

USING *QUIPPER* AS AN ONLINE PLATFORM FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

by **Herri Mulyono**

University of Muhammadiyah Prof. DR HAMKA,
Jalan Tanah Merdeka, East Jakarta, 13830, Indonesia
hmulyono @ uhamka.ac.id

Abstract

This paper evaluates the affordability of *Quipper* as an online platform for teaching and learning English as a foreign language (EFL). It focuses on the extent to which features available in *Quipper* may correspond to fundamental components of Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) pedagogy, as suggested by Chapelle (2003), including L2-input exposure, interaction and linguistic production. The evaluation results indicate that *Quipper* is affordable for use as an online teaching and learning EFL platform. More importantly, it corresponds to the three conditions of CALL pedagogy, thus making it a potential aid for activities used in teaching and learning foreign language.

Keywords: Online platform, learning management system (LMS), teaching and learning English as a foreign language (EFL), computer-assisted language learning (CALL).

1. Introduction

The advanced development of Information and Communication Technology has provided excellent opportunities for teachers and students to experience English language teaching and learning activities beyond their traditional classrooms; that is, through online learning. Literature on the use of technology in EFL classrooms has suggested a number of benefits from using online learning modes, such as the Web, wikis, blogs and other online learning platforms, on the development of students' language skills (for example, see Alshumaimeri, 2011; Jung, Kudo, & Choi, 2012; Sun & Yang, 2015).

Furthermore, many ELT professionals and ICT practitioners have written reviews about technology for classroom use to help teachers to keep updated with information about types of technology suitable for language teaching and learning. In the *Teaching English with Technology Journal*, I noted four interesting reviews, namely those by Ciaffaroni (2003); Elturki and Hussein (2011); Kiliçkaya (2007); and Michalak (2015). Unfortunately, there are still few articles in the journal that evaluate learning management systems (LMS) for the teaching and learning of English online.

In this paper, I will examine the use of *Quipper* as an online platform for EFL learning. Specifically, I will evaluate the affordability of *Quipper* from a technical perspective; that is, whether or not some features available in *Quipper* help teachers expose students to L2 input, facilitate interaction among teachers, students and between teachers and students, and whether they promote students' linguistic production. To help readers understand the following discussion, I will provide a brief definition of two terms used in online learning and LMS. The term 'online learning' (also known as 'e-learning') is used to explain the use of the Internet as a technological tool that enables users to interact with the content, with other users; and to get support during the process of learning so that they can acquire knowledge, construct personal meaning, and to experience learning (Ally, 2008).

In addition, the term 'learning management system' (LMS) is described as an online learning platform, software that is devised to organise and manage learning (Anderson, 2008; Paulsen, 2003). More specifically, LMS is defined as a "systemic infrastructure that manages the learning process of an entire organization" (Watson & Watson, 2007, p. 28). LMS is characterised by three fundamental features, namely the creation of course tools (the creation of modules, learning materials and group work), student and tutor support tools (access to learning materials, teacher-students and student-student communication) and administrative systems (registration, course enrolment, and grouping students – Paulsen, 2003).

The paper is organised according to five sections. Section 2 that follows provides an overview of *Quipper*. Section 3 informs the readers about the basic operation and features of *Quipper* that have potential for foreign language learning. The evaluation of *Quipper* features is presented in Section 4 and, finally, conclusion and recommendations are offered in Section 5.

2. An overview of *Quipper*

Quipper, also known as Quipper School, is a web-based online learning application. It was originally developed by Quipper Ltd. located in London. *Quipper* opens its representative offices in four countries, namely Japan, the Philippines, Indonesia and Mexico.

Quipper has been used by millions of teachers and learners around the world, including those in the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, Mexico, the United Kingdom, India, Russia and Turkey. This may be why some languages available on *Quipper* correspond to those countries, including English, Japanese, Filipino, Bahasa Indonesia, Mexican-Spanish, and Thai.

Unlike other similar web-based learning management platforms such as *Moodle*, *Claroline*, *ATutor*, *Omeka* and *Docebo* that need installation on an existing hosting site (or a web server), *Quipper* provides teachers and students with a ready-to-use web-based learning application. It also supports teachers via virtual storage that allows them upload and keep their PowerPoint presentations, PDF files, pictures and videos online. Furthermore, the storage helps teachers maintain their teaching and learning activity records on the web server; thus, they can monitor their students' learning without encountering constraints of time and place. It is interesting that the use of these facilities in *Quipper* is completely free, although it requires registration.

