

INVESTIGATING UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE DUOLINGO APPLICATION AS A TOOL TO ENHANCE MOTIVATION IN LEARNING ENGLISH

Sandy Zakaria¹, Dzul Fikri², Durotun Nasihah³

*^{1,2,3}English Education Department, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education
Universitas Islam Malang*

Abstract: This study examines the perceptions of English department students at Universitas Islam Malang regarding the use of the Duolingo application as a tool to enhance motivation in learning English. Employing a mixed-method design, the research involved 25 undergraduate students who completed a structured questionnaire and participated in semi-structured interviews. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative data were examined through Miles and Huberman's flow model of thematic analysis. Findings revealed that students generally perceived Duolingo positively, citing its accessibility, interactive features, and gamified elements—such as stories, experience points (XP), achievement badges, and challenges—as key factors in sustaining engagement. Students highlighted that the app's game-like environment reduced learning anxiety, encouraged consistent practice, and offered a flexible, mobile-friendly platform for independent study. Moreover, Duolingo's narrative-based and task-oriented features were found to increase intrinsic motivation by making the learning process enjoyable and goal-oriented. The study concludes that integrating Duolingo into English learning practices can foster learner autonomy and improve motivational levels, particularly when used alongside formal instruction. Recommendations are provided for educators, students, and future researchers on leveraging mobile-assisted language learning tools to maximize learning outcomes.

Keywords: English Student, Student Perception, Duolingo Application, Learning Motivation.

INTRODUCTION

In today's globalized world, English proficiency has become an essential skill for university students in Indonesia, especially those enrolled in English education departments. As future teachers and professionals, English students are expected not only to master language skills but also to engage actively with innovative learning resources. However, many students struggle with traditional, classroom-centred approaches, which often fail to sustain motivation and engagement. This condition calls for alternative methods that combine accessibility, enjoyment, and meaningful learning experiences.

One critical factor that influences learning success is student perception. Perception shapes how learners evaluate their experiences, tools, and methods, ultimately determining whether they accept or reject a particular approach. As Slameto (2003) explains, perception emerges from the interaction between external stimuli and internal processing, meaning that students' views provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of a learning tool. In the context of mobile-assisted language learning (MALL), student perception is crucial for assessing whether an application is engaging, relevant, and capable of fostering motivation.

Among the many digital platforms available, the Duolingo application has become one of the most popular tools for independent English learning. Launched in 2012, Duolingo integrates gamification techniques—such as experience points (XP), streaks, badges, and story-based tasks—into short, interactive lessons that target reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills. Its free access, mobile-friendly design, and game-like interface make it highly appealing to students across different backgrounds (Nushi & Eqbali, 2017). Previous studies have highlighted Duolingo's potential for vocabulary enrichment, listening comprehension, and self-directed practice (Ajisoko, 2020; Inayah et al., 2020). Yet, less is known about how university students in Indonesia perceive Duolingo specifically concerning their learning motivation.

Learning motivation is widely regarded as the driving force behind effective language acquisition. Gardner (1985) defined it as the combination of effort, desire, and positive attitudes that sustain learners' engagement with a language. Motivated learners are more likely to persist through challenges, engage in meaningful practice, and achieve higher outcomes. In technology-enhanced learning, motivation can be influenced by factors such as usability, interactivity, and enjoyment (Rofidah et al., 2024). Gamified applications like Duolingo may thus offer not only

linguistic benefits but also motivational reinforcement, transforming language learning into a more enjoyable and self-sustaining process.

This study aims to investigate how English students at Universitas Islam Malang perceive the use of Duolingo in their learning process and to explore the extent to which its features contribute to increased learning motivation. By examining students' perceptions, this research seeks to reveal the potential of Duolingo as a supportive tool for higher education contexts in Indonesia, where digital learning is increasingly integrated into academic practice.

METHOD

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018), combining quantitative and qualitative methods to gain a comprehensive understanding of students' perceptions of the Duolingo application and its influence on their motivation to learn English. The participants consisted of 25 undergraduate students enrolled in the English Education Department at Universitas Islam Malang. Data were collected through a questionnaire adapted from Pramesti and Susanti (2020) and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire consisted of 30 closed-ended items divided into two sections. The first section assessed students' general perceptions of Duolingo, focusing on aspects such as usability, content, context, control, and accessibility. Four students were purposively selected for follow-up interviews based on their active use of Duolingo and their willingness to articulate their experiences.

