Kahoot! as a Pedagogical Tool in IELTS Writing Instruction: A Qualitative Analysis of Gamified Learning Strategies

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Abstract

Writing is one of the four primary skills assessed in the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). Its inherent complexity often leads to student anxiety and difficulties. Recognizing the need for innovative teaching and assessment methods incorporating technology, this study investigates the interactive game Kahoot! in an IELTS writing course in Pare, Kediri. Despite evidence supporting its effectiveness, Kahoot!'s integration into academic writing still needs to be improved. This research aims to evaluate how Kahoot! Enhances students' fluency in academic writing within an IELTS context and identifies factors influencing this relationship. Conducted through a qualitative, descriptive case study approach, the study involves English teachers and their students who use Kahoot! in academic IELTS writing classes. Findings indicate that Kahoot! Primarily aids in understanding writing tasks by simplifying data complexity and integrating it into engaging game features, thus enhancing learning engagement and task response. Key factors contributing to improved writing responses include the simplicity of visual presentation, the competitive nature of the game, and the resulting enjoyment. This suggests that Kahoot! can effectively create a dynamic and enjoyable learning environment, potentially improving academic writing performance in IELTS courses.

Keywords: Kahoot!, academic writing, IELTS, online games, teaching English

INTRODUCTION

English writing is a crucial skill in many areas of life, including professional settings and personal communication. Writing effectively is essential for online posting, emailing, social media engagement, and persuasive copywriting (Curry & Lillis, 2022). However, writing is complex, requiring the coordination of various language and cognitive processes, making it one of the most challenging skills to master (Kim et al., 2021; Kurniasih et al., 2022). Academic writing is unique among various writing skills, presenting distinct challenges, especially for learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). It demands a high level of competence, including the ability to organize ideas logically, plan extended texts,

elaborate and support arguments, link sentences seamlessly, utilize technical vocabulary, and accurately summarize and paraphrase sources (Caemmerer et al., 2023; Lin & Morrison, 2021).

As a fundamental competency, writing is also one of the four primary skills assessed by the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), the leading English test for higher education and global migration (Pratiwi et al., 2016; Yang & Badger, 2015). Annually, over 3.5 million people, including many Indonesians, take the IELTS, which offers Academic and General Training. The IELTS Academic Writing test, recognized as a measure of academic writing proficiency, consists of two tasks to complete within 60 minutes. Task 1 requires candidates to describe visual information (such as graphs, tables, charts, or diagrams) in at least 150 words within approximately 20 minutes, covering diverse topics like human population trends, reading interest percentages, and company production records. In contrast, Task 2 involves discussing a given viewpoint, argument, or problem, which distinctly separates it from Task 1.

The assessment qualifies as academic writing because of the nature of these tasks and the criteria used for evaluation, which include task achievement/response, coherence and cohesion, lexical resource, grammatical range, and accuracy (Bagheri & Riasati, 2016). The IELTS Academic Writing test demands proficient use of grammar and vocabulary, and it is generally not recommended for beginners who need a comprehensive understanding of English in various contexts. Consequently, teaching strategies for IELTS preparation should focus on reducing student anxiety related to the complexities of academic writing. This can be achieved by employing innovative methods and integrating technology in EFL writing classes to enhance the learning environment and support students' writing development (Andersen et al., 2022; Rachmajanti et al., 2022; Sulistyo et al., 2019).

One practical example of such innovative technology is Kahoot!, a widely used game-based student response system (GSRS) that engages over 70 million active users worldwide (Alawadhi & Abu-Ayyash, 2021). This free platform allows students to compete by answering questions quickly to achieve high scores, effectively combining game elements like music, images, points, and competitive leaderboards. Such features enhance motivation and create a dynamic and engaging learning environment (Bawa, 2019). Kahoot! Employs experiential learning strategies, encouraging students to learn through action and reflection, which are crucial for embedding knowledge (Cadet, 2023; Zhang & Yu, 2021). As a GSRS, Kahoot! Promotes enhanced student engagement and learning and encourages productive use of mobile devices in class (Licorish et al., 2018). This tool supports various educational activities, including presenting new topics, reviewing material, remote learning, formative assessments, and interactive lessons. It also aids in ice-breaking, prize distribution, feedback collection, and fostering creativity and teamwork among students and colleagues.