3. Basic operation and features

Quipper is available online at <http://school.quipper.com>. The system is user-friendly as *Quipper*'s menu and sub-menu feature a simple design and accordingly, users can navigate all facilities available on the system with ease. This ease of using technology, as argued by Teo, Lee and Chai (2008), may promote users' positive attitudes towards the particular technology (such as *Quipper*), and may eventually be a contributing factor to using it.

Figure 1. *Quipper*'s welcoming screen.



To start using *Quipper*, both teachers and students are required to sign up for an account. They can either use their *Facebook* accounts or create a new, free *Quipper* accounts. To get a free account, teachers and students need only to provide an email address, telephone number, and the name of the school. If their school has already registered in the *Quipper*

database, teachers then can make a request to the *Quipper* ambassador at the school to assign their account into the virtual school classroom.

After registration, users can then log in into the system with the username and password they have already created. What is important to note is that *Quipper* will initially ask the user's role when logging into the system (see Figure 1). There are two roles for users: teachers and students (see Table 1). Each of these roles allows different access to *Quipper*'s three main features, which are 'Creation', 'Assessment' and 'Learning'.

Table 1. Menu and sub-menu in *Quipper*'s dashboard.

Role	Main menu	Sub-menu
Teachers	Overview	Overview, performance
	Assignments	Assignments, examinations
	Curriculum	Curriculum
	Message	Message (personal), announcement
	Manage	Students, groups, teachers
Students	Assignment	To do, try it again, mastered
	Messages	Messages, notices
	Study notes	Study notes

The 'creation' feature deals with setting up the learning classroom, the materials and the student participants. The 'assessment' feature facilitates teachers' use of the learning materials (lessons and quizzes) and assigning them to students. Learners then access these learning materials on the 'learning' feature. In addition to the three main features, *Quipper* provides a help facility (displayed as a question mark icon) to help teachers and students to understand the functions of each menu.

The 'teacher role' enables teachers to have full access to *Quipper*'s three main features. The role also grants teacher access to 'overview', 'assignments', 'curriculum', 'message' and 'manage' menus. The 'overview' menu provides brief information about active assignments submitted by the students ('overview sub-menu'), and students' individual performances ('performance sub-menu'). The 'assignment' menu allows teachers to create new assignments, distribute them to students and monitor their progress. The 'curriculum' menu offers two options for teachers regarding the learning materials; they can either use the materials available on the *Quipper* database, or they can develop their own materials and use them to teach their students. The 'message' menu has two functions; firstly, it facilitates

teacher-student communication, and, secondly, it allows teachers to distribute notes to all students. Finally, the 'manage' menu allows teachers to select course participants, group the students, and invite other colleagues to teach collaboratively within the virtual classroom.

The 'student' role is limited to accessing *Quipper*'s learning features. As shown in Table 1, three main menus on the student dashboard include assignments, messages and study notes. The assignment menu informs students about tasks that need to be completed. The menu also notifies them about the tasks they have already done and their level of mastery. In addition, the 'message' menu allows learners to interact with their teachers and peers. Unfortunately, this facility is suitable only for communication between two individuals, which may make group discussions difficult. The other study note menu allows students to write personal notes related to a topic or an assignment. It is important to highlight here that student users can only access the learning materials according to the classroom (course) already provided by their teachers.

4. Evaluation

In this section, I will evaluate *Quipper*'s features in terms of its affordability as an online English teaching learning platform. Special focus will be placed on whether or not these features address the three conditions of CALL pedagogy suggested by Chapelle (2003): L2-input exposure, interaction and linguistic production. In order to do this, I attended a *Quipper*-mediated English teaching and learning activities at a senior secondary school in Indonesia. My role at that time was as a teacher.

4.1. Affordability of *Quipper*

Technically, the *Quipper* web application meets all three standards of online learning platforms as described by Paulsen (2003), namely the creation of course tools, student and tutor support tools and course administration. The course-creation tools on *Quipper* are easy to use, and the student- and tutor- support tools address both teacher and students' engagements in teaching and learning activities. For example, teachers can create a lesson that can be accessed by their students. Unfortunately, despite the availability of the administrative system, *Quipper* does not offer an administrative function. Teachers, therefore, need to set up a new classroom (course), create learning modules, and select the participating students themselves. This administrative workload may be challenging for some teachers to some extent, particularly for those who are not familiar with a web-based learning management system.

4.2. CALL pedagogy elements in *Quipper*

Chapelle (2003) suggests three conditions of CALL pedagogy that EFL teachers should consider when incorporating technology into language learning classrooms; these are the availability of L2-input exposure, interaction and linguistic production.

