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**| RESEARCH ARTICLE**

## **Online Vocabulary Tasks for Engaging and Motivating EFL College Students in Distance Learning During the Pandemic and Post-pandemic**

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**| ABSTRACT**

Vocabulary teaching and learning constitute a major problem for EFL instructors and students. EFL freshman students have difficulty in pronouncing, recognizing the meaning of, using and spelling new English words. Due to the Covid-19 Pandemic, all college courses have shifted to online distance learning since March 2020. Surveys with samples of college students and instructors in Saudi Arabia showed lack of interest among the students in online instruction, participation, giving oral presentations, doing homework-assignments, attending online classes, low engagement, interaction, communication and self-efficacy. No adaptations have been made in the college curricula. Since the new distance learning environment requires new modes of teaching and learning, the present study proposes a variety of online vocabulary tasks and technologies that vocabulary instructors can choose from, such as mobile-based applications viz Vocup, Quizlet, Quizizz, game-based mobile apps, Saving Alice, Duolingo, Kahoot, vocabulary flashcards, mobile audiobooks, collaborative mobile ebook reading; podcasts; online dictionaries; concordance-based glosses; picture viewing and picture drawing on tablets; videos; e-portfolios; teaching idioms via graphic novels; multimedia annotations; social networks; project-based learning and mind-maps. To engage, motivate and encourage student-student and student-instructor interaction in the distance learning environment, the study proposes the following: using WhatsApp, ConnectYard, creating a community of inquiry, creating learning partnership, collaborative writing exchange projects, student collaboration, social interaction, integrating text-chat and webcam, and utilizing technology-mediated task-based language teaching. Online vocabulary tasks can be performed individually, in pairs or in small groups; interactively or collaboratively; synchronously or asynchronously. Instructional phases and teacher and students' roles are also described.

**| KEYWORDS**

Online tasks, online activities, mobile apps, vocabulary tasks, Vocabulary pedagogy, distance learning, Covid-19 Pandemic, EFL college students, student motivation, student engagement

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### **1. Introduction**

English teachers often employ traditional vocabulary teaching techniques such as first language (L1) equivalents, pictures, word formation rules and word lists. They ask the students to read the new words aloud repeatedly and copy them as homework in order to reinforce students' retention of the words (Yu, 2020). Despite that, instructors and students usually complain of insufficient knowledge of English vocabulary. A study with a sample of English-as-a-Foreign-Language (EFL) instructors and students at the Preparatory Year Program in Saudi Arabia indicated that lack of vocabulary is one of the major factors in students' inability to speak English (Khan, Radzuan, Shahbaz, Ibrahim & Khan, 2018). In addition, before the Pandemic, vocabulary teaching and learning constituted a major problem for EFL instructors and students at the College of Languages and Translation (COLT), King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. EFL freshman students had poor vocabulary knowledge, incorrect pronunciation, inability to connect the pronunciation of certain words with their written form, recognizing their part of speech, inability to categorize words into groups sharing the same semantic feature, word formation with prefixes and suffixes and others (Al-Jarf, 2019a; Al-Jarf, 2019b; Al-Jarf, 2015a; Al-Jarf, 2008; Al-Jarf, 2007).

Even when there was a sudden transition from face-to-face to distance learning (DL) at Saudi schools and universities starting March 2020 due to the outbreak of the Covid-19 Pandemic, the students were having difficulty with online vocabulary courses. For 3 consecutive semesters (March 2021 to the end of Spring 2021), vocabulary courses, among other language courses, were delivered online using a variety of platforms such as Blackboard, Zoom, Microsoft Teams, WebEx, Google Classroom, and others. Results of a survey conducted in Spring 2020 showed that 55% of college students at language and translation departments were having difficulty understanding the language course content, complained of insufficient online practice, and were dissatisfied with online communication with their instructors. Students showed low self-efficacy, low engagement, and motivation in the DL environment. Many students were uninterested in online courses, in doing homework-assignments, did not participate in online discussions and refused to give oral presentations. Online course attendance was not high as that before that Pandemic (Al-Jarf, 2020b). In Fall 2021, college students and instructors in Saudi Arabia resumed face-to-face instruction in combination with DL on alternate days. But, unlike the past 3 semesters, instructors and students join their online classes from campus rather than from home. Responses to a survey conducted in Fall 2021 revealed that instructors are still complaining of students' lack of interest, engagement, and interaction in online classes. During online classes, students are not attentive and uninterested in class participation.

