EXPLORING STUDENT'S EXPERIENCES OF USING DUOLINGO IN ENGLISH LEARNING OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM

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Abstract. This study explores students' experiences in using Duolingo as an English learning tool outside the classroom. Using qualitative and phenomenological methods, this study explores how students use Duolingo, the benefits they perceive, and the challenges they face. The results of semi-structured interviews with five participants showed that Duolingo provides high flexibility and accessibility, allowing students to learn anytime and anywhere. The gamification feature on Duolingo increases students' motivation, although there are challenges such as consistency in use and distraction from other activities. The main benefits perceived by students include increased vocabulary, motivation to learn, and development of independent learning habits. However, challenges such as boredom and lack of in-depth explanations are obstacles. This study provides important insights for teachers, students, and application developers to maximize Duolingo's potential in supporting English learning. Overall, Duolingo is effective as a learning support tool, but should be used as a complement to conventional methods.
Keywords: Duolingo, English language learning, educational technology, student experience, qualitative methods.

1. INTRODUCTION

Along with the development of the increasingly advanced era, humans began to live side by side with technology in all aspects of life, one of which is in the aspect of education. Technology has brought humans into the modern era of teaching and learning. The benefits of technology in the learning process are that it can motivate students to learn with more interesting, creative, and flexible learning tools. Students can use technology to help them in the learning process.

Technology has a lot of potential in improving and strengthening students' enthusiasm for learning so that they can enjoy the learning process more.in the classroom or outside the classroom because of the easy access to obtain information on teaching materials and materials needed. Modern technology provides various tools that can be used to enrich students' learning experiences, especially in learning English. Not only learning in the classroom teaches how to understand various languages, but the internet also provides a learning technology that can be used by various groups, especially in academic environments, namely students. Learning applications are available anytime and anywhere without being limited by space and time, both learning in the classroom or outside the classroom (Mindog, 2016). There are various learning applications available in learning language teaching, one of which is the Duolingo application.

Duolingo is becoming an increasingly popular application and is widely used in learning English. To date, Duolingo has been downloaded more than 500 million times worldwide, making it one of the most popular language learning platforms. Duolingo is an easily accessible alternative application to help students learn English

to improve their English skills. Not only is it easily accessible, Duolingo offers an interactive and engaging approach through "gamification techniques" that make the learning process more fun and motivate students to continue learning. According to Rahmatullah, (2021) gamification is the process of using game elements that can be controlled in certain fields, especially in education. Munday (2015) stated that the Duolingo application teaches users how to have fun learning by presenting combined activities between several skills in the form of games. In an interesting gamification approach, Duolingo is an application that offers an interactive learning experience that can create a learning space anywhere and anytime. This is reflected in the statement made by Stockwell and Reinders (2019) who stated that mobile-based learning tools play an important role in helping students to learn independently anywhere and anytime, so technology such as language learning applications has provided a new way for students to learn more flexibly.

Duolingo is a globally recognized language learning application for its ability to provide interactive English learning with various exercises and tests. Duolingo provides various main features for its users, including learning content supported by AI technology in its learning features, language learning that is tailored to the user's abilities and desires, learning progress achievement reports and much more. However, despite the many services provided by the application, many users, especially students, still do not understand how to use this application in depth. Even the language understanding of students who use the Duolingo application is still very limited.

Most previous studies still focus on the effectiveness of this application in general in improving student learning outcomes such as grammar or vocabulary skills. For example, in a study conducted by Laewen et al. (2019) which highlights that the use of Duolingo can have a positive impact on language acquisition in the short term. It can be said that very few studies have explored the subjective experiences of students who use the Duolingo application. In fact, language learning does not always discuss the results but also the process and challenges of students in using it. In this case, students may only be considered as users of the final results without paying more attention to how they interact with the application. Moreover, it provides important insights into the exploration of subjective student experiences of students who use it, how they learn, the benefits they feel and also what challenges they face in their learning process in improving their English skills. Understanding user experience is an important aspect in evaluating the effectiveness of an application from a student perspective.