Furthermore, recent scholarly research on Kahoot! Underscores its versatility and effectiveness in improving educational outcomes across academic contexts and literature. Hou (2018) investigated the integration of Kahoot! as an Interactive Response System (IRS) in English courses, finding that students appreciated the IRS for enhancing engagement with literacy materials. Ruiz (2021) further examined Kahoot!'s role in a Spanish flipped classroom, noting its benefits in increasing student engagement and conceptual understanding and creating a positive learning atmosphere. These findings suggest the potential for broader applications of Kahoot! in education. Moreover, research by Yunus et

al. (2019) demonstrated Kahoot!'s effectiveness in teaching English grammar and sentence structure, as it provided more interactive opportunities between students, peers, and lesson content. Despite these positive outcomes, there remains a need for more detailed research on Kahoot!'s effectiveness in teaching, particularly in writing classes, where its impact is less documented.

Therefore, this study aims to explore the potential of Kahoot! to enhance academic writing fluency in IELTS classes, focusing mainly on the game's ability to aid students in summarizing and paraphrasing data. The research is centered on understanding how Kahoot! Influences students' ability to efficiently handle academic sources in Writing Task 1 of the IELTS. In light of this objective, the research poses two critical problem statements: How is Kahoot! Implemented to accelerate students' fluency in academic writing for the IELTS? Second, what specific aspects of Kahoot! Facilitate students' summarizing and paraphrasing data skills during the IELTS writing tasks. These questions aim to delineate the effectiveness of Kahoot! in meeting the intricate demands of academic writing in high-stakes testing scenarios.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research design, utilizing a descriptive case study approach to explain and directly answer the research questions thoroughly. As Creswell and Creswell (2018) described, a case study is a research method often used in various fields to conduct in-depth analyses of specific instances, such as programs, events, activities, processes, or individuals. The primary objective was to investigate how Kahoot! Enhanced students' fluency in writing, particularly in summarizing and paraphrasing data, and identified the aspects of the game that positively influenced students' ability to effectively complete Task 1 of the writing test. Task 1 in the IELTS Academic Writing test involved transferring information from a visual source—such as a graph, table, chart, or diagram—into a written format of at least 150 words within 20 minutes.
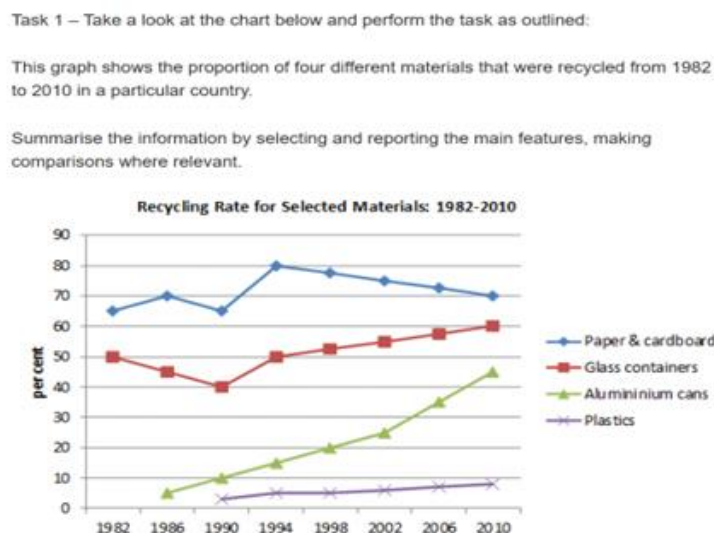
Figure 1. Sample of IELTS academic writing task 1

The researcher adopted the role of an observer, engaging closely with participants to bridge any gap between the researcher and the subjects studied. Multiple forms of data were

collected to ensure a comprehensive understanding, consistent with qualitative research practices that include gathering documents, audiovisual materials, observations, interviews, and images (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Data collection methods specifically employed were observations, in-depth interviews, and documentation. The interviews aimed to explore the significant role of the Kahoot! Game in enhancing students' understanding of the material and writing fluency for IELTS Writing Task 1, as well as to gauge both teachers' and students' perceptions of how Kahoot! Influences students' abilities in summarizing and paraphrasing data.

For data analysis, the researcher employed qualitative techniques that allow for a detailed examination of various data forms such as conversational records, photographs, observations, and different types of interviews (Lester et al., 2020; Swain & King, 2022). The analysis involved three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. The information extracted from interviews was meticulously selected to align with the research questions, and analysis techniques varied depending on the responses received (Flick, 2013). Finally, the research findings were validated through comprehensive research conduct and triangulation methods. The research procedures were systematically organized into three phases: planning, application (which includes data collection, analysis, and deriving conclusions and recommendations), and reporting the results.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION
The Implementation of Kahoot! to Accelerate Students' Academic IELTS Writing Fluency

Academic IELTS writing tests require students to manage their time and compose texts under pressure efficiently. In response to observations that students were bored and struggled to focus during traditional explanations of Task 1, which involves interpreting and summarizing data from various charts and diagrams, teachers at an IELTS preparation course first implemented the Kahoot! Game in 2022. This game-based approach was designed to enhance motivation and simplify interpreting complex visual data, allowing students approximately three minutes to understand and summarize the content accurately.