In another study during the Covid-19 Pandemic, Shamsan, Ali and Hezam (2021) investigated the online vocabulary learning strategies that Saudi EFL students use to get the meaning of new vocabulary, the strategies they use to study new vocabulary and the strategies they follow in reviewing the vocabulary items that they have learnt and keep them as part of their repertoire. They found that 77% of the students do not ask their instructors about the meaning of new vocabulary items, 92% do not ask their classmates and 85% do not ask their friends. These results could be attributed to online study and social distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic.

As for the college course curriculum during the Pandemic, results of a survey conducted by Al-Jarf (2021b) with a sample of instructors and students at a number of Saudi universities showed that no adaptations, nor adjustments in the languages, translation, linguistics and literature course curricula were made in the distance learning (DL) courses offered to students during the first 4 semesters of the Pandemic (Spring 2020, Fall 2021, Spring 2021, Fall 2021). The course content, topics taught, amount of material covered, types of material used by the students were the same as those offered before the Pandemic, when classes were held face to face. No digital resources have been added, uploaded, or required in all the courses including the vocabulary courses. The only difference is in how the students are taught, face-to-face or online, through the platform. The instructors added that the set of courses in the college/department program and the course description of each cannot be easily modified, changed, or added to as these are usually approved by the Department, College and Academic Councils at their university, not individual instructors. Any changes in the curriculum have to be approved by the aforementioned Councils. Instructors are not given the freedom, nor the choice to change or add new topics to the course content they are teaching without getting the approval of at least their department or College Council, which was not possible because of the disruption that the Pandemic has created. However, instructors at Saudi universities have the choice and freedom to select the learning activities to be given to the students even when they are using the textbooks assigned by the department as in the listening, speaking, reading, writing, grammar and vocabulary courses.

The above status quo of teaching and learning in the DL environment during the Pandemic shows that online teaching mandates radical changes in our teaching practices, and instructors have to completely replace traditional teaching techniques and syllabuses, modify them or add to them to help language and translation students achieve the required learning outcomes. Therefore, to motivate and engage EFL college students to learn English vocabulary autonomously in the DL learning environment, the present study aims to: (i) propose a model for integrating online tasks and activities in EFL vocabulary instruction as a supplement to the assigned textbook; (ii) give examples of online tasks that EFL instructors can use in the vocabulary DL environment; (iii) give examples of online procedures to increase student engagement, interaction, communication and motivation; (iv) give guidelines for selecting and performing online vocabulary tasks and activities; (v) how to search for online vocabulary tasks and activities; and (vi) describe the instructional stages that can be followed by the instructors and the instructor's role.

Utilization of supplementary online vocabulary tasks will provide EFL college students with additional opportunities for practicing and mastering English vocabulary which is important for students' success not only in the vocabulary course, but also in the listening, speaking, reading, writing and grammar courses that they take in the first 4 semesters of the translation program at COLT. It is also important for comprehending oral and written texts in the interpreting and translation courses, the translation project, and the production of target texts.

Supplementary online vocabulary tasks have several advantages. The students can access and perform those tasks any time, at their own convenience. Students learn from each other and interact with their classmates and instructor. The material posted can serve as a reference. They see, evaluate, discuss, and comment on other students' performance. Students can refer to the material as many times as they wish and whenever they need. They can follow up their own progress. They can learn independently. They have control over their own learning. They can pose questions and express their needs whenever they wish.