This study aims to determine the various experiences of students in using Duolingo as an English learning tool outside the classroom. The most focused thing in this study is how students use the Duolingo application to improve their English language skills and abilities, what benefits they feel and also what challenges or obstacles they face during the learning process. This study seeks to dig deeper and understand the meaning of students' experiences so that this study uses qualitative methods and phenomenological methods. According to Creswell (2014) states that the phenomenological approach allows researchers to understand human experiences more richly and deeply.

This research is expected to be able to fill the gap that provides a new perspective on digital-based language learning or applications from the perspective of students as users. By focusing on student experience, this research is able to produce new insights that can enrich the understanding of the effectiveness of the

Duolingo application in the English learning process. In this finding, it is also expected to contribute to teachers, students and application developers to maximize the potential of the Duolingo application in supporting the improvement of English learning. Therefore, this research is not only academically relevant, but also practical in the context of contemporary learning.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative approach where the research method only focuses on in-depth observation to understand the phenomenon more thoroughly which is usually explained using descriptive. According to Sugiyono (2022), the descriptive qualitative research method is a study based on the philosophy of postpositivism used to research the conditions of natural objects where the researcher is the key instrument. So the descriptive qualitative approach used in this study is a research method that aims to answer problems in research by describing and explaining them in detail and in depth. This approach functions to explain a situation regarding a behavior, phenomenon or event, problem and certain circumstances whose results are meaningful sentences that explain certain understandings. The descriptive qualitative approach chosen in this study aims to describe students' experiences in using the Duolingo application as an English learning tool outside the classroom. The results of this study will be presented in the form of descriptive narratives that focus on students' experiences that describe clear phenomena to the reader.

This study also uses a phenomenological method which can be interpreted as a study of a person's life experience or a method of studying how individuals subjectively feel experiences and give meaning to the phenomenon (Kirana, 2021). This phenomenological method was chosen as the purpose of in-depth research of students' experiences, as they experience them without prejudice or interpretation from the researcher. This method has the meaning of exploring students' experiences in using Duolingo as an English learning tool outside the classroom in understanding the essence of students' experiences, including how they learn, what benefits they feel and what challenges students face.

The data collection that we used was in the form of semi-structured interviews. According to Sugiyono (2013), semi-structured interviews are interviews where the subjects being studied can provide free and unrestricted answers, but the subjects being studied must not deviate from the predetermined theme. Semi-structured interviews allow participants to describe their experiences in depth and give researchers the freedom to explore new themes that emerge. This interview uses open-ended question guidelines by adjusting the order or adding questions to be more flexible because it allows new questions because of the answers given by the informant during the interview session, resulting in deeper information exploration. This interview aims to explore students' experiences in using educational applications, namely Duolingo, as a learning tool to improve English skills outside the classroom.

The in-depth interview method provides researchers with the flexibility to explore topics thoroughly and adjust questions according to participants' answers, which in turn helps in uncovering the deeper meaning of participants' experiences. In this study, we involved 5 participants who were selected based on different selection criteria and gender. The participants we selected for this study were students who use the Duolingo application for English learning outside the classroom. These

participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure that they could meet certain criteria, such as using the Duolingo application for at least one month and having previous experience in learning English through formal education. According to Muhammad Hasan (2022), purposive sampling is a sampling technique that allows researchers to select participants who are directly relevant to the purpose of the study. Interviews were conducted face-to-face and online to facilitate in-depth conversations with participants, by recording voices during the interview to ensure the authenticity of the answers to produce answers that are in accordance with the purpose of this writing. Most interviews last for 7-15 minutes with a total of 9 core questions accompanied by in-depth questions for each participant to obtain in-depth results and in accordance with this study in semi-structured interviews. Each interview with our sources was documented through conversation recordings with the participants' permission to facilitate data analysis.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study reveals various experiences of students in using Duolingo as an English learning tool outside the classroom. The main findings show that Duolingo provides high flexibility and accessibility, allowing students to learn English anytime and anywhere. In addition, the game features implemented in this application are quite successful in increasing students' motivation to learn consistently, although sometimes other games or notifications that exist can distract participants' focus. In the findings of this study, Duolingo's flexibility and accessibility allow students to apply English learning to their daily routines. This is in accordance with previous studies stating that easily accessible educational technology can increase student participation and engagement. Gamification elements in Duolingo such as points and daily challenges, are able to create a more interesting and competitive learning environment and have a major impact on increasing students' motivation in learning English. By using the semi-structured interview method, we can find out more about the English learning experiences experienced by participants supported by the phenomenology method to find out more clearly what the participants experienced and felt in using Duolingo. The methods chosen make it easier for researchers to find out the experiences experienced and felt by the participants