(a) *Quipper* features enhance L2 input exposure

According to Chapelle (2003), the use of computer technology in the classroom should bring benefit to learners through enhanced linguistic input. The three types of language input suggested by Chappelle are salience (e.g. interaction with a grammar application), modification (providing any means that help learners to arrive at the meaning, such as through images), and elaboration (providing explanations). *Quipper* addresses these types of enhanced learning input.

As a web-based learning platform, *Quipper* offers learners multimodal exposure (written, aural and visual) for foreign language input. For example, teachers can develop learning materials that are enriched by visual and audio media, such as text with illustration, images, videos or other multimedia resources. In order to do this, teachers can employ the multimedia tools available in 'lesson' and 'assessment' menus.

Figure 2. Embedded video from *YouTube*.

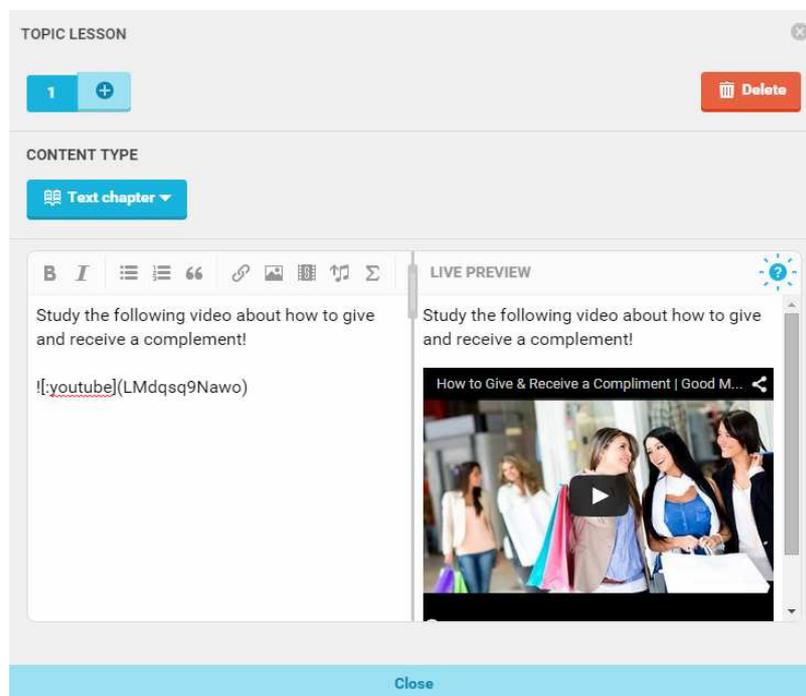


Figure 2 above illustrates how teachers can embed images, audios, or videos in the lesson content or in assignments. The incorporation of multimedia applications in the learning

materials in *Quipper* not only motivates students but also improves students' understanding of word meanings and linguistic forms from texts presented by the teachers.

Unfortunately, *Quipper* is not enhanced with a speech recognition technology, technology that can identify or recognise words or spoken expressions. Such an absence reduces an opportunity for the students to interact with the computer verbally, thus, the learning of speaking is not feasible for the students.

(b) *Quipper* features promote classroom interactions

The use of CALL applications in EFL classrooms should also provide an opportunity for teachers and learners to interact, either within synchronous (real-time) or asynchronous (not-realtime) modes (Chapelle, 2003). Chapelle (2003) highlights three types of interaction that teachers should promote within language learning tasks: interpersonal interaction, learner-computer interaction, and intrapersonal interaction. In *Quipper*, teachers and students are given an opportunity to get engaged into interpersonal communication. The 'message' and 'announcement' features help teachers to interact with colleagues and students. In addition, teachers can work collaboratively with their colleagues when developing a learning curriculum, or can design lessons (assignments) for the pupils together. To do this, teachers initially need to invite colleagues into their classroom through the Teacher Page, via email or on the Class Page, as shown in Figure 3 below:

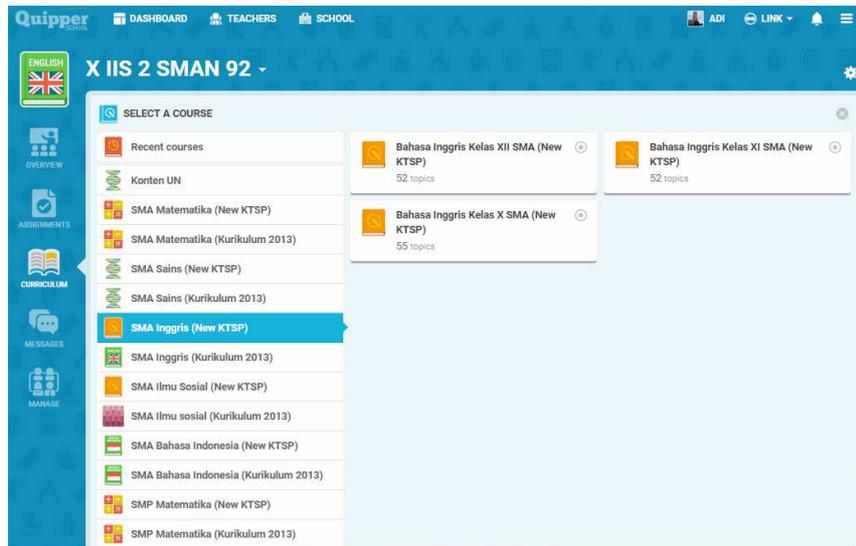
Figure 3. Inviting colleague to participate