## **2. Context**

The translation program at the College of Languages and Translation (COLT), King Saud University (KSU), Riyadh, Saudi Arabia is 5 years long (10 semesters). In the first 2 years (4 semesters), the students take English language courses: 4 Listening, 4 speaking, 4 reading, 4 writing, 3 grammar, and 2 vocabulary building courses. Three hours per week are allocated to the Vocabulary I course and two hours per week are allocated to the Vocabulary II course. Students in levels (semesters) 1 and 2 study the following textbooks that are assigned by the department:

- *Vocabulary I textbook (3 hours per week)*: Redman, Stuart (2017). *English Vocabulary in Use: Pre-intermediate and Intermediate*. Cambridge University Press.
- *Vocabulary II textbook (2 hours a week)*: McCarth, Michael and O'Dell, Felicity (2017). *English Vocabulary in Use: Upper-intermediate*. 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, Cambridge University Press.

In Level I (Vocabulary I), the students cover 42 lessons out of 100. They cover the following lessons: *Classroom language, Apologies, excuses, and thanks, The physical world, Animals and insects, Countries, nationality, and language, The body and what it can do, The place where you live, Around the home (1), Around the home (2), Money, Health: physical injuries, Clothes, Shops and shopping, Food, Cooking and restaurants, Jobs, In the office, Business and finance, Ball games, Computers and the Internet, Global Problems, Prefixes, Noun suffixes, Adjective suffixes, Nouns and verbs with the same form, Compound nouns, Compound adjectives, Collocation (word partners), Idioms and fixed expressions, Verb or adjective + preposition, Preposition + nouns, Phrasal verbs (1): form and meaning, Phrasal verbs (2): vocabulary and style, Have and have got, Make, do and take, Give, keep, break and see, Leave, catch and let, Get: uses and expressions, Go: uses and expressions, The Senses, Partitives, Uncountable nouns and plural nouns.*

In Level II (Vocabulary II), the students cover 32 lessons out of 100. They cover the following lessons: *Suffixes, Prefixes, Roots, Abbreviations and acronyms, New words in English, Words commonly mispronounced, Homonyms, Words that only occur in the plural, Describing People: Appearance, Describing People: Character, At Home, Global Problems, Education, Work, The Arts, The Natural World, Similes, Binomials, Idioms describing people, Idioms describing Problematic Situations, Idioms connected with praise and criticism, Idioms connected with using language, Miscellaneous Idioms, Expressions with do and make, Expressions with bring and take, Expressions with get, Expressions with set and put, Expressions with come and go, Miscellaneous expressions, Formal and informal words, US English.*

In the two vocabulary courses, the students study 3000 words. They are required to practice and master the following: *pronunciation of silent letter, hidden consonants, double letters, spelling changes, words with the same vowel but different pronunciation and words with different vowels but the same pronunciation, syllabication, and stress, sound-symbol associations, spelling changes and spelling variants; part of speech; count/non-count nouns; singular and plural forms; word synonyms and antonyms; English and Arabic meanings; word formation: prefixes, suffixes, derivatives, and compounds; idioms and collocations; word families; American vs British usage; formal vs. informal usage of words.*

## **3. Searching for Online Vocabulary Tasks and Activities**

The students may search for vocabulary websites or apps in Google, Google Play or Apple App Stores on their own by enclosing the vocabulary subskill or topic of interest such as "*collocations*", "*English phrasal verbs*", "*English idioms*", "*English plurals* and so on, and connecting the search terms with Boolean operators such as "*and, or, not*" and adding the word "*English*" to avoid getting results in other languages.

## **4. Selecting Online Vocabulary Tasks**

Online tasks selected can be instructor-initiated or student-initiated. They can be selected from internet websites, mobile apps, social media sites, podcasts, YouTube videos and others. The course instructor can search for and make a list of useful English vocabulary websites, apps, podcasts or videos related to the vocabulary skills and topics/themes to be covered in the course. He/she may assign weekly online vocabulary tasks to be performed by the students. Online vocabulary tasks selected should focus on a single vocabulary subskill or topic such as *idioms, collocations, phrasal verbs, binomials, singular and plural forms, spelling changes and spelling variants, parts of speech, noun types (count and non-count; abstract and concrete; collective), synonyms and antonyms, word formation (prefixes, suffixes, roots), derivatives, word families, acronyms and abbreviations, American vs British usage, formal and informal* and so on. The vocabulary websites/apps selected should provide *word definitions,*

explanations, example sentences to show how a particular word is used, supplementary vocabulary exercises for extra practice and provide students with instant feedback. They should match the students' proficiency level and contain enough material and items. The instructor can post several websites/apps/online tasks that target a particular vocabulary subskill to accommodate the different proficiency levels, learning styles and needs of the students.