3.1. How Students Learn to Use Duolingo to Improve Their English Skills Outside the Classroom.

In this study, it shows how students learn to improve their English skills based on the results of interviews we conducted with participants by asking several questions to find out what made participants interested in using Duolingo. On average, most of the answers given by participants regarding the initial connection in using the Duolingo application were through advertisements from other platforms, seeing ratings and game-based work concepts in Duolingo, which made them interested in using Duolingo to improve their English skills. This was conveyed by the participants, according to the 4th participant who thought that he found an effective way to learn languages outside the classroom by using the Duolingo application platform media through the available advertisements. Meanwhile, according to the 5th participant who thought that recommendations from people close to him, namely his friends who had used the Duolingo application

"....before I knew about the Duolingo application, because I saw references from other videos, that made me interested in using Duolingo.." according to the 4th participation.

".... I got to know the Duolingo application when I was in 2nd or 3rd grade of high school, I forgot, basically at that time my friend recommended to me about an interactive English learning application and it seemed like the learning was game-based, so that was the first time I got to know the Duolingo application..." according to the 5th participant.

From the statements listed above by representatives of both participants 4 and 5, it can be concluded that the thing that makes participants interested in using language learning on the Duolingo application is the presence of advertisements on other platforms, such as YouTube, Instagram, TikTok and so on. Apart from advertisements that are spread across many platforms, recommendations from other people, be it friends, family or other close people. The statement above is evidence of a genuine answer regarding the experience they felt when choosing Duolingo as an application for learning English outside the classroom, which in fact the Duolingo application is the most popular language application. This also gives the impression that Duolingo has succeeded in making users interested in the application with advertisements or video references shared on social media and the concept of working on questions based on games.

In the process of learning English outside of formal learning using the Duolingo platform, how long the participants use the Duolingo application is also necessary in testing how much experience students have in the effectiveness of Duolingo when users use it consistently. Several participants have different opinions in responding to questions about the schedule or time in using the Duolingo application.

"...Usually I use the Duolingo application at night around 8-9 pm, after playing games, approximately 1 hour, it is true that I only spend a little time doing it, but because of the routine from the Duolingo application, I use the learning application consistently..." according to participant 1.

"... when using the Duolingo application, I can do it every day, but in the Duolingo application there is a feature with a time span which requires me to do it every day, but if I don't do it there will be a warning and if I don't use it for a long time, the routine will be lost, well... usually I use Duolingo for about a week or two after that then stop or rarely use it..." according to the 4th participant.

"...to be honest, because I just wanted to use Duolingo for fun. So I only use Duolingo when I feel bored, to fill my free time. So, the progress of my skills through the application is a bit lacking because of the inconsistency..." according to the 2nd participant.

Some of the participants above argued that having a consistent schedule in learning a language using the Duolingo application, as the saying goes in Indonesia, little by little it will become a hill. Even though the study hours are relatively few with real consistency, there is still increasing progress that can be felt by the user. It is different with users who use this application inconsistently, maybe even their Duolingo application has been neglected, which may make progress in English skills a little slower than those who do it consistently. From some of the opinions above, we know that participants usually use Duolingo only when they have free time by

spending one hour in one use. This shows that the use of the Duolingo application if used consistently can increase the progress of participants' English skills faster, such as increasing their grammar, writing, speaking and pronunciation skills.

In improving the English language skills of users. Duolingo certainly has various interesting features that can make its users feel not bored in learning a language. There are several features on Duolingo that according to participants can improve their English skills, namely, story features, grammar, quizzes and speaking pronunciation. Several participants have several different opinions in responding to the question of which features improve language skills

"... the thing that made me interested in the Duolingo application was because there was learning accompanied by games in the daily exercises, so the interesting features in the daily exercises were often related to grammar, so my ability to master grammar improved quite a bit.." according to participant 4

"... in the Duolingo application, we know that there is a daily practice feature, right? Well, I think what improved my English skills was in the speaking section, like repeating what was said in the system. Well, I also improved a bit in the pronunciation section, there is a new feature for practicing pronunciation..." according to participant 1

