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THE USE OF DIGITAL TOOLS TO IMPROVE STUDENTS' VOCABULARY EL USO DE HERRAMIENTAS DIGITALES PARA MEJORAR EL VOCABULARIO DE LOS ESTUDIANTES

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Abstract

Throughout history, education has undergone profound changes at all levels and in all disciplines. In the case of language teaching, new elements and aspects have been integrated that must be considered in the teaching-learning process. Therefore, it can empower students to become the professionals that today's society needs, while maintaining the quality of education. In the current situation, considering the use of technology and digital tools, teachers assume the role of adviser, guide, and coordinator, develop a pedagogy based on dialogues with students, promote formative research, teamwork, discussion, and exchange of knowledge, thus generating interest in learning and feeling. Conveniently this technological advance and the use of digital tools is a support for the development of teaching practices, which teachers can support in simultaneous activities through games, videos, readings, activities suggested by research. In this sense, the main objective of this study is to analyze the characteristics of digital tools in teaching vocabulary to improve language learning. A mixed approach methodology allowed to outline the most important characteristics of digital tools in vocabulary language teaching.

Keywords: Vocabulary, digital tools, ICT.

Resumen

A lo largo de la historia, la educación ha sufrido profundos cambios en todos los niveles y en todas las disciplinas. En el caso de la enseñanza de idiomas, se han integrado nuevos elementos y aspectos que deben ser considerados en el proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje. Por lo tanto, puede capacitar a los estudiantes para que se conviertan en los profesionales que la sociedad actual necesita, manteniendo la calidad de la educación. En la coyuntura actual, considerando el uso de la tecnología y las herramientas digitales, los docentes asumen el rol de asesor, guía y coordinador, desarrollan una pedagogía basada en el diálogo con los estudiantes, promueven la investigación formativa, el trabajo en equipo, la discusión y el intercambio de saberes, generando así Interés por aprender y sentir. Convenientemente este avance tecnológico y el uso de herramientas digitales es un apoyo para el desarrollo de prácticas docentes, las cuales los docentes pueden apoyar en actividades simultáneas a través de juegos, videos, lecturas, actividades sugeridas por la investigación. En este sentido, el objetivo principal de este estudio es analizar las características de las herramientas digitales en la enseñanza de vocabulario para mejorar el aprendizaje de idiomas. Una metodología de enfoque mixto permitió esbozar las características más importantes de las herramientas digitales en la enseñanza de vocabulario de idiomas.

Palabras clave: Vocabulario, herramientas digitales, TIC.

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1. Introduction

Digital media provide access to useful information and create connections with study groups and other educational systems, making the entire learning process more interesting and engaging. It even improves the whole learning process a lot. Using digital media, it is easier and more convenient to share and receive information, communicate, and maintain connections, thus improving the learning process. Therefore, digital media helps teachers and students of English to find solutions to problems and improve their language skills (Nagendra, 2022).

Despite this, at the regional level there are many prejudices regarding the implementation of digital tools in language teaching. The cause of this problem is usually associated with the pedagogical approaches used by the teacher. This, according to authors such as Tan and Wan (2019), is largely due to the approach used by teachers to teach vocabulary is inefficient. Some teachers are very exam oriented and use traditional methods like practice and rote learning.

Theoretical framework

- ***Background of learning English in the world***

English is learned as a second language in many countries, and it is acquired and learned by people all over the world. It is a compulsory subject in both primary and secondary schools in Ecuador, even in some universities (Harpia et al., 2020). However, most students nationwide have low English proficiency despite learning the language since primary school (Samsi, 2016; Vlasáková & Manuhutu 2018; Dewi et al., 2022). Despite the evolution of technology, some teachers rely on conventional methods to teach vocabulary skills to their students, consequently the latter lose interest and fail to master the challenging skill.