The online tasks selected should help the students make the following connections: connecting the printed form of the word with its pronunciation (the hidden sounds, silent letters, double letters, and homophones), with its part of speech, singular or plural form, synonym or antonym, English and Arabic meanings, usage, component parts, and previously encountered words. Categorization, association, and visualization skills and mnemonic approaches should be emphasized (Al-Jarf, 2006).

## 5. Types of Online Activities

Based on a review of the literature on the effective practices in second language (L2) vocabulary teaching and learning, the following types of online vocabulary websites/apps and tasks can be used in the DL environment:

### 1) *Mobile-based applications such as:*

A variety of mobile apps (MAs) can be used for all kinds of language learning purposes, including vocabulary (Al-Jarf, 2022b; Al-Jarf, 2020c; Al-Jarf, 2013). The following MAs were found effective in teaching vocabulary and can be used in the DL environment in Saudi language and translation departments:

- *Vocup*<sup>1</sup> is a vocabulary trainer in which the user adds the words to his/her digital vocabulary book. *Vocup* will then ask the user every word and will repeat it if he/she makes a mistake. The user can easily share his/her vocabulary book with classmates who use *Vocup*. Makoe and Thuli (2018) found that *VocUp* enhanced the English vocabulary of university students in an open distance learning context.
- *Quizlet*: It is an online tool for making vocabulary flashcards and games. Instructors and students can use Quizlet to create their own vocabulary flashcards. Students can study vocabulary flashcards with a classmate or search the Quizlet archive of millions of vocabulary flashcard decks from other students. In a study by Solhi Andarab (2019), contextualized vocabulary items with collocations written in complete sentences on Quizlet facilitated upper-intermediate EFL students' vocabulary learning and was more effective than learning decontextualized individual English words with synonyms.
- *Quizizz*, a teacher-powered interactive learning platform for finding and creating engaging activities that students will like. Huei, Yunus and Hashim (2021) used Quizizz to improve the English vocabulary achievement of primary EFL students in rural schools during the COVID-19 Epidemic. Quizizz enhanced their vocabulary achievement.
- *Synchronous and asynchronous game-based MAs*: Intermediate-level English language learners in an English-medium state university learnt vocabulary through synchronous and asynchronous games and activities to establish an interactive virtual learning platform that connects the students together in the DL environment. Those games and activities enhanced students' vocabulary learning, activated, and maintained intrinsic motivation in learning parts of speech and collocations over a period of eight weeks (Karaaslan, Kilic, Guven-Yalcin & Gullu (2018). The students are encouraged to share vocabulary games such as crossword puzzles and word search games.
- *Saving Alice*, a self-developed MA for enhancing the acquisition of the TOEIC test vocabulary and spelling among EFL students. Yang, Wu, & Wu (2020) found that the *Saving Alice* app significantly enhanced the students' learning outcomes. The students' learning outcomes correlated with the frequency of using the game-based MAs.
- *Duolingo*<sup>2</sup>, game-like language lessons that help students develop their listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. It was designed by language experts and was based on teaching techniques that have been proven to foster long-term language retention.
- *Kahoot*<sup>3</sup>, a learning platform that users can use for creating games and multiple-choice quizzes. It can be accessed via a web browser or via the Kahoot app. Kahoot helps students review what they have learnt, helps instructors in formative assessment, or taking a break from traditional classroom activities (Al-Jarf, 2021d).

Guaqueta. and Castro-Garces (2018) reported that Duolingo and Kahoot language learning apps effectively fostered high school students' vocabulary building.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/p/vocup/9n6w2h3qjgmm?activetab=pivot:overviewtab>

<sup>2</sup> [apps.apple.com/us/app/duolingo-language-lessons/id570060128](https://apps.apple.com/us/app/duolingo-language-lessons/id570060128)

<sup>3</sup> [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kahoot!](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kahoot!)

