MICROLEARNING IN DEVELOPING STUDENTS' FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEXICAL COMPETENCE: THE DIDACTIC POTENTIAL OF QUIZLET AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR INTEGRATING DIGITAL TOOLS

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Abstract. The re substantiates microlearning as an analytical framework for designing vocabulary work in foreign language learning. It examines the cognitive foundations of this approach (retrieval practice, spaced repetition, cognitive load and depth of processing) and the didactic potential of the Quizlet platform. A seven-stage methodological model is proposed that leads from the selection of vocabulary to its communicative transfer and delayed assessment, and indicators of its effectiveness are outlined.

Keywords: microlearning, lexical competence, Quizlet, retrieval practice, spaced repetition, foreign language, digital tools.

Introduction. Learning foreign language vocabulary is not limited to the initial encounter with a word. It requires repeated retrieval, returning to the material at intervals, understanding of context and practical use. Classroom teaching organised by thematic units does not always ensure sufficiently regular work with vocabulary between classes. This raises a research question: how does the organisation of vocabulary acquisition change if the learning process is designed not only around topics and classes but also around short, recurring cycles of work with lexical material?

Aim and objectives of the study. The aim of the study is to substantiate microlearning as an analytical framework for designing vocabulary work and to describe a methodological model for implementing it with the Quizlet platform. To achieve this aim, the following objectives were set: to distinguish microlearning from related concepts; to identify its cognitive foundations; to assess the potential and limitations of Quizlet; and to propose a methodological model and indicators of its effectiveness. The proposed framework has the status of a working hypothesis, and the model is a methodological proposal whose effectiveness requires empirical verification.

Research results and discussion. Microlearning and related concepts. We understand microlearning as the purposeful design of a learning experience from small activities with clearly defined aims and scope, each of which is a link in a broader sequence of acquisition. This concept is related to, but not identical with, several neighbouring ones. Short sessions are merely a matter of duration and, without an overall design, amount to a shortened class. Mobile learning defines the mode of access to materials. Blended learning is a model of organising the educational process, of which micro-activities may be a component. Gamification, i.e. the use of game

elements in a non-game context, plays an auxiliary role in our approach and is justified only when it serves the learning aim.

Microlearning also has limitations: fragmentation of knowledge, lack of context, the risk of shallow processing and the difficulty of transferring isolated knowledge into real speech. Therefore, each micro-activity should be embedded in a sequence that leads from recognising a word to using it productively.

Cognitive foundations. Research on the testing effect shows that active retrieval promotes long-term retention better than repeated rereading [4]. The spacing effect points to the advantages of practice distributed over time compared with massed practice [1]. At the same time, a distinction should be drawn between the principle of spaced repetition as a general didactic idea and the specific algorithms that implement it on platforms, whose parameters are usually not disclosed.

Short sessions can support regular practice and help to dose the material with regard to cognitive load [5]. However, a short format does not automatically improve memory or reduce load: the outcome depends on the complexity of the material, the type of task and the students' level.

Knowing a translation does not mean being able to use a word. Knowing a lexical item involves its form, meaning, collocations, grammatical behaviour, word-formation links and pragmatic constraints [3]. Retention is influenced more by the depth of processing, in particular by the presence of need, search and evaluation in a task, than by the number of repetitions as such [2]. Consequently, the transfer of what has been learned to new communicative situations has to be designed separately.

Quizlet as a means of implementing microlearning principles. The platform makes it possible to create thematic sets, divide a large topic into meaningful blocks of 8–12 items, combine terms, definitions, translations and usage examples, and work in different modes: flashcards, writing, matching and testing. The Learn mode is presented as using adaptive repetition; however, the details of its algorithm are not disclosed, so it should not be regarded as a proven optimal mechanism of spaced repetition. The range of available features depends on the version (free or paid) and changes over time, so it should be checked against the official documentation at the time of implementation.

The key methodological problem is that "word – translation" flashcards on their own develop recognition but not use of a word. It can be overcome by using context sentences on the cards (a gapped sentence on one side and the word on the other), sets of collocations (conduct research, draw a conclusion), short writing tasks after a session, as well as dialogues and professional situations in which these words are needed. For group revision in class, Quizlet can be complemented by Kahoot! and Wordwall.

Methodological model. We propose a seven-stage model in which each stage has its own aim, role of the platform, teacher's actions and means of assessment.

Stage 1 – selection and structuring. The teacher selects 8–12 items with regard to the students' level, the topic and the communicative value of the words, divides the topic into blocks and creates a set in Quizlet. The criterion of assessment is the set's alignment with the learning aim.

Stage 2 – initial processing. Students become familiar with the meaning, pronunciation, grammatical features and typical context of the words through cards with examples and audio; the teacher gives a brief commentary in class. Understanding is checked through oral explanation of meaning.

Stage 3 – retrieval practice. Students retrieve the meaning or form of a word in the writing and flashcard modes during an independent 5–10-minute session following the teacher's instructions. The indicator is the percentage of correct answers.

Stage 4 – spaced repetition. Students return to the set over several days, not only within a single class, according to an agreed schedule (for example, on days 1, 3 and 7). The dynamics of results are assessed.

Stage 5 – contextualisation. Words are used in collocations and texts; gapped cards and collocation sets are used for this purpose, and the teacher assigns sentence-writing tasks. The criterion is the quality of the sentences.

Stage 6 – communicative transfer. Students produce their own utterances – a dialogue or a short text based on a situation, while Quizlet serves as a means of preparing the vocabulary. The result is assessed against a rubric: accuracy, appropriateness and variety of use.

Stage 7 – delayed assessment. After 2–4 weeks, retention and independent use of the words are checked with a control set and a delayed test.

An example of implementing the model in an Academic English course is the block "Academic research": conduct research, draw a conclusion, support a claim, a growing body of evidence, be consistent with, highlight the need for. After a short explanation, students work through the cards on day 1, return to them on days 3 and 7, write two sentences with each construction, and in class write a concluding paragraph for an imaginary study. Three weeks later, a delayed test with a usage task is administered.

Assessment of effectiveness. It is advisable to assess not only the immediate result but also the retention of vocabulary and the ability to use it. For this purpose, we propose the following indicators: recognition (choosing the meaning) and active recall (translation, gap-filling); productive use (a sentence or text assessed against a rubric: form, meaning, collocation, appropriateness); delayed effect (retesting after 2–4 weeks); regularity of work (number of completed sessions, students' self-reports, platform data where available); cognitive load and students' attitudes (a short questionnaire). Possible research designs include a comparison of groups (micro-cyclic work versus traditional organisation) or a "pre-test – post-test – delayed test" design for a single group, taking into account the limitations of a small sample.

Conclusions. Microlearning is productively viewed as a way of designing a sequence of vocabulary work rather than as a shortening of classes. Quizlet can implement the principles of retrieval practice and spaced repetition, but on its own it does not ensure contextual and communicative mastery of a word; therefore, micro-activities on the platform should be embedded in a coherent sequence – from the selection of vocabulary to its delayed assessment. Empirical verification of the proposed model is a prospect for further research.

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