This is corroborated by authors such as Fitriani (2020), who argues that teaching students to speak English as a foreign language is tremendously challenging. Having learned English for years at school and acquired enough vocabulary and grammatical features, students still find it difficult to speak English effortlessly. In fact, the use of digital



tools in speech teaching can be considered a prospective solution since some of them are specially designed for learning the English language. These tools equip teachers with unlimited and up-to-date resources, as well as make it easier for students to become much more involved in learning activities and are expected to better perform their speaking ability (Wahyuni & Rahman, 2019).

- ***Background on learning English vocabulary***

Vocabulary is one of the essential aspects of language learning, and it plays a crucial role in both oral and written communication. In the English language, learning vocabulary is particularly important due to the widespread use of English globally, and the constantly evolving nature of the language.

The history of vocabulary learning in English dates back several centuries, with a focus on teaching words and their meanings. In the early years, vocabulary was taught through rote learning and memorization, but this approach has since evolved to encompass a range of techniques

and strategies to aid learners in acquiring and retaining new words.

One of the most prominent investigations related to the learning of English vocabulary is the work of Paul Nation, a leading figure in the field of language teaching and learning. In his book, "Teaching and Learning Vocabulary," Nation emphasizes the importance of extensive reading in vocabulary acquisition. He states, "Reading is one of the most important ways of learning vocabulary because it exposes learners to words in context" (Nation, 2008, p. 36). Nation's work highlights the effectiveness of exposure to language in natural contexts as a means of improving vocabulary acquisition.

Another investigation that sheds light on the learning of English vocabulary is the work of Michael Lewis, who introduced the concept of lexical chunks. According to Lewis, a lexical chunk is a group of words that are commonly used together and have a single meaning. He argues that learning these chunks is essential in achieving fluency in a language. Lewis states, "We do not speak in single words or phrases but in longer, pre-fabricated units, which we store

and retrieve as single units" (Lewis, 1993, p. 89). Lewis's work highlights the importance of learning vocabulary in context, rather than in isolation.

A third investigation that contributes to our understanding of the learning of English vocabulary is the work of Norbert Schmitt, who focuses on the role of frequency in vocabulary acquisition. Schmitt argues that words that occur more frequently in the language are more likely to be learned and retained by learners. He states, "The more frequently a word occurs in a language, the more likely it is to be learned and retained by learners" (Schmitt, 2000, p. 199). Schmitt's work highlights the importance of teaching high-frequency vocabulary to learners, as these words are more likely to be encountered in everyday language use.

In conclusion, the study of English vocabulary learning has a long history and continues to evolve with the changing nature of the language. Investigations such as those conducted by Nation, Lewis, and Schmitt have contributed significantly to the understanding of effective vocabulary learning

strategies. These investigations have emphasized the importance of exposure to language in natural contexts, the learning of lexical chunks, and the teaching of high-frequency vocabulary. By incorporating these strategies into language teaching and learning, we can improve the effectiveness of vocabulary acquisition and ultimately improve learners' ability to communicate in English.

- ***Background of digital tools in learning spaces***

The advent of technological possibilities may have impacted the way students view vocabulary learning and, more importantly, the way language learning in general fits into the more global digital context. Under this premise, it is well known that digital devices play an important role in students' personal lives, but little is known about how students interact with their digital tools in their study space (Arones et al., 2022).

According to authors such as Cojocnean (2016), vocabulary learning in a computer-assisted and mobile language learning context refers to the possibilities offered by technology to learn or consolidate



vocabulary in English. Technological opportunities can be incidental or explicit in nature, but most of the time technology encompasses these two approaches. In the current study, digital learning strategies used with digital tools are grouped into four types, based on the characteristics that characterize technology-enhanced tools. Therefore, the four types of digital learning strategies are: social, determination, metacognitive-cognitive and memory (Junaid et al., 2022).

Digital tools include computer-assisted language learning tools and mobile devices, such as: computer-assisted vocabulary learning programs, computer-based vocabulary exercises, online dictionaries, lexical concordances, electronic lexical glosses, the use of websites of social networks, as well as the use of other websites. which would give students incidental opportunities to find new words (Ramamuthie & Abdul Aziz, 2022). Mobile-assisted language learning tools include language learning apps, but also apps that are not specifically designed for vocabulary learning (Parmawati, 2019).