Figure 1. IELTS writing task 1 material in Kahoot!

The implementation of Kahoot! Involves several strategic steps: Initially, teachers select and analyze materials suitable for the game format, focusing on visual data that can be

effectively communicated through brief queries. After setting up a Kahoot! Teachers then create quizzes tailored to these specifics, embedding images of the data into each quiz question to prompt responses about trends such as increases, decreases, fluctuations, and stability. Each game session consists of ten questions and begins once all students have joined using a provided PIN and submitted their names. This method makes the learning process more engaging and aligns with the educational goal of improving students' analytical skills in a lively, interactive environment. However, the teachers noted that this technique predominantly applies to Task 1 of the writing test, which focuses on data interpretation.
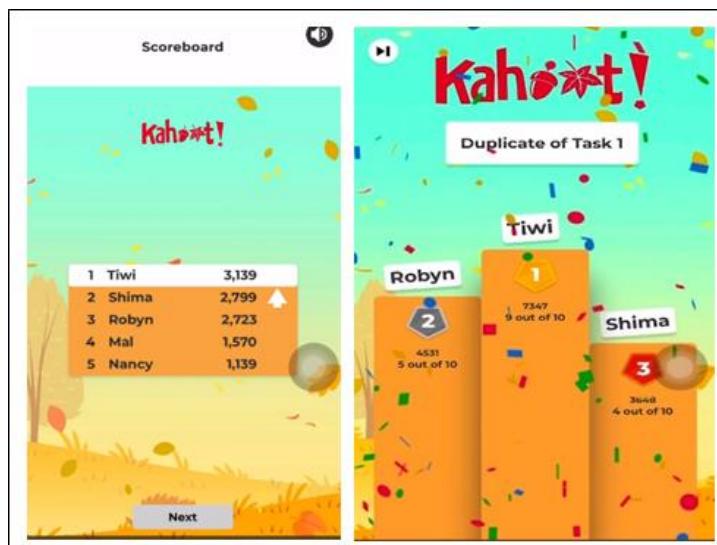

Figure 2. Students leaderboard and podium on the Kahoot!

Furthermore, Kahoot! Enhances student engagement and learning through a competitive leaderboard that updates after each question, displaying the scores and ranking students accordingly. Martín-Sómer et al. (2021) note that this feature rewards students who answer correctly and quickly, fostering a dynamic learning environment. Each question allows only ten seconds for a response, encouraging students to answer rapidly. This design not only tests their knowledge but also enables peer learning, as students can see their own performance and that of their peers. Cadet (2023) highlights the reflective component of this approach, where students in pairs answer two reflective questions to evaluate how the Kahoot! Activities as formative assessments align with their learning objectives.

Further interviews revealed the success of Kahoot! Implementation largely depends on how teachers orchestrate the entire class sequence, which includes understanding the students' knowledge background, focusing on content, and integrating follow-up activities with Kahoot! to extend learning. Ruiz (2021) supports this approach, noting that peer instruction techniques are beneficial, enabling the learning process to continue beyond clicking the right or wrong answers. Consequently, teachers play a pivotal role in effectively using this tool. The effectiveness of Kahoot! also hinges on integrating students' insight, dexterity, and enthusiasm—elements fostered during gameplay. According to Wang and Tahir (2020), Kahoot! Enhances engagement through its dynamic, game-like environment that includes scoring, ranking, and multimedia elements such as images, video, and music.

Such online formative assessment tools have been shown to improve achievement scores and develop complex cognitive skills like self-regulation.

Interviews with students indicated a significant improvement in their writing capabilities, particularly in speed and accuracy when interpreting data for daily tasks in the WhatsApp group. Kahoot!'s focus on terms related to data change and movement has introduced them to novel ways of data interpretation. Previously, students spent considerable time predicting data movements and summarizing key points. With a better grasp of relevant terminology, they can quickly identify changes and articulate their ideas, improving their ability to manage the 20-minute time frame for Task 1 of IELTS writing. This process involves spending the first three minutes understanding the data, the next two summarizing it, and the remaining fifteen composing the actual text.