"...oh I don't really know, but I think all the features in Duolingo are helpful, I think I'm more into pronunciation, also since college there has been pronunciation learning which made me interested in learning pronunciation in the Duolingo application..." according to participant 3

From the opinions above, research shows that Duolingo is able to provide interesting features that help users improve their English language skills. According to participant 2, the feature on Duolingo that can help in learning English is the grammar feature, in contrast to the opinions of participants 3 and 4 who think that the feature that can help is pronunciation. Some participants use Duolingo on average for months or one or two months. Several other participants also use the Duolingo application for a long time, around 1 to 2 years, but most of them do not practice intensively or just delete and download it.

The Duolingo application can be considered effective in improving students' English skills, with their interest in this application being triggered by advertisements on social media and recommendations from friends. Consistency in using the application plays an important role in achieving learning progress, where users or students who practice regularly will tend to experience more significant improvements compared to those who are inconsistent. The interesting features offered by Duolingo, such as grammar, speaking, and pronunciation exercises, can also contribute to the effectiveness of learning. Therefore, Duolingo can be considered a useful tool for students to use consistently and utilize all the features available in learning English.

3.2. Benefits that Students get from Using Duolingo as an Application for Learning English Outside the Classroom.

This study also revealed that the use of the Duolingo application can provide various benefits for students in improving their English skills. From several examples of statements stated by several participants above, we can conclude that with the benefits obtained in Duolingo as a learning medium outside the classroom if used

consistently. In using Duolingo, participants felt the benefits that made their English skills improve. Several participants argued that the English skills that stood out most for them on average were grammar, writing and pronunciation.

*"...in using the Duolingo application to improve my English skills, I think my English skills that have improved are in the grammar and pronunciation sections because, as I mentioned earlier, the daily practice feature is about understanding sentences in grammar, so it's quite good for increasing my knowledge of grammar..."*according to participant 1

*"...in my opinion, when using the Duolingo application. The thing that makes my English skills improve is in the grammar and speaking sections because every time there is a sequence of questions that are repeated from the daily exercises that remind me of them, also for each exercise, it's like we are asked to repeat the statement given by the system so it helps a bit in my speaking skills.. "*according to the participants

There are several features on Duolingo that according to participants can improve their English skills, namely, story features, grammar, quizzes and speaking pronunciation. With several features on Duolingo, it is very helpful to improve the English skills of its users if used consistently. On average, our participants have only been using Duolingo for a few months or you could say one or two months if using it intensively, but there are also those who use it for a period of 2 years but are not consistent, because they use Duolingo only to fill their free time or when they feel bored. By using Duolingo, participants feel the benefits that improve their English skills, and according to participants, what makes them feel the most improved in their English skills is grammar, writing and pronunciation.

Duolingo educational application helps users to improve their English skills so that users feel helped to be more confident in using English directly. Some participants feel that Duolingo helps them to be more confident in using English both in conversation and in writing, because the questions on Duolingo are easy to understand, and have interesting features that make participants comfortable and fun when using them. Even so, some participants feel that they have not felt the full benefits because of the use of the Duolingo application in a short time. There are several situations in everyday life that according to participants are helped by the learning on Duolingo, for example during class learning, Duolingo is able to help with how to pronounce English, and their grammar. Even so, some participants are still confused in understanding the clear and detailed explanation of the material to help understand the questions.

The use of the Duolingo application can provide various benefits for students in improving their English skills, especially in terms of grammar, writing, and pronunciation. Although most participants have only used the application for a short time, they felt a significant improvement in their English skills, especially through features such as daily exercises, stories, and quizzes. Participants felt more confident in using English both in conversation and writing thanks to the ease of understanding the questions provided by Duolingo. However, some participants also expressed that they had not fully felt the benefits of this application due to inconsistent use and limited study time. Nevertheless, Duolingo is still considered a useful tool in supporting English learning outside the classroom, with the potential to help students in everyday situations, especially in the context of classroom learning.

3.3. Challenges or Obstacles Experienced by Students when Using the Duolingo Application as a Tool for Learning English Outside the Classroom.

