nakata, 2011; Ho & Kawaguchi, 2021) and academic vocabulary learning (Dizon, 2016).

In response to the second research question, the study found that adding an image to the electronic word cards only improved immediate vocabulary learning (Figure 2). The group of students who studied the AWL on Quizlet with a picture showed a 2% higher improvement than the students who studied the words without an image, but that was only on the immediate (post) test. One month later, those same students had forgotten a lot more than the students who studied the words without an image. These findings are somewhat consistent with the results of a previous study, showing that vocabulary learning was improved during combined exposure to sound/video/captions when watching videos in the target language (Klimova, 2021). Nevertheless, the current results differ from Klimova's study (2021) in that the image only helped with short-term memorization and not with the long-term accusation and learning of academic words.

Additionally, it was found that those who did not know vocabulary very well (scored lower than 50%) benefited the most from studying on Quizlet, and their proficiency was increased by 40% on the Post-Test. Even though they forgot some of that knowledge, they scored 16% higher on the Delayed Test than on the Pre-Test (Figure 3). The students who already knew the AWL words from sublist 5 with 75% proficiency or higher only increased their scores by 13-25% and retained 8-10% of it a month later. However, one reason for the more significant improvement in the "Low Performers" group, compared to the students who scored 75% or more on the Pre-Test, could be that the latter group only had a small gap until reaching the maximum score of 100%. Nevertheless, the results of the overall improvement of vocabulary knowledge for all students after using Quizlet agree with the findings of Nakata (2011).

Another advantage of using Quizlet for academic vocabulary learning is that students really liked it. The survey responses indicated that almost all (88%) of the students believed that using the website helped them learn faster and was more convenient since all the information they needed was already on the flashcards. They were determined to continue using Quizlet in the future. Participants also said that the website was simple and easy to use, and the definitions on the flashcards were easy to understand. Additionally, they felt that flipping the flashcards from front to back was another beneficial feature. The survey results also showed that 40% of the students had something they did not like about Quizlet, but none of the given reasons were related to the tool's effectiveness. Instead, the students' dissatisfaction was with the service provider - either the requirement to sign up to use Quizlet or the presence of advertisements. Still, the overall feeling was that Quizlet was helpful, and the students would use it again, despite the above-mentioned minor inconveniences.

The obvious application of the current study's findings is that Quizlet could be implemented to study academic vocabulary. Another implication of the study is that even though an image on the flashcard makes it a lot more attractive, it is not necessary for vocabulary acquisition. If students practice with Quizlet, they will improve their word knowledge.

The results above need to be interpreted in the context of the study's limitations. The main limitation is that the positive results in vocabulary acquisition may not be attributed to the specific use of Quizlet. The improvement in vocabulary knowledge could be simply because students spent time studying the words! It is possible that similar improvement could have been achieved by using any other tool or even just studying a list of words and their definitions - as we see from the study comparing the use of Quizlet with traditional flashcards (Ho & Kawaguchi, 2021). In order to isolate the effects of Quizlet on vocabulary learning, future research needs to compare its use with the use of another tool for vocabulary learning. Another limitation of the study is that it was conducted in only one hour; therefore, the Post-Test results indicate mostly short-term memory ability and not true vocabulary learning. This problem can be remedied if the experiment is extended over a longer period - maybe the entire semester. After the Pre-Test, students would use Quizlet regularly and have a Post-Test after a few weeks or months. Another limitation is the small sample size, making it difficult to generalize the findings. Finally, using the same Pre- and Post-test while keeping variations to a minimum may mean that students' scores have improved just by taking a test they have already seen.

Future research may investigate these questions: 1) Are there any conditions where the presence of an image will dramatically improve vocabulary acquisition? 2) Does students' initial level of proficiency determine the benefit of having an image on electronic word cards? 3) Will studying the electronic word cards for prolonged periods of time (and not just an hour), have a more distinct, positive effect on vocabulary acquisition when the cards are accompanied by an image?

Conclusion

Technology is becoming an inseparable part of language teaching and learning. Electronic devices for vocabulary acquisition could be very effective and beneficial, especially for mastering the AWL, which requires even more focused attention than everyday vocabulary. The current study confirmed similar results from previous research - that Quizlet, with or without an image illustrating the words, helps students learn academic vocabulary. Even if the increased proficiency was only because of the time spent studying vocabulary (and not directly linked to the use of Quizlet), the outcomes are still welcomed. Students' positive attitude will help learners spend more time using the application or website, which in turn will help increase their vocabulary proficiency.

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	Appen	dix A	
Pre, Post, and Delaye Quizlet Project Name		oup	
2. pursue			
3. facilitate			
Open to new behav	d for each of the definition or opinions peral c) discrete d) prime		
To make people ob a) precise b) ratio			
	w a contrast or difference whereas c) notion d) ratio	9	
0	alue, use, meaning, etc. alent c) prime d) wherea	s	
O O	t improves something or whereas c) margin d) welf		
consult	facilitate	orient	ratio
discrete	margin	precise	welfare
expose	notion	prime	whereas