Digital tools have become increasingly important in learning the English language in recent years. Research has shown that digital tools can play a critical role in learning the English language.

In this way, Haidari, Baysal & Kanadli (2020) in their study titled: The impact of digital technology-mediated foreign language instruction on vocabulary learning: A meta-analytic review, established as a general objective to investigate the overall impact of digital technology-mediated instruction on learning foreign language vocabulary in the Turkish context by calculating the mean effects followed by some moderator analyses. The main results that were obtained in this study was that "The common effect size was identified as 1.173 depending on random effects model, meaning that the integration of digital technologies in foreign language teaching may have a profound positive impact ($g = 1.173$) on students' vocabulary learning achievement" (Haidari, Baysal & Kanadli 2020, p. 245).

Under similar conditions, a study by Zainuddin and Attaran (2016) found that the use of digital tools such as e-books and multimedia improved English language learning outcomes. The study was conducted on Malaysian ESL students who used digital tools to learn the English language. The study found that students who used these digital tools had significantly better language skills compared to those who did not.

Similarly, a study by Barzegar and Alavinia (2019) investigated the impact of using digital storytelling on English language learning outcomes. The study was carried out with Iranian EFL students and found that students who used digital storytelling as a tool for language learning had significantly higher scores on vocabulary and reading comprehension tests compared to those who did not use digital storytelling. digital storytelling.

Mobile learning is another digital tool that has proven to be effective in learning the English language. A study by Elhami and Ahangar (2020) investigated the impact of using mobile learning on English language learning outcomes. The study was carried out with Iranian EFL students

and found that students who used mobile learning tools had significantly higher scores on grammar and vocabulary tests compared to those who did not use these tools.

Data from these studies provide strong evidence that digital tools are essential for effective English language learning. Digital tools can provide learners with access to authentic and engaging materials, immediate feedback, and opportunities for collaborative learning. For example, digital tools such as eBooks, multimedia, digital storytelling, and mobile learning apps have become increasingly popular in English language learning. These tools provide students with access to engaging content and opportunities to practice their language skills in a collaborative and interactive way.

Collaborative learning has been found to be an effective strategy for learning the English language, and digital tools have made this strategy even more effective. A study by Yanguas, Smith, and Markey (2017) investigated the effectiveness of collaborative writing tasks in the L2 classroom. The study found that group work was more effective than



pair or individual work in improving writing skills in English as a second language. Digital tools like Google Docs and other online peer-to-peer feedback tools have made it easy for students to collaborate on writing assignments, which can help them improve their writing skills.

Social networks are another digital tool that can be used to improve English language learning. A study by Sönmez (2021) investigated the role of social networks in learning the English language. The study found that students who used social media to learn languages had significantly higher motivation levels and better speaking and writing skills compared to those who did not use social media.

In conclusion, digital tools are essential for effective learning of the English language. Digital tools such as eBooks, multimedia, digital storytelling, mobile learning apps, and social media provide students with access to authentic and engaging materials, immediate feedback, and opportunities for collaborative learning. Collaborative learning has been found to be an effective strategy for learning the English language, and digital tools

have made this strategy even more effective. Educators must incorporate digital tools into their teaching practices to ensure that English learners have access to the best possible resources for their learning.

The general objective for this research was to analyze the characteristics of digital tools in teaching vocabulary to improve language learning and the specific ones were: To analyze other research on the use of digital tools to improve students' vocabulary, to describe the teachers' perception about the use of digital tool for improving students' vocabulary and to identify the most appropriate digital tools to improve students' vocabulary. The main result obtained was that teachers are supportive of using tools such as duolingo, lingo kids, babel and open talk, to improve students' vocabulary.

2. Methodology

The objective of this mixed-focus research was to analyze the characteristics of digital tools in teaching vocabulary to improve language learning,

For this, information from primary and secondary sources has been compiled in the first moment through a review of the literature. On the other hand, statistics on the use of digital tools in vocabulary learning by language learners were collected and compared with each other to reveal the importance of digital tools in vocabulary learning.