Moreover, the evaluation of IELTS writing focuses not only on ideas but also on grammar, vocabulary, and paragraph organization with a minimum word count. The ability to construct a well-organized text within twenty minutes indicates true writing fluency (Rad & Alipour, 2023). Martín-Sómer et al. (2021) further emphasize the importance of interactive educational technologies in mitigating student stress and disinterest, which can adversely affect learning outcomes, especially in online settings.

Factors Influencing Student Competence in Summarizing and Paraphrasing Data through Kahoot! Game Implementation in IELTS Writing Tasks

Integrating innovative teaching media such as Kahoot! can significantly enhance the teaching process and outcomes by introducing technological elements that transform the classroom atmosphere. This innovation mainly enhances students' fluency in the IELTS Writing Task 1. According to interviews with teachers and students, several factors are associated with Kahoot! Positively affects students' ability to summarize data.

Firstly, presenting questions using data visuals along with simplified vocabulary related to graphical information improves students' ability to memorize and track changes, facilitating the application of their knowledge in actual writing tasks. Visualization aids a more profound understanding of lessons than mere listening or reading. IELTS Writing Task 1 requires students to engage with numerical or sequential data, which may only inherently interest some of them. The task involves several steps: understanding the marking criteria, paraphrasing the question, and writing an overview that accurately presents the data. Students must analyze each data segment to identify key features. Providing vocabulary for describing data movements—such as "steadiness" for no change over time or "fluctuation" for periodic increases and decreases—simplifies interpreting data.

Additionally, in synchronous classes, Kahoot! Games typically last about 10 minutes and are conducted in real time, with each student participating from their device. Students enter games using a nickname and PIN, maintaining anonymity while answering questions on a large screen with a countdown timer and graphical answer options (Martín-Sómer et al., 2021).

Secondly, the competitive nature of Kahoot! Challenges students to think logically and quickly about data movements. This competitive setup accelerates their ability to analyze information and significantly boosts their motivation by invoking a fear of losing and the potential embarrassment among peers. In the Kahoot! game, students have just ten seconds to answer each question. This time constraint typically divides their focus: the first five seconds for understanding the question and the remaining five for decision-making. Such

rapid pacing fosters greater student participation and stimulates creative thinking, making the learning process both fast-paced and enjoyable (Plump & LaRosa, 2017). This activity also subconsciously trains students to utilize their logical thinking skills within a limited timeframe.

Finally, the sense of euphoria that the Kahoot! game generates from start to finish significantly enriches the student experience. This excitement begins with the game's opening screen, which displays the Kahoot! logo accompanied by energetic music that boosts students' spirits. The quizzes feature vibrant, colorful visuals that transform any feelings of boredom into enjoyment, enhancing their engagement with the lesson material. This aligns with the theory of joyful learning, which posits that positive emotions can bolster motivation while negative emotions may hinder learning (Wirani et al., 2021; Jiang et al., 2021). Additionally, the game's conclusion celebrates the winners by featuring them on a virtual podium yet allows all participants to use pseudonyms to reduce anxiety about public exposure. This anonymity can lessen writing anxiety, thereby improving text-writing skills (Mojdehi & Zarei, 2023).

CONCLUSION

This research underscores the effectiveness of the Kahoot! game in enhancing academic writing skills for IELTS. Key findings demonstrate the successful implementation of Kahoot! Requires teachers to carefully select relevant material and create a Kahoot! account, and design quizzes using the application's templates. Each question is timed at ten seconds, promoting quick thinking and comprehensive mastery of the material. The structured use of pre-tests and post-tests ensures thorough engagement with the course content and a detailed understanding of the learning objectives. Students benefited significantly from integrating Kahoot!, particularly in terms of memorizing terminology related to data change and improving the speed of their decision-making in Writing Task 1. A critical aspect of the game's success is the holistic approach to class management, which involves understanding students' background knowledge, the content delivered, and the strategic follow-up to Kahoot! activities to deepen learning.

The study revealed that the terms of data change and movement introduced through Kahoot! Helped students predict data trends, summarize essential information, and organize their responses. This enhanced their ability to manage the 20-minute task window more efficiently and demonstrated marked improvements in their writing fluency. Given these benefits, incorporating Kahoot! EFL writing instruction is highly beneficial for boosting student enthusiasm and achieving educational goals. Nonetheless, this study is limited by its scope as a case study. Future research on a broader scale is recommended to substantiate these findings further and explore the potential of Kahoot! in other educational contexts.

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