

303. GAMIFICATION PLATFORMS FOR VOCABULARY ACQUISITION: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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This study examines the advantages and disadvantages of three popular gamification platforms for English vocabulary acquisition: Quizlet, Memrise, and Reword. Popularity is measured by the number of downloads on Google Play. A key evaluation criterion is the ability to create and share custom word sets within the application. The study reveals that while all three platforms integrate game-based mechanics to support motivation and retention, they differ significantly in depth of content, pedagogical flexibility, and accessibility of free-tier features.

In the modern information society, where globalisation and technological progress play a central role, proficiency in English has become increasingly important. Lexical competence – mastery of vocabulary – constitutes the foundation of effective communication [1]. Mobile applications occupy a prominent place among the tools available for language learning, offering flexibility and accessibility regardless of time or location, which is especially relevant for today's learners who seek to integrate language study into everyday life.

Gamification – the application of game-design elements to non-game contexts – has gained considerable attention in educational technology research as a mechanism for enhancing learner motivation and promoting long-term retention of lexical items [2]. Applications such as Quizlet, Memrise, and Reword incorporate game-like features including point systems, leaderboards, adaptive challenges, and spaced repetition algorithms.

The aim of this study is to analyse three prominent gamification platforms for English vocabulary learning, identifying their strengths and limitations. In addition to effectiveness, a key evaluation criterion is the capacity to create and share custom word lists within each application.

Research on mobile-assisted vocabulary learning has grown substantially, though it remains unevenly distributed across platforms. The most extensively studied application is Quizlet [1, 2, 3, 4], while Memrise has received moderate scholarly attention [4]. In the majority of these studies, both platforms are discussed primarily in terms of their advantages; critical assessments of limitations are comparatively rare. Bolatbek [3] represents a notable exception by identifying weaknesses in Quizlet's pedagogical design. Dorodneva and Zolnikova [1] provide a broader critique of mobile vocabulary applications as a category. Reword has not yet received dedicated academic scrutiny despite its growing user base, highlighting a gap that the present study addresses.

Quizlet (50 million+ downloads on Google Play) is among the most widely recognised vocabulary platforms globally. Its primary strength lies in the ability to create custom study sets independently or to draw on an extensive library of community-generated modules covering diverse topics. Import functionality – compatible with Word, Excel, and Google Docs – enables efficient bulk upload of word lists. Upon entering an English term, the system automatically suggests translations and a selection of contextually relevant images (approximately ten options per word), a feature student consistently identify as effective for memorisation [2].

The platform offers multiple study modes – Flashcards, Learn, Test, and Match – which include a variety of task types such as multiple choice, spelling. An additional competitive game mode enables users to race against other learners, introducing a social gamification dimension. Both a web version and a mobile application are available, facilitating rapid word-set creation on a computer with subsequent access via smartphone.

Negative aspects of this platform include the lack of contextual example sentences for vocabulary items. Although it is theoretically possible to create flashcards with custom contexts, this presents a certain challenge: in such cases, automated features – such as the instant retrieval of translations and images that occur when entering individual English words – become unavailable.

Memrise (10 million+ downloads) differentiates itself through the integration of short video clips illustrating word usage in natural speech, contributing to contextual comprehension. An embedded conversational chatbot engages users in a written dialogue, providing productive practice beyond passive recognition. The platform is accessible via both web and mobile interfaces.

However, Memrise presents notable constraints for classroom use. While Memrise now offers Community Word Lists for user-generated content, this feature remains separate from official courses and

lacks the streamlined import functionality found in Quizlet. For structured classroom use, the inability to easily integrate self-created syllabi remains a limitation. Content coverage is oriented towards beginner and intermediate levels, limiting utility for advanced learners. Furthermore, the advertised 'thousands of videos with native speakers' largely consist of single-word utterances rather than authentic contextualised use, reducing their practical value for deepening lexical knowledge [4].

Reword (1 million+ downloads) organises its content into 50 thematic categories selected on the basis of word frequency, including the Oxford 3000 and Oxford 5000 lists – the most commonly occurring English words identified through corpus analysis, mastery of which enables comprehension of approximately 92 % of general-topic texts. When a user adds a word, the application automatically retrieves transcription, translation, an illustrative image, and, for many lexical items, usage examples in context. Spaced repetition governs review scheduling, and detailed progress statistics are provided across weekly, monthly, and yearly intervals [1].

The application's limitations include the absence of a web interface, which restricts vocabulary input to the mobile device and disadvantages for users who prefer working at a computer. The free tier allows study of only approximately ten words per day, with most features requiring a paid subscription. Although the developers advertise list import functionality, in practice this requires technical expertise to encode the upload file correctly. Critically for educational use, custom word sets cannot be shared with other users, preventing educators from distributing curated lists to students directly through the platform.

Table 1 presents a structured comparison of the three platforms across pedagogical criteria most relevant to vocabulary instruction.

Table 1 — Comparative overview of Quizlet, Memrise, and Reword

Criterion	Quizlet	Memrise	Reword
Gamified modes	Yes (4+ modes)	Limited	Yes (tests, writing)
Custom word sets	Yes (import)	Yes	Personal only
Spaced repetition	Partial	Partial	Yes (full)
Context examples	No	Video clips	Yes (auto)
Web version	Yes	Yes	No
Free access	Limited	Limited	~10 words/day
Motivation tools	Competition, games	Video, chatbot	Statistics, images

The analysis reveals that each platform embodies a distinct pedagogical philosophy. Quizlet offers the most instructor-friendly environment for custom content creation and the richest variety of gamified study modes. Memrise excels in delivering authentic audio-visual input and conversational practice through its chatbot, supporting incidental vocabulary acquisition [4].

Reword demonstrates the strongest implementation of spaced repetition, which is widely regarded as the most empirically supported technique for long-term vocabulary retention [1]. Its automated context-and-image retrieval feature accelerates word-set creation, and its frequency-based corpora (Oxford 3000/5000) align closely with established lexical syllabus design. Nevertheless, the absence of sharing functionality and a web interface represent considerable pedagogical drawbacks for classroom deployment.

Regarding motivational design, all three platforms incorporate gamification elements – competitive modes, progress tracking, and reward feedback – to varying degrees. Quizlet's real-time competitive game and Reword's longitudinal statistics appear most conducive to sustaining learner engagement over time. Memrise's video content and chatbot, while engaging, are constrained by the platform's limited scope and payroll.

To sum up, in general, the popularity and number of downloads of an app are not always a reliable indicator of its quality for a particular user. This comparative study demonstrates that gamification platforms for vocabulary acquisition offer meaningful pedagogical affordances but also carry significant limitations that must be accounted for in instructional planning. No single application comprehensively meets the full criteria of an effective vocabulary learning programme. Quizlet remains the most versatile tool for learning. Memrise provides engaging multimodal input suitable for supplementary practice at lower proficiency levels. Reword's spaced repetition system and automated word enrichment make it particularly effective for independent vocabulary building.

From a pedagogical standpoint, the most effective approach may involve combining platforms strategically: for example, using Reword for high-frequency vocabulary consolidation through spaced repetition, and Quizlet for designed topical sets. Vocabulary applications should, however, be regarded as one component within a broader language learning programme that includes meaningful communicative practice, extensive reading, and authentic language exposure.

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