The research approach corresponds to a mixed, qualitative-quantitative approach. The type of research is explanatory for quantitative data and phenomenological for inductive information obtained from bibliographical analysis.

The type of sampling was the Convenience, because people who participated in this was available and predisposed to help in the investigation, for that

A survey was applied to a population of 100 teachers and training teachers' users of digital platforms, the sample size was obtained through a general formula with a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 5%, it corresponds to a total participant of 80 users. the type of sampling was based on a simple non-probabilistic sampling,

given the conditions and size of the population. Simple non-probability sampling is a sampling method in which items are not selected at random and not all items have the same probability of being selected. Instead, they are selected based on availability, convenience, or personal judgment (Salvadó, 2016). In this case, the objective of the survey was to collect information about the importance of digital tools for learning vocabulary in English. This information was important to understand students' perception of digital tools and how they use them in their learning process. With this information, the digital resources and tools available for students, their learning process can be improved and provided with a more effective learning experience.

The survey was applied using digital online survey platforms, such as Google Forms. The survey consisted of five questions that explored the use of digital tools for learning vocabulary in English, the frequency of use of these tools, the advantages, and disadvantages that the users perceive in the use of them.

Table 1: Directed Survey Questions.

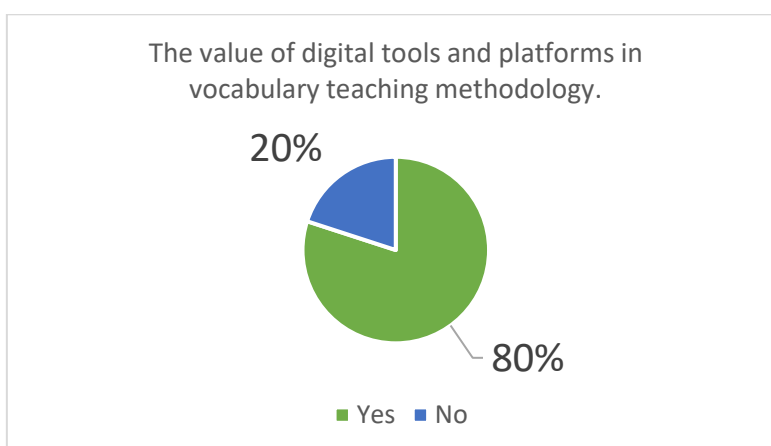
N ^a	Questions
1	Do digital tools and platforms add value to your vocabulary teaching methodology?
2	What principles is your vocabulary teaching strategy based on?
3	What are the main digital platforms you use to teach and learn English?
4	Do you consider the adoption of a new language teaching system based on digital tools viable?
5	What is the perception of language teachers about digital tools to learn the English language?

3. Results and Discussion

Previous large-scale studies have analyzed the potential effects of the reading medium within classrooms focusing on the relationship between time spent using digital devices at school, as measured by self-report questionnaires where students

recorded their frequency of digital device use for different learning tasks, and students' vocabulary skills (Salmerón et al., 2022). Overall, the relationship tended to be small, with both positive and negative associations between primary and secondary.

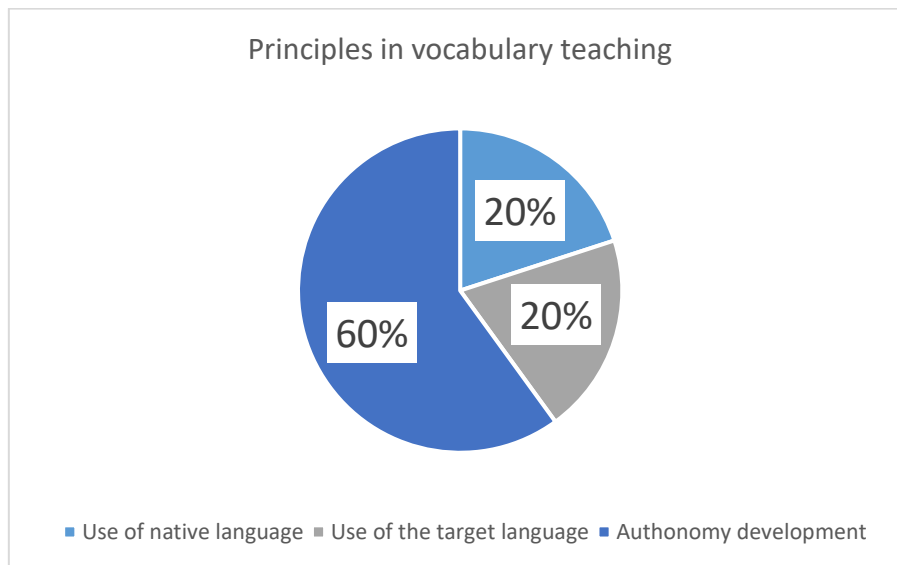
Question 1: Do digital tools and platforms add value to your vocabulary teaching methodology?



