EFL Undergraduate Students' Perceptions of Using Duolingo Application as an English Language Learning Tool

Auges Amalia Diva[1]*; Daviq Rizal[2]; M. Robich Amin Dinov[3]

[1,2]Universitas Islam Negeri Walisongo; [3]Universitas Negeri Semarang

*)Corresponding author: auges0808@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to look into students' perceptions on using the Duolingo application to learn English. This was a descriptive investigation which involved 100 university students in Semarang, Central Java, Indonesia. Surveys and interviews were used to collect data. The data of the questionnaire were analyzed quantitatively through simple percentage analysis of SPSS. Meanwhile, the interview data were qualitatively examined. Collection, categorization, description, interpretation, and conclusion comprise the model. The findings revealed that the students gave favorable responses to fourteen questionnaire statements and three interview questions that represented their perceptions on the use of Duolingo in EFL learning. The students thought that learning English with Duolingo was simple, enjoyable, interesting, and motivating. In short, the students had positive perceptions on the use of Duolingo in EFL learning. Furthermore, according to the results of the students' interviews, there were various advantages and disadvantages of using Duolingo to learn English. For example, this application could help students improve their English skills, the features of Duolingo were interesting and addictive, it could stimulate and motivate students to learn English, and students felt comfortable and enjoyed learning English while using Duolingo. On the other hand, students noticed several drawbacks of using the Duolingo application, including the inability to play and learn through the use of Duolingo in offline mode, the presence of annoying advertisements in the middle of exercises, the presence of several repeated questions in the same level, and the lack of explanation regarding grammatical structures.

Keywords: EFL, Perceptions, DuoLingo, Language Learning.

INTRODUCTION

Learning a language can be difficult, frustrating, and anxiety-inducing (Akbari, 2015). Additionally, acquiring a new language takes time and persistence to practice; without sufficient incentive, pupils are prone to give up (Turan & Akdag-Cimen, 2020). To overcome the challenges, the integration of technology into teaching and learning process is considered as an ideal solution since the technology has consistently contributes to positive impacts on EFL (Basar & Sahin, 2022). In another way, given the potential benefits of technology, effectively utilizing it in EFL instruction will greatly aid in resolving any obstacles that may arise. As a result, using technology in teaching and learning activities is advised for students.

Technology has been employed as a strategy to enhance education and techniques of education. Because smartphones and tablets are generally available, mobile applications have been utilized in second language acquisition (H. Ahmed, 2016). Technology is also thought that it has an important role in improving the efficacy and efficiency of educational processes (TÜREL & DAVUDOVA, 2022). In brief, technology is an important tool that can have a lot of positive effects on a lot of different sectors, including the educational sector. Technology-enhanced instruction creates a favorable environment for educators and learners alike.

Gamification arises from the expansion of technology use in EFL instruction. Gamification is a term used to describe creative and engaging learning activities that incorporate entertaining games and their auxiliary components (Redjeki & Muhajir, 2021). The consistent integration of games into EFL instruction has raised students' motivation and interest in the subject (Pitoyo et al., 2020). As many research studies demonstrate, utilizing gaming techniques in conjunction with technology can effectively support EFL instruction (Pinto et al., 2021). Thus, in order to achieve the best possible EFL learning outcomes, technological integration into instruction must be a top priority.

Duolingo is a popular learning platform. It is the language learning and global communication app of the future. Duolingo is a mobile-based language program that combines visual, audio, and questions about a language's grammar (H. B. E. Ahmed, 2016). Language learning software Duolingo offers free language classes via mobile and online apps and incorporates gamification elements. This platform has several advantages, is easy to use, and has a great deal of potential to help EFL learners succeed (Munday, 2015). Additionally, using this platform has improved language proficiency, professional competence, and the growth of digital literacy (Brick & Cervi-Wilson, 2019). This suggests that it is a useful instrument for assisting EFL instruction (Jiang et al., 2021a).

Web-based gamification and educational gamification have become increasingly popular in recent years. Many scholars and practitioners believe that gamification have a high educational value because they provide pupils with a joyful and non-stressful learning environment. It reduces the student's anxiousness during the learning process. Gamification, according to (Bagchi, 2021), increases communicative competence and foster innovative and spontaneous language usage. They work well to boost motivation and encourage learner-centeredness. Gamification can help students build their attitudes and provide them more opportunities to speak up. Furthermore, (Zarzycka-Piskorz, 2016) contends that gamification has the benefit of providing diversity, reducing boredom, providing a thrill when performing grammatical exercises, and pushing pupils to work. In this study, gamification is defined as the

application of game elements into education which makes learning more relaxed, fun and comfortable for the students. This is done to inspire and engage learners so that they become active participants in their own learning process.