- *Vocabulary flashcards* such as TOEFL, IELTS and GRE Vocabulary, High Frequency Words, StudyDroid Flashcards 2.0-Free, SAT Word A Day prep & widget, Flashcard-Idioms & Phrases-IP001 (a Vocabulary Flashcard application with 4000+ difficult English words) and others (Al-Jarf, 2021f).
- Learning vocabulary through *mobile audiobooks*, collaborative mobile *ebook reading*, multicultural *literature*, children's *short stories*, and apps that focus on sound-symbol association and deriving meaning of difficult words from context (Al-Jarf, 2021a; Al-Jarf, 2021e; Al-Jarf, 2016; Al-Jarf, 2015b; Al-Jarf, 2012b).
- Learning vocabulary from *TED Talks* and listening and speaking MAs (Al-Jarf, 2021g; Al-Jarf, 2021c; Al-Jarf, 2012a).
- *Specialized dictionary* MAs for general and specialized purposes such as English for engineering, business, computer science, and medicine (Al-Jarf, 2022a).

**2) Vocabulary audio podcasting tasks**

A podcast is a digital audio file which can be downloaded to a computer or mobile device. Iranian EFL students who used audio podcasts plus still pictures and audio podcasts plus animated pictures had higher attitude levels and higher vocabulary gains and retention than students who did not (Elekaei, Tabrizi & Chalak, 2019).

**3) Online dictionaries and printed glosses**

Intermediate-level Korean university students used freely available online dictionaries, *Naver.com*, as an aid to vocabulary acquisition. Findings suggested that freely available online dictionaries are equally effective as a written gloss. Reading unfamiliar topics may lead to slightly better vocabulary gains than reading familiar topics (Laffey, 2019).

**4) Activities for concordance-based glosses**

A concordance<sup>4</sup> is an alphabetical list of words contained in a book, with reference to the passages in which each word occurs. Intermediate to advanced EFL students, who possess foundational receptive vocabulary knowledge i.e., recognize the word and know its definition, and who practiced concordance-based glosses, gained productive knowledge of academic lexical items. The glosses were beneficial and likely to be used for subsequent language study (Poole, 2012).

**5) Picture viewing and picture drawing on tablets:**

Reading flashcards with pictures drawn by primary students was more effective in increasing students' motivation and memory retention than reading printed flashcards from electronic files. The pictures were highly illustrative of the meaning of the target words, thus transforming students' learning pattern from passive to active learning (Ou, Tarng & Chen, 2018).

**6) Integrating video**

The students can watch English vocabulary videos containing images, L2 audios, and L1 and L2 captions that are relevant to the target words. Undergraduate students studying at a Thai university gained more vocabulary knowledge and preferred learning L2 vocabulary via video containing both L1 and L2 captions, interesting and related images, and the proper volume of audios. These findings highlight the significant role of multimedia learning in linking visual and auditory information (Yawiloeng, 2020).

In Mohsen's (2016) study, students who participated in a virtual knee surgery simulation by dragging various surgery devices shown in the clip over the knee of a patient outperformed those who watched and listened to the same video surgery video on YouTube in comprehension and vocabulary recognition. Students' interaction with the online video simulation affected their comprehension of the video content and acquisition of L2 incidental vocabulary.

At a Midwestern university, students enrolled in a listening comprehension class watched a web-delivered academic lecture video on horticulture, acquired incidental vocabulary. Advanced students showed both metacognitive and cognitive learning strategies, whereas intermediate and lower-level learners made use of cognitive strategies (Smidt & Hegelheimer, 2004).

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/concordance>

**7) E-portfolios**

An e-portfolio<sup>5</sup> is a collection of a student's work such as assignments, demonstrations, presentations, essays, papers, reports, blogs, interviews, and artifacts that show the student's learning progress, achievement, and evidence of what students could do. E-portfolios facilitate, document, and archive a student's learning.