80% of those surveyed affirm that digital tools and platforms add value to their vocabulary teaching methodology, given that in most cases it significantly facilitates the language learning process, and

especially vocabulary. On the other hand, the remaining 20% consider that the use of digital tools does not provide any kind of added value to their teaching methodology.

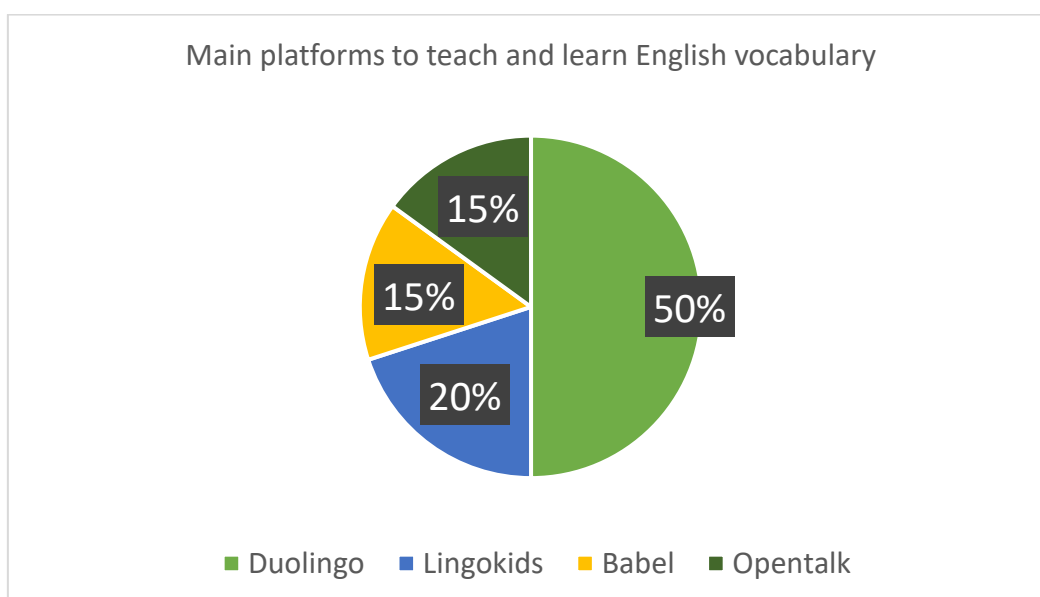
Question 2: What principles is your vocabulary teaching strategy based on?



60% of the surveyed teachers affirm that the principles of their vocabulary teaching strategy are highly related to autonomous learning development, which includes aspects such as the use of language learning platforms and websites. On the other hand, 20% affirm that the

principles of their teaching methodology are totally involved in the use of the native language. Finally, 20% of those surveyed maintain that their teaching methodology is marked by the using of target language.