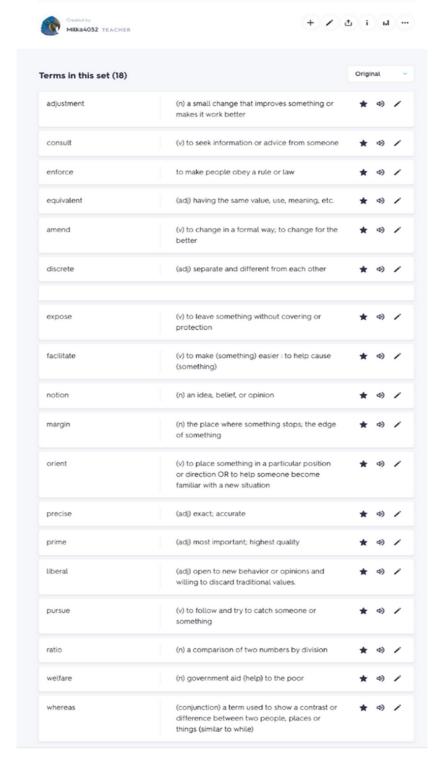
5. V	Vrite dow:	ı a word	from the	chart to	match the	definitions:
-------------	------------	----------	----------	----------	-----------	--------------

•	to place something in	a particular po	osition or direc	rtion
•	to place sometime in	a particular po	osition of unce	

•	separate and different from each other
•	most important; highest quality
•	to leave something without covering or protection
•	a comparison of two numbers by division
6.	Choose a word from the chart to finish the sentences:
•	In today's complicated economy, people should specialists before
	investing money or starting their own business.
•	When the teacher corrected the student's paper, she wrote comments in the
	·
•	This past year and a half, the COVID pandemic has caused many people to become
	dependent on
•	The navigation systems on airplanes must be very or the airplanes will
	not make it to their destination.
•	Some scientists hold the that being constantly involved in research is
	the only way to discover something worthwhile.

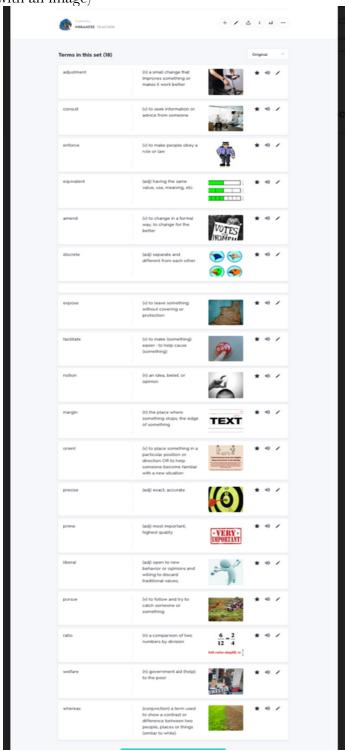
Appendix B

Group 1 (Flashcards with no image)



Appendix C

Group 2 (Flashcards with an image)



Appendix D

Quizlet Vocabulary Survey Results

What did you like about the website you used in class today?

- Convenient didn't need to make paper flashcards and could also use other prepared ones.
- Easy and helpful to learn
- I could turn the card quickly helped me memorize the definitions
- Like the pictures so we understand the words better
- It's simple and helped me learn faster
- It's simple
- The pictures helped me remember the definition more
- Very simple and easy to understand
- The basic, understandable definitions
- I learned a lot of words faster today
- The variety of ways to study
- Easy, simple, the pictures were the best part
- Comprehensible definitions and easy to navigate
- So good
- The clear and simple definitions
- We can see the new words and meanings easily, and we can put pictures
- I learned academic vocabulary faster
- I could see the words and meaning at the same time
- 2. How did Quizlet help (or not help) you learn vocabulary faster?
 - Short definitions helped me a lot, and I didn't need to look them u4
 - Helps me remember the definitions and spelling
 - The definitions are just behind the words helped me to learn faster
 - Faster than paper cards, and has pronunciation (audio)
 - The flashcards learning that way helped me learn faster
 - Good definitions
 - It's the vocabulary I need to know in one place, so I can memorize them faster
 - Going back and forth (turning the card) helps me memorize quicker
 - The definitions are right there, and I didn't have to search for them
 - There are already a lot of prepared lists, so you can study to ones you need faster
 - Seeing the words and definitions together helped me learn easier and faster than ever
 - Helped a lot because I didn't have to search for definitions

- The easy definitions helped me understand the vocabulary faster
- I could flip the card easily
- It included the word and simple definition, and I could flip, helped me learn better and faster
- 3. Is there anything you did not like about the website? What is it?
 - I had to sign up
 - Had to sign up, but it's ok since it's free
 - That it's not free forever
 - Ads
 - Having to sign up
 - I practiced without pictures, but I would like to have pictures, I think it will help me
 - My group did not have pictures I think it was going to be easier for me to memorize with pictures
 - Ads
- 4. Do you think that you will use this website on your own in the future?
 - Yes it will be useful to learn new vocabulary
 - Yes very helpful website
 - Yes
 - Yes
 - Definitely
 - 100% yes
 - ABSOLUTELY
 - Yes
 - Yes
 - I think so
 - Oh yes
 - Yes, if it's free
 - Yeah
 - Maybe
 - Yes, I do
 - For sure, I love it
 - Yes, I do, really useful for an English learner

About the author

Tatyana S. Lukov is an adjunct faculty member teaching EIL classes at Brigham Young University of Hawai'i (BYUH) for 10 years. She holds an Associates degree in English from Ricks College, a Bachelors in English and Psychology from BYUH, and a TESOL certificate from BYUH. She is currently an MA TESOL candidate at Hawaii Pacific University.