In a study by Tanaka, Yonesaka and Ueno (2015), the researchers developed an e-portfolio system called "*Lexinote*," in which EFL Japanese college students recorded and saved the target words they encountered online, searched for them in online dictionaries, practiced them in written and oral rehearsals. The students shared their own collection with peers. The instructor helped and guided the students to monitor and control their vocabulary learning metacognitively according to word familiarity. "*Lexinote*" also provided the students with audio lessons and online video lectures. Instructors could follow up the students' learning records by number of words recorded, type of practices chosen, and how frequently they edit their learning records.

**8) Teaching idioms via graphic novels**

A *graphic novel*<sup>6</sup> refers to books with comics or trade paperbacks. It also includes anthologized work, fiction, and non-fiction. In this strategy, figurative idioms are used in a script and the script is converted to a graphic novel using a computer software. Turkish university students who learned idioms through the graphic novel technique performed significantly better, reflecting the efficiency of the graphic novel technique in vocabulary teaching (Basal, Aytan & Demir, 2016).

**9) Multimedia annotations**

A *multimedia annotation* is a piece of information that explains something or adds more information about the content of multimedia, such as highlighting and tagging texts, images, websites, videos, songs, and other digital resources. A study by Cetinkaya & Sutcu (2019) revealed that multimedia annotations sent to students through WhatsApp enhanced their vocabulary acquisition particularly 'Text+Picture+Audio' and 'Text+Picture' multimedia annotations that increased students' vocabulary acquisition more meaningfully than any other type. The students could learn unconsciously, and they had positive opinions of the use of pictures and audio annotations. However, a few students reacted negatively to irrelevant posts because they occupied a lot of space on their mobile phones. Although 'Text+Audio' multimedia annotations contributed to the students' success more than 'texts' only, 'Text+Audio' multimedia annotations were not found to be meaningful. Similarly, L2 students with low-visual and low-verbal abilities benefited from learning materials presented without annotations. Delivering learning materials with written annotation to students with high-verbal ability and delivering learning materials with pictorial annotation to students with high-visual ability resulted in better vocabulary learning (Khazaie & Ketabi, 2011).

**10) Mobile-based social network**

Social Networking Sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Telegram, WhatsApp and others can be integrated in vocabulary instruction in DL. Mukhlif and Challob (2021) used Facebook as an Online Learning Platform for improving Iraqi EFL secondary school students' vocabulary knowledge and found that the Facebook Online Learning Platform was more effective than traditional instruction due to the use of a variety of teaching techniques, effective group work, immediate feedback, and autonomous learning opportunities that positively affected students' learning of English vocabulary.

**11) Project-based Learning**

Project Based Learning<sup>7</sup> (PBL) is a teaching strategy in which students are actively engaged in real-life projects and any topic that is meaningful to them. Shaalan, 2020 found that integrating project-based learning in an ESP course was effective in developing dental vocabulary among English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) Malaysian students in their preparatory year at the College of Dentistry, at Al-Azhar University, Cairo. Each project covered a specific topic related to dentistry. They located new dental terms in reading texts, used them in writing assignments and in communication. The students were required to work together on their projects. PBL fostered the learners' self-autonomy, problem-solving, critical thinking, and creativity.

**12) Using Mindmap**

Mind-maps created by mind-mapping software can be integrated in DL vocabulary instruction as a brainstorming activity, and as a tool for helping EFL students organize, compare, group, connect, and review their vocabulary. They help them learn, apply, retain, and relate words sharing the same root or base, the same prefix or suffix, word cognates, derivatives of

<sup>5</sup> [teaching.berkeley.edu/resources/assessment-and-evaluation/design-assessment/e-portfolio](https://teaching.berkeley.edu/resources/assessment-and-evaluation/design-assessment/e-portfolio)

<sup>6</sup> [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Graphic\\_novel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Graphic_novel)

<sup>7</sup> [What is Project Based Learning? | PBLWorks](#)

the same word, words sharing the same spelling patterns (same silent letter, hidden sounds, double letters), singular or plural forms, part of speech, synonym or antonym, word families, previously-encountered words and others (Al-Jarf, 2015).

## **6. Engaging, interacting, and communicating with students in the DL environment**

To promote students' engagement, interaction, communication and provide them with feedback in the DL vocabulary learning environment, the instructor may use any of the following:

### **(1) Using WhatsApp**

WhatsApp can be used for student-student and student-teacher communication Makoe and Shandu-Phetla (2019) used WhatsApp to facilitate interaction and build communities through the lens of Ubuntu (an African concept of humanness) in distance education. The students were encouraged to work together through a mobile-based social network to learn English vocabulary.