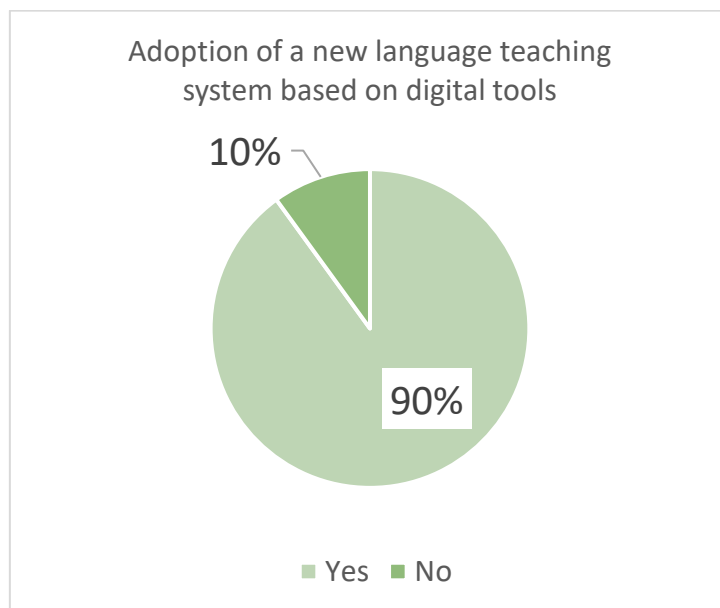
Question 3: What are the main digital platforms you use to teach and learn English?



First of all, Duolingo dominates in the context of vocabulary learning apps, with 50% of daily active users, followed by ligokids, with 20% of users. On the other hand, babel, a

platform with similar characteristics, has 15% of daily active users, as does Opentalk, a platform that also has 15% of active users.

Question 4: Do you consider the adoption of a new language teaching system based on digital tools viable?

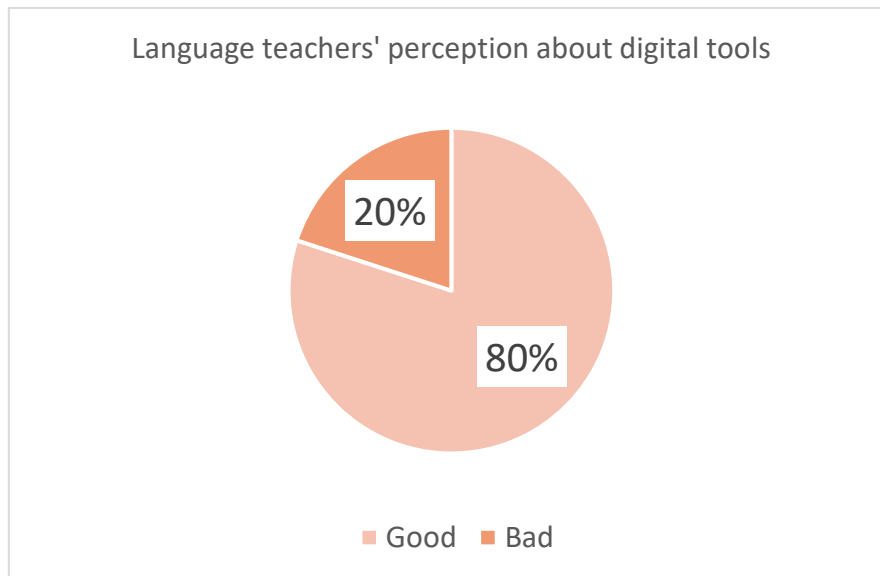


90% of the teachers surveyed consider the adoption of a new language teaching system based on digital tools viable, this is largely thanks to the benefits that technology represents in the acquisition of knowledge in language matters. Finally, the remaining 10% consider the adoption of a new language teaching system based on digital tools unsustainable.

digital platform for learning English for children from 2 to 8 years old, carried out a study aimed at children up to 5 years old to find out their preferences, this language is taught between digital tools and traditional methods. According to the study, children who used digital tools during learning showed more independent behavior than children who used traditional methods.

According to Nieves (2023) on the El Economista website, Lingokids, a

Question 5: What is the perception of language teachers about digital tools to learn the English language?