In addition to interacting with colleagues, teachers can interact with the *Quipper* content developer through the 'curriculum' feature. The curriculum menu as shown in Figure 4 allows teachers either to develop their own curriculum (learning materials), or to use the

available materials developed by the *Quipper* content developer in the *Quipper* database. These teacher-colleagues and teacher-content developer interactions are advantages of *Quipper* that, as far I have observed, are not available on other similar online learning platform.

Figure 4. Curriculum available in *Quipper* database



In addition to teacher-student interaction, student-student interaction is offered through private messaging (peer-to-peer) and ‘group work’ feature. Unfortunately, the ‘group work’ feature does not provide room for students to discuss a particular topic or work collaboratively. In other words, the limited functionality of private messaging and group work features indicates that collaborative learning activities for students seem to be difficult to promote using these features.

What is interesting about the *Quipper* features for teachers, students, and teacher-student interaction is the integration with social media platforms such as *Twitter* and *Facebook*. This social media integration enables teachers to build social relationships with their colleagues and students effortlessly, and to monitor their students’ interaction and the progress they have made without having constraints of time and place. Another advantage for students is that social media are integrated into the *Quipper* system because this not only helps students to socialise with their peers, it also keeps them updated about their learning progress. As argued by Donato (1994), social interaction may promote collective scaffolding that helps students perform the language they are learning beyond their linguistics ability.

With regard to intrapersonal interaction, *Quipper* provides useful tools called ‘Hint’ and ‘Explanation’ for the students’ assignment. The ‘Hint’ and ‘Explanation’ features enable

teachers to give their students help (e.g. with clues or explanations) in order to answer questions on a test or in a assignment. They also provide an opportunity for students to stimulate their inner voice and become involved in deep cognitive processing of input (Chapelle, 2003). It is interesting that teachers can also use the ‘Hint’ and ‘Explanation’ features to provide learning feedback to their students, as such features can be accessed by students during and after they complete an assignment. These two types of students’ access to the learning feedback are of course subject to teachers’ personal choices when developing assignments for students.

In addition to interpersonal and intrapersonal interaction features, *Quipper* provides a chance for learners to interact with a computer, although this seems limited. Students can only interact with a computer through the lessons and quizzes previously set up by their teachers. The use of a flash application that enables more learner-computer interactions (such as language games and computer-user communication applications) is unfortunately not available in *Quipper*, as it requires teachers to have advanced computer skills.

(c) *Quipper* facilitates students’ linguistic production.

According to Chapelle (2003), the incorporation of technology in the EFL classroom should promote learning tasks that afford a wide variety of opportunities for learners to produce the target language. Chapelle (2003) suggests that learners’ language production within CALL tasks should provide students with chances to plan before speaking or writing, to receive feedback so they can correct their linguistic output, and to suggest a learning scaffolding.

Figure 5). The limited range of question type is reason for such a limitation and they should therefore be brought to the attention of the developers for further improvement of the system.

5. Conclusion and recommendation

In summary, *Quipper* fits the three conditions for an online learning platform, which makes *Quipper* affordable for EFL teaching and learning. More importantly, *Quipper* addresses the three conditions of CALL pedagogy suggested by Chapelle (2003), which are L2-input exposure, interaction and linguistic production. Personally, I have attended virtual English learning classrooms designed using *Quipper* for four months as a teacher and found this online learning platform particularly useful for promoting independent learning for the students, with support from teachers as well as from their peers. The greatest value I perceived regarding *Quipper* was that the features were user-friendly, and it supported the school's English curriculum. I also found *Quipper*, as an online platform, to be a feasible alternative for teachers to assign learning tasks to students outside the classroom. This is because *Quipper* grants teachers access to monitoring students' engagement with the task and enables them to evaluate their achievements, particularly in the areas of students' learning to read, listen and write English.

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