This study looks into the perspectives of college students regarding the use of Duolingo for EFL instruction. Comprehensive information that is rarely provided in other research of a comparable nature is provided by the study's outcomes. In the meanwhile, this study offers an overview of the students' perceptions on the incorporation of Duolingo into EFL instruction, encompassing language proficiency and learning motivation. The optimal use of Duolingo in EFL instruction is supported by an understanding of and consideration for perceptions of the students. Realizing this phenomenon above, the researcher was encouraged to apply Duolingo Application in learning English to her students. Finally, the objective of this research was to investigate her students' perception towards the use of Duolingo Application in learning English and also supported by students' arguments regarding the drawbacks of using the Duolingo application.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Numerous studies have been conducted to investigate the use of Duolingo. Several studies have highlighted the use of Duolingo to improve (Habibie, 2020), reading (Jiang et al., 2021b), speaking and listening (Niah & Pahmi, 2019). The other discussed how to use Duolingo to increase students' motivation (Zeng (曾成) & Fisher, 2023) and what benefits and drawbacks (Perez, 2020) are potentially brought about by the implementation of Duolingo in English learning activities.

The preceding research show that Duolingo, as a user-friendly language learning tool, has had a positive influence on users. The platform, which is available in the form of a website and an application, allows users to learn a language at any time and from any location. Duolingo's emergence offers new opportunities for language learners of every level to practice English.

Students of Duolingo are exposed to activities such as listening, reading, speaking, and writing (Alfuhaid, 2021). As a result, it enables users to improve both their receptive and productive skills. For example, when the users are conducting the exercises, they are required to listen to the audio and respond to the question by providing the proper response. This type of activity helps people improve their listening skills. Another form of task is inputting the necessary words or phrases to finish the story. This type of activity allows people to improve their writing skills.

In terms of language skills, using Duolingo improves pronunciation, vocabulary, and

grammatical mastery (Redjeki & Muhajir, 2021). Because Duolingo provides a handbook that includes explanations, examples, and grammar exercises for each topic, users may better comprehend the grammar. Duolingo also exposes users to a wide range of vocabularies and facilitates pronunciation practice through tasks supplied at each level.

Several studies show that using Duolingo in EFL learning helps users boost their learning motivation since it creates a fun learning environment (Habibie, 2020). The use of Duolingo has provided users with a pleasurable learning experience because they can learn and play at the same time. This enjoyable learning practice encourages users to remain interested and motivated in their Duolingo learning. Furthermore, various research highlight the benefits and drawbacks of utilizing Duolingo in EFL learning (Perez, 2020). Using Duolingo has several advantages, including a variety of learning exercises and simple access. Meanwhile, several disadvantages of using Duolingo include rigid use and less direct connection.

METHOD

This is a descriptive study, which aims to investigate students' perception towards the use of Duolingo Application in learning English. The study uses a mixed-method design in terms of data collection. The major data sources consist of quantitative questionnaire and a qualitative semi-structured interview. The study was conducted at several universities in Central Java, Indonesia. The participants were selected by using purposive sampling technique and considering several criteria. The students that participated in this study are new Duolingo users, actively used Duolingo at least for three months, and regularly practiced English through Duolingo. A total of 100 undergraduate students were purposively selected to participate in this study. They were consisted of 57 females and 43 male students. Their ages range were 19-21. According to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), it was B1 level.

To obtain data, the researchers distributed questionnaires and conducted interviews. The questionnaire has fifteen items designed to assess students' perspectives toward the use of Duolingo in EFL study. The questionnaire items were delivered using Google form, and the interview was conducted via WhatsApp. The questionnaire and interview items were prepared by the researchers, who relied on content validity and expertise to assure the tools' validity. The questionnaire contains elements that describe how students perceive and act in relation to the usage of Duolingo in EFL learning as a learning medium/language learning platform as well as a supporting educational tool to develop language abilities and components. The items on the questionnaire address four major topics: general opinions, language skills, language components, and learning motivation, interest, and anxiety. In responding to each item of the

questionnaire, the researchers used the Likert Scale and asked the students to select one of four options: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). The questionnaire data were quantitatively assessed through simple percentage analysis (Matthew et al., 2014). Meanwhile, the interview data were qualitatively evaluated using a model that included collection, classification, description, interpretation, and conclusion as suggested by. In short, the researcher used both quantitative and qualitative methods to analyze the data from this study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Results of Questionnaire