Digital tools for language learning include a wide range of resources, such as websites, mobile applications, and multimedia materials. These tools can offer learners of English a variety of benefits, such as increased motivation and engagement, as well as opportunities for more individualized and flexible learning experiences. However, language teachers may be skeptical of these tools, viewing them as a threat to their traditional role as educators or questioning their effectiveness. Language teachers' perception of digital tools for learning the English language is complex and multifaceted. While some teachers are enthusiastic about the potential

of these tools, others are more skeptical and have concerns about their effectiveness and the resources required to integrate them into their teaching. However, it is clear that digital tools have the potential to offer learners of English new and innovative ways to engage with the language, and it is important for teachers to continue exploring these tools and their potential impact on language learning.

A study conducted by Reinders and White (2011) explored language teachers' attitudes towards the use of digital tools in the classroom. The study found that while teachers recognized the potential benefits of these tools, such as increased student motivation and engagement,



they were also concerned about the quality of the materials and the potential for students to become distracted by the technology. Furthermore, teachers expressed concerns about the amount of time and resources required to integrate digital tools into their teaching, as well as the need for adequate training and support.

Similarly, a more recent study by Jia and Fu (2019) investigated Chinese English teachers' attitudes towards using digital tools in their classrooms. The study found that while teachers recognized the potential benefits of digital tools for language learning, they also had concerns about their effectiveness and the need for sufficient training and support. In addition, the study found that teachers' attitudes towards digital tools were influenced by their teaching experience and their level of familiarity with technology.

These two studies highlight the mixed perceptions of language teachers towards digital tools for language learning. While teachers recognize the potential benefits of these tools, they also have concerns about their effectiveness and the resources required to integrate them

into their teaching. Furthermore, teachers' attitudes towards digital tools are influenced by their teaching experience and their level of familiarity with technology.

However, it is important to note that not all teachers share these concerns. Some teachers are enthusiastic about the potential of digital tools for language learning and actively incorporate them into their teaching. For example, a study by Belz and Reinhardt (2011) found that some language teachers viewed digital tools as a way to enhance their teaching and to create more engaging and interactive learning experiences for their students.

4. Conclusions

The use of digital tools in teaching vocabulary to language students is essential in today's technologically advanced world. Digital tools offer numerous benefits such as interactive and engaging experiences that cater to the diverse learning styles of students. Additionally, these tools provide teachers with the opportunity to personalize learning, provide immediate feedback, and track

progress. The use of digital tools can help students to enhance their vocabulary acquisition and retention, which ultimately leads to improved communication and academic success.

Numerous studies have explored the use of digital tools to improve students' vocabulary acquisition. These studies have demonstrated that digital tools offer several advantages, including increased motivation, engagement, and autonomy in learning. Moreover, the use of digital tools in vocabulary instruction has been shown to enhance retention and recall of new words, providing learners with more opportunities to practice and reinforce their knowledge.

While some teachers may be hesitant to adopt digital tools in their classrooms, research indicates that the majority of teachers are supportive of using tools such as duolingo, lingo kids, babel and open talk, to improve students' vocabulary. Teachers who have experience using digital tools report increased student engagement and motivation, as well as improved learning outcomes. However, concerns about accessibility, training, and resource

allocation may need to be addressed to ensure that all students have equal access to digital tools and that teachers have the necessary support to effectively integrate them into their teaching.

There are numerous digital tools available to improve students' vocabulary, including online games, apps, and multimedia resources. The most appropriate digital tools will depend on the learning goals, needs, and preferences of the students. For example, gamified vocabulary apps may be more suitable for younger learners, while multimedia resources may be more appropriate for older learners who prefer more in-depth exploration of vocabulary. Teachers should carefully select digital tools that align with their teaching objectives and provide meaningful learning experiences for their students.

in general, the use of digital tools in teaching vocabulary to language students is crucial for enhancing their learning experiences and improving their language skills. Teachers who adopt digital tools can provide students with more interactive, engaging, and personalized learning experiences that cater to their



diverse needs and learning styles. While there may be some concerns about the implementation and accessibility of digital tools, research has shown that the benefits outweigh the challenges. It is essential for teachers to continue exploring and incorporating digital tools into their teaching to improve students' vocabulary acquisition and retention.

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