The questionnaire used a Likert scale (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree) to assess both general perceptions of Duolingo and specific views on its motivational features such as stories, experience points, crowns, and achievements. The interviews followed a semi-structured

format, enabling participants to reflect on their experiences using mobile applications, particularly Duolingo, in their English learning process.

Data from the questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics to determine the percentage of responses across the five-point Likert scale. This analysis provided an overview of students' general perceptions of Duolingo and its features. Qualitative data were analyzed using the model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. By combining descriptive statistics with thematic analysis, the study aimed to achieve both breadth and depth in understanding students' perceptions of the Duolingo application as a motivational tool for English language learning.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The majority of students expressed positive views regarding the usability of Duolingo. Most participants reported that the application was easy to navigate, with a clear structure that guided them through lessons step by step. Survey data from 25 students revealed predominantly positive perceptions of Duolingo. Across five aspects—usability, content, context, control, and connectivity—the majority of responses were favorable, with 70–92% agreeing or strongly agreeing on each item. Students highlighted Duolingo's accessibility (92% positive) as major strengths.

The table of students' perception of Duolingo's accessibility

Answer	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	1	4%
Disagree	1	4%
Neutral	0	0%
Agree	12	48%
Strongly Agree	11	44%
Total	25	100%

As shown in the Table, an overwhelming 92% of students agreed or strongly agreed that Duolingo offers flexible and accessible learning opportunities. The app's anytime-anywhere accessibility is a major strength

The table of students' perception of Duolingo's story feature

Answer	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	0	0%
Disagree	1	4%
Neutral	3	12%
Agree	19	76%
Strongly Agree	2	8%
Total	25	100%

A substantial 84% of students agreed or strongly agreed that Duolingo's Story feature motivated them to reach their learning goals. With 76% agreeing and 8% strongly agreeing, this finding highlights the feature's potential as an effective internal motivational trigger. Only a small portion of respondents were neutral (12%) or disagreed (4%). These results reinforce the idea that interactive storytelling in language apps can cultivate intrinsic motivation by making the learning experience more immersive and goal-oriented

Regarding motivational features, the gamified system proved particularly influential. XP points, Crowns, Lingots, and Streaks motivated students to practice consistently, with over two-thirds (64–72%) affirming their effectiveness. The Story feature received the highest approval (76–84%), as students found it enjoyable and goal-oriented. Similarly, Challenges and Leaderboards encouraged persistence through competition, with approximately 65–68% of respondents responding positively.

Overall, the quantitative findings suggest that Duolingo's combination of gamification, interactive content, and mobile accessibility plays a significant role in boosting student motivation to learn English.

During interviews, several students mentioned that they appreciated the simple interface and the immediate feedback provided after completing tasks. One participant noted, "*I don't get lost using it; everything is clear, and it makes me want to keep going.*". This perception aligns with previous findings by Nushi and Egbali (2017), who highlighted the role of Duolingo's user-friendly interface in promoting learner engagement. Usability is particularly important for language learning applications because complicated or cluttered designs can discourage consistent practice.

In terms of content, students also responded positively. A large proportion agreed that the lessons were engaging, enjoyable, and useful for practicing vocabulary and grammar. Several students highlighted the colorful visuals and audio features as factors that made learning less monotonous. One student commented that "*the exercises feel like a game, not like homework,*" reflecting the application's gamified approach.

This result supports Silmi's (2019) study, which found that students preferred Duolingo due to its fun and straightforward content. The enjoyment of the content plays a key role in sustaining intrinsic motivation. As Gardner (1985) argued, learners are more likely to persist in language study if they find the process enjoyable. By presenting language exercises in a game-like form, Duolingo seems to bridge the gap between entertainment and education, which in turn encourages students to practice more frequently.