The purpose of this study was to look into the perspectives of learners on using the Duolingo application to learn English. According to the questionnaire, all of the participants own a smartphone or an Android device, and 90% own a laptop computer. They had been utilizing them for about two years. They all have a Duolingo account on their phone or laptop. According to the results of the questionnaire, learners were enthusiastic about using the Duolingo application to learn English. All of the means in each item ranged from 6.19 to 7.14. The detailed findings can be seen in the Table 1 and 2.

Table 1. Easiness of using and learning through the use of Duolingo

No.	Students' Perception	Total	Percentage	Mean
1.	Duolingo is a fun English learning medium.	71	89%	6.76
2.	Duolingo is a helpful English learning medium.	66	83%	6.29
3.	Duolingo is an accessible English learning medium.	67	84%	6.38
4.	Duolingo facilitates effective English learning activities.	75	94%	7.14
5.	Duolingo facilitates active English learning activities.	66	83%	6.29
6.	Duolingo facilitates ideal English learning.	68	85%	6.48
7.	Duolingo is an innovative game-based English learning medium.	69	86%	6.57

Based on Table 1, first we found that 89% of students think Duolingo is a fun English learning medium. The students appreciate using Duolingo to learn English. The usage of Duolingo in English learning helps pupils avoid boredom. Second, 83% of students agree that Duolingo is a helpful English learning medium. This language learning platform assists students in learning English by introducing them to a range of material resources such as guidebooks, exercises, conversations, podcasts, and so on. Third, 84% of students think that Duolingo is an accessible English learning medium. It is a language learning platform that is available via website and application and can be accessed via a variety of technical devices such as a computer, laptop, smartphone, and tablet. It is also feasible to access it at any time and from any location. Fourth, 94% agreed that Duolingo facilitates effective English learning activities. It is developed with a feature that motivates students to create and achieve specific learning goals. As a result, learning becomes more effective. Fifth, 83% agree that Duolingo facilitates active English learning activities. When students are encouraged to establish and achieve a goal using the Duolingo feature, they are reminded to practice often. These encourage students to become active learners who are accustomed to practicing English on a regular and consistent basis in order to meet their learning objectives. Sixth, 85% stated that Duolingo facilitates ideal English learning. It allows students to learn English at any time and from any location, and it also delivers a wealth of learning tools. Finally, 86% of students agreed that Duolingo is an innovative game-based English learning medium that incorporates gaming aspects into learning tasks.

Table 2. Effectiveness and language improvement through the use of Duolingo

No.	Students' Perception	Total	Percentage	Mean
1.	Duolingo promotes vocabulary enrichment.	71	89%	6.76
2.	Duolingo promotes better understanding on proper sentence structure.	70	88%	6.67
3.	Duolingo promotes better pronunciation practice.	67	84%	6.38
4.	Duolingo supports listening skill improvement.	66	83%	6.29

5.	Duolingo supports speaking skill improvement.	68	85%	6.48
6.	Duolingo supports reading skill improvement.	73	91%	6.95
7.	Duolingo supports writing skill improvement.	65	81%	6.19

Based on Table 2, first we found that the percentage of 89% of students agreed that Duolingo promotes vocabulary enrichment. Learning English with Duolingo exposes students to a wide range of vocabulary. To make things easier, pupils are introduced to vocabulary related to their learning level and topic. Second, 88% think that Duolingo promotes better understanding on proper sentence structure. It includes a manual for each topic. The guidebook not only discusses the essential sentence structure but also provides easy examples to help students understand the sentence structure better. As a result, it helps them in improving their grammatical proficiency and comprehension. Third, 84% agreed that Duolingo promotes better pronunciation practice. Duolingo exercises that enhance better pronunciation fluency include word pronouncing. Fourthly 83% agreed that Duolingo helps students improve their listening skills by giving them the option to listen to a range of Podcasts on a variety of topics. The more podcasts kids listen to, the stronger their listening and understanding skills. Fifth, 85% agree that Duolingo supports speaking skill improvement. Students can train and improve their speaking skills and fluency by replying to the conversation orally. Sixth, 91% agreed that Duolingo supports reading skill improvement. Some exercises in Duolingo require students to read brief paragraphs, answer relevant questions, draw their own conclusions, and comprehend the implied meaning behind the paragraphs. These activities help pupils improve their reading ability and comprehension. Finally, 81% agreed that 81% Duolingo helps students improve their writing skills by providing simple writing exercises, however it is still confined to arranging or composing simple words, phrases, and sentences.