### **(2) Using ConnectYard**

It is a social engagement platform that can be integrated with Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Google Classroom, Moodle, Edmodo, Canvas, or Blackboard. It has different types of messaging (text, social media, or email) to reach all the students using their devices on their preferred messaging channels. It allows interaction with the learning content, improving measures of performance and attendance. It has an analytics capability that allows measuring and tracking high performing classrooms, teachers, and students (Al-Jarf, 2021d).

### **(3) Creating a community of inquiry**

A *Community of Inquiry*<sup>8</sup> framework is a process of creating a deep and meaningful collaborative-constructivist learning experience through the development of three interdependent elements: teaching presence, cognitive and social. Herrera Díaz and González Miy (2017) revealed a relationship between the community of inquiry framework with its three forms of presence: teaching, cognitive, and social) and oral skill development. The students reported that the teaching presence fosters vocabulary learning, grammar, and accuracy.

### **(4) Creating learning partnerships**

Here the students enrolled in language course are paired with native or highly competent speakers. At the UK's Open University, students enrolled in six beginners' language courses reported that such partnerships helped them learn vocabulary, understand the spoken language, and strengthened their motivation to complete the course. 72% of the students who participated in this initiative completed the course (Jilg & Southgate, 2017).

### **(5) Student collaboration**

Ariffin (2021) indicated that students' vocabulary knowledge improved after they had studied together collaboratively because the interaction among the students during their discussion helped them improve other language skills such as listening, speaking, and reading, gave them opportunities to be in charge of their own learning; built their self-confidence in interacting with the other students and encouraged a sharing attitude among them.

Moreover, Chinese and Japanese college students were engaged in a "*Collaborative Writing Exchange Project*" by email using similar online vocabulary development tools. All target terms were preorganized and made available online in both Japanese and Chinese under common Semantic Field Keywords. The students had freedom to choose within sets of most relevant words from five academic disciplines. Writing themes were suggested to the students in both countries to keep their email exchanges consistent. The students performed print and online reading activities. The students had high satisfaction levels. The collaboration project helped many students from various language backgrounds to rapidly expand their target vocabulary, especially when blended with other real language negotiation tasks (Loucky, 2012). González-Lloret (2020) added that through collaborative technology-mediated tasks, instructors can promote productive language output (spoken and written) and a type of interaction that facilitates language learning and motivates students to continue improving their language skills.

Likewise, high school students in an Indian village collaborate and interact with international teachers and students from different countries via Skype daily. This collaboration proved to have many benefits for the students: Listening, speaking, and writing skill enhancement, improved pronunciation, learning new grammatical structures, and new vocabulary. For

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<sup>8</sup> [The Community of Inquiry](#)

example, the students learn names of countries, their location, cities, people, flags, currency, and exchange information and pictures about the local and target cultures. They learn about the foreign country's educational system, history, food, art, antiquities, costumes, and traditions. They learn about natural phenomena in other regions of the world such as the northern lights. They take virtual field trips to some museums and historical places (Al-Jarf, 2020a).

(6) Social interaction

Social networking can be used by teachers and students as a community discussion tool, student-to-teacher reporting tool, a teacher-to-student reporting tool and a support tool for supplementary out-of-class vocabulary learning through Quizlet. Students can be encouraged to engage in learning activities outside the formal class time through Quizlet (Tran, 2018). Similarly, there was a clear improvement in the overall engagement of Japanese university students through using Quizlet to learn vocabulary (Stroud, 2014).

(7) Integrating text-chat, webcam and decision-making tasks

High-intermediate EFL college students at a university in Taiwan used text-chat without webcam and text-chat with webcam combined with jigsaw tasks and decision-making tasks. The decision-making tasks enhanced learners' social presence development better. The students' image provided by the webcam enhanced their social presence. They perceived the highest social presence in the decision-making-webcam tasks, and the lowest social presence in the jigsaw, non-webcam tasks (Ko, 2016).