Students generally felt that Duolingo's materials were relevant to their everyday experiences and could be applied in real-life situations. About two-thirds agreed that the vocabulary and expressions presented were useful for practical communication. However, a notable portion of participants expressed neutrality, suggesting that some learners did not always find the content directly aligned with their personal needs. For example, one student mentioned that while the exercises were helpful, *"sometimes the sentences are strange or not what we usually say."*

This mixed response reflects both the strengths and limitations of standardized applications. As Yusda et al. (2020) observed, while Duolingo provides accessible and flexible practice, it still requires teacher mediation to ensure contextual accuracy and appropriateness. Thus, while students acknowledged the contextual relevance of many exercises, they also recognized the need for supplementary input from instructors to bridge occasional gaps between app-based practice and authentic language use.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

This study investigated the perceptions of English education students at Universitas Islam Malang regarding the use of the Duolingo application as a tool to enhance motivation in learning English. Drawing on both questionnaire data and semi-structured interviews, the findings revealed an overall positive perception of Duolingo's usability, content, contextual relevance, and accessibility. Students appreciated the application's user-friendly interface, engaging and colourful content, and flexible design that allowed them to practice anytime and anywhere.

Crucially, students reported that Duolingo's gamified features had a significant impact on their motivation to learn. These elements encouraged them to practice more consistently, set personal goals, and enjoy the learning process. While some students noted limitations in the

contextual authenticity of the content, the majority expressed that the app provided meaningful support in sustaining their learning motivation.

Overall, the study confirms that Duolingo can serve as an effective supplementary tool in English learning, particularly in motivating students to engage more actively and independently. It demonstrates how gamification in mobile-assisted language learning contributes not only to skill development but also to learners' psychological engagement, making the process more enjoyable and sustainable.

Further studies with larger and more diverse samples are recommended to explore variations in perception across different contexts. In addition, longitudinal research could investigate how sustained use of Duolingo impacts not only motivation but also long-term language proficiency.

By addressing these areas, educators, learners, and researchers can maximize the potential of mobile-assisted tools like Duolingo, ensuring that technology plays a supportive role in fostering both motivation and achievement in English language learning.

REFERENCES

Ajisoko, P. (2020). The use of Duolingo apps to improve vocabulary in teaching English.

International Journal of Emerging Technologies in Learning (iJET), 15(7), 149–155.

<https://doi.org/10.3991/ijet.v15i07.13229>

Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2018). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.

Gardner, R. C. (1985). *Social psychology and second language learning: The role of attitudes and motivation*. Edward Arnold.

Habibie, A. (2020). Semi-structured interview as a method in language education research. *Journal of Applied Linguistics and Language Research*, 7(4), 123–134.

Inayah, R., Rachmawati, D., & Rahmawati, F. (2020). Mobile-assisted language learning through Duolingo: Students' perceptions and experiences. *Indonesian Journal of EFL and Linguistics*, 5(2), 275–292. <https://doi.org/10.21462/ijefl.v5i2.278>

Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.

Nushi, M., & Eqbali, M. H. (2017). Duolingo: A mobile application to assist second language learning. *Teaching English with Technology*, 17(1), 89–98.

Pramesti, D., & Susanti, D. (2020). The effectiveness of Duolingo application in improving students' English skills. *Journal of English Education and Teaching*, 4(2), 135–146.
<https://doi.org/10.33369/jeet.4.2.135-146>

Rofidah, N., Wulandari, S., & Firmansyah, A. (2024). Motivation in mobile-assisted English learning: A study of gamification features in Indonesia. *Asian EFL Journal*, 26(3), 112–130.

Silmi, M. (2019). Students' attitudes toward Duolingo as a medium for vocabulary learning. *Journal of English Language Teaching Innovations*, 1(2), 45–52.

Slameto. (2003). *Belajar dan faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhinya*. Rineka Cipta.

Sugiyono. (2015). *Metode penelitian pendidikan: Pendekatan kuantitatif, kualitatif, dan R&D*. Alfabeta.

Yin, C., & Fitzgerald, R. (2015). Mobile learning and student engagement in higher education. *International Journal of Mobile and Blended Learning*, 7(2), 30–47.

<https://doi.org/10.4018/ijmbl.2015040103>

Yusda, A., Putri, R., & Arifin, Z. (2020). Students' perceptions on the use of Duolingo application in language learning. *Journal of Language Education Research*, 5(1), 25–36.