The Results of Interview

In sustaining with the results of the questionnaire, the results of the interviews with three students show that the students are enthusiastic about using Duolingo for EFL study.

> "Duolingo is an excellent educational games program because it is free software for learning English. The application is also adaptable because it can be played and taught anywhere and at any time. Furthermore, it is user-friendly and compatible with a wide range of devices. Everyone may effortlessly play and learn using this application."

(Student 1)

"I believe that using Duolingo to learn English is an appropriate way in today's context. It could inspire and motivate me to study English. I was able to practice listening, speaking, writing, and reading in a practical and enjoyable manner by using Duolingo. Duolingo also allows me to learn grammar; there are many instances of parts of speech and language structure on the questions provided. I understand how to arrange statements in English, how to appropriately enunciate words or sentences, translate phrases, and so on. I believe Duolingo has improved my skills; it has greatly aided my English learning." (Student 2)

"I use Duolingo because it allows me to study English as I play games. I feel at ease, which allows me to learn English more quickly. There is no mental load in learning, nor is there any fear of making mistakes in front of others." (Student 3)

These findings are consistent with the findings of a previous study conducted by (Novitasari & Purnamaningsih, 2022), who discovered that Duolingo is an efficient English learning platform since it provides students with ease and convenience in utilizing it. This platform is also enjoyable and entertaining to use (Pramesti & Susanti, 2020). As a result, it makes students pleased to study English with Duolingo.

Furthermore, the students provide feedback on the disadvantages of using Duolingo to learn English.

"I can't play Duolingo offline, so I have to connect to the internet if we want to use the app. So I can't access it if I don't have an internet package. I believe it would be preferable if this application could be upgraded and added an offline feature." (Student 1)

"I see that there are a lot of advertisements on that app. After I complete one level, an advertisement will appear. These can occasionally interfere with my attention when playing and learning English." (Student 2)

"Occasionally, I discover that multiple questions in the same level are repeated. It bores me because I already knew the solution from the previous number. I believe it makes it easier for me to finish it. I anticipate that this application will enhance the questions and add more difficult themes." (Student 3)

In conclusion, despite the fact that there were various disadvantages to using Duolingo to learn English, the good parts of it still provided more benefits to the students' learning activities. Finally, the results of the questionnaire and interview revealed that the majority of students have a positive opinion and attitude toward using the Duolingo application to learn English. They all believe that it is an effective method for improving their English abilities and motivation to learn English. This outcome is consistent with the findings of (Mulya & Refnaldi, 2016), who concur that Duolingo has appealing qualities that help pique students' attention and

inspire them to learn English. Another study discovered that instructional game applications improve students' abilities. According to (Park, 2012), the beneficial effect of educational games can increase students' academic achievement through particular subject instruction supported by selected games. Then, by playing games, students' general talents, such as self-efficacy, problem solving, decision making, logical thinking, creativity, communication, and so on, can be developed. Furthermore, (Nushi & Eqbali, 2017) highlights how educators and students are learning that virtual resources can be an effective supplement to face-to-face activities. This suggests that the application could aid students' learning and so contribute to their success.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to look into students' attitudes on using the Duolingo program to learn English. According to the conclusions of this study, students have a favorable attitude about the usage of Duolingo in English learning because it provides numerous benefits to students' learning processes. This application has the potential to improve students' English skills and motivate them to learn English. They also felt at ease and liked learning English with Duolingo. Furthermore, the majority of students believed that using Duolingo to learn English was an effective and enjoyable method. The findings also stated that the overall mean scores of each item from the questionnaires were in the high range (6.19 to 7.14). However, there were a number of negatives to using Duolingo in the learning process, such as odd phrases, irritating commercials, repetitive questions, and a lack of a grammar guide. We anticipate that these issues will be resolved in the near future. Finally, due to the benefits of DuoLingo, the researcher encourages and suggests that other academics employ it in their students' teaching and learning activities.

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