(8) Utilizing technology-mediated task-based language teaching

Vellanki and Bandu (2021) recommended the integration of technology-mediated task-based language teaching (TBLT) because of its emphasis on real-life language, and student-centered activities. In TBLT, students' stay interested and engaged in the virtual classroom. It encourages them to interact with each other and with their instructor.

## 7. Instructional Phases with Online Task and Activities

Instruction with online task and activities goes through three stages: a Pre-Task Phase, a Task Phase and a Post-task Phase. In the *Pre-Task Phase*, state the objective, i.e., tell the students what they are going to do, study or practice. Tell them how they are going to perform the task (individually, in small groups, in pairs ... etc.). Explain what is to be performed. Give an example. Give detailed, clear, and specific instructions on how a particular online task should be performed. Introduce the online course, blog, online discussion forum. Give the students the name of the website, app, video or podcast and ask them to locate and download it. Show the students how they can search Google for vocabulary Websites or apps targeting specific vocabulary subskills or themes by selecting specific search terms, enclosing search terms in quotation marks and using Boolean operators. Post sample online tasks and show what they are supposed to do, how and where to respond. Tell the students what you expect of them. The instructor can use an Online Course Management System, an online discussion forum, a blog, a social media website such as WhatsApp, Telegram, Facebook or Twitter to post the vocabulary websites and tasks, hold the discussion and provide interaction and feedback.

In the *Task Phase*, the students may perform the vocabulary tasks perform the vocabulary skills individually, in pairs, in small groups, synchronously or asynchronously, interactively, or collaboratively. Explain each task, illustrate it, perform it and supervise it. Set a time limit or deadline for completing a task (emphasize speed). Provide guidance and answer students' questions.

In the *Post-Task Phase*, give feedback and comment on students' performance. The students comment on each other's performance and correct each other's errors. Encourage the students to suggest digital resources related to the theme under study.

The EFL college instructor serves as a facilitator. She helps the students in locating relevant websites, apps, podcasts, and YouTube videos that meet their needs and purposes and show them how to create an e-portfolio. She matches the students' proficiency level with the difficulty level of the online vocabulary task or technology. She encourages the students to fully engage in the online vocabulary task or technology. She follows the students up to make sure they are making the best use of the assigned online vocabulary tasks or technology. She gives extra credit for performing specific online vocabulary tasks or using a particular technology depending on how many they have completed. Online vocabulary website or app material may be included on tests to motivate the students to take the supplementary activities seriously.



## 8. Recommendations

The present study has proposed a variety of online tasks, websites, MAs, podcasts, YouTube videos that instructors can use for teaching vocabulary to EFL college students in the DL environment. Since it is not possible to try all of the online tasks reported herein in one semester, the instructors can choose from them depending on the time allocated for the vocabulary course, the kind of vocabulary items and subskills taught in the course, students' calibre in using technology, their interest and proficiency level. Instructors should take into consideration that technology does not teach by itself, and its use does not guarantee the automatic learning and retention of the vocabulary contained in them. The students should not be left to use the selected technologies passively. They should be encouraged to engage in, respond to, and be actively involved in online tasks and activities. The vocabulary instructor should supervise and guide the students, provide help, and give feedback and encouragement.

To make the best use of online vocabulary tasks and technologies, Chien (2013) suggested the integration of the online word activity designs, focus on different elements of word knowledge, direct instruction on specific technical terms, and students' awareness of the vocabulary selected. To make vocabulary and content word learning more effective, the students can create their own flashcards or e-portfolios using MAs such as *Quizlet* and *Vocabulary Builders*. Students' needs, weaknesses and learning purpose should be used as guidelines for customizing online vocabulary tasks especially those created by the students themselves or by their instructor.

Students' satisfaction, perceived difficulty of online vocabulary apps and technologies and their performance *should be* always assessed. Mobile technologies such as tablets and smartphones might be especially advantageous. The utilization of different online vocabulary tasks and technologies by Saudi college students majoring in English, translation, linguistics, or literature, together with their preferences and views on their usefulness, are still open for further investigation by researchers in the future.

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