In using an application, both game applications and shopping applications such as Duolingo certainly have different benefits and obstacles. In using Duolingo, we as researchers also have questions regarding what obstacles or challenges participants experience when using this Duolingo application. Several participants have different views on the challenges they face in using it.

"...when I use the Duolingo application, I feel that the questions are lacking in detailed explanations about the questions, such as which chapter material is in question." according to participant 1.

"...it is difficult to be consistent, because of being busy or lazy so that there is no time which causes the sequence to be lost and starting from the beginning cannot be continued" according to the 4th participant.

From the statements of opinion that they experienced and felt, the main obstacle factors that made participants feel hampered in the learning process were several important points that were the main problems in using Duolingo, namely the lack of further explanation regarding the division of questions given and when to use them in everyday life, the second was the gamification feature provided by Duolingo which only lacked variation, causing boredom in users. So that participants felt they did not understand the questions and this could also be the main factor in the beginning of participants feeling bored or not having the enthusiasm to study harder to use this application.

In this case, the use of the Duolingo feature still needs to be developed further. Even so, this obstacle is not far from the user's personality or persona. The second obstacle that we found in interviews with participants also had different views between one participant and another. From several opinions that participants gave, we found that the second obstacle that caused participants to lose motivation or feel bored was because of other activities that were more important according to participants, for example being busy with schoolwork, distractions from games or social media.

"...yes, every time I want to learn using the Duolingo application, sometimes there are problems, sometimes there are many assignments from school, part-time jobs, and other schedules. Actually, if I am bored, I personally am not bored. The suggestion is to go back to the initial motivation. Well, for my own motivation, I also want to improve my own English skills. Well, every time I want to do exercises on Duolingo, there are always obstacles from outside." according to participant 1.

"...yes, every time I want to learn a language from the Duolingo application, sometimes I get distracted by online games. Because honestly, I initially downloaded the Duolingo application just to fill my free time" according to the 2nd participant.

".. I'm more bored because the game is monotonous. Like it's just that. Actually, the reminder notifications to study from the Duolingo application are always

*there, but it's like I'm too lazy to do it, actually it's good to be reminded like that but honestly from my personal opinion it's sometimes a bit annoying "*according to the 3rd participant.

".. yeah sometimes I feel bored, at first when I used Duolingo to learn a language it felt fun and exciting so I wanted to keep practicing and do it regularly. Well then for almost two to three weeks or four weeks, I forgot after that I had difficulty consistently studying on Duolingo because I get distracted and bored easily." according to the 4th participant.

Using the Duolingo app as an English learning tool outside of class faces several significant challenges and obstacles for students. First, participants expressed that the lack of detailed explanations of the questions given made it difficult for them to understand the material, which could hinder the learning process. Second, the challenge of maintaining consistent use of the app arose due to being busy and distracted by other activities, such as schoolwork and social media and online games that could often divert their attention from learning. Some participants also felt bored with the limited variety of gamification features, which could reduce their motivation to continue learning using the app. Although Duolingo has potential as a language learning tool for students, further development of features and material delivery is needed to improve the user experience and learning effectiveness.

4. CONCLUSION

This study aims to explore students' experiences in using Duolingo as a tool to support English language skills outside the classroom, focusing on students' learning styles, perceived benefits, and challenges faced. Based on semi-structured interviews with five participants consisting of 3 female and 2 male student participants, the results of the study show three main findings that can be concluded, namely Duolingo provides high flexibility in learning, allowing students to learn independently with a structured and fun approach. The way students use Duolingo tends to be flexible, Different usage patterns between students reflect the application's ability to be tailored to individual needs. Features such as daily exercises, speaking exercises, and stories help students learn new vocabulary and strengthen independent learning habits. Duolingo also provides a structured yet fun learning experience, allowing students to learn anytime and anywhere.

Second, the main benefits felt by students include increasing vocabulary, motivation to learn through gamification elements, developing independent learning habits and developing students' confidence in their English skills. Features such as stories and speaking exercises make a real contribution to the development of certain skills, although their nature is still limited because Duolingo cannot replace formal learning. Nevertheless, this application is considered quite effective as a supporting tool in strengthening English language skills from basic and so on. However, this study also identified a number of challenges. Some participants felt that this application did not provide in-depth context in grammar learning and the speaking features were not interactive enough to significantly improve conversational skills. The main challenges in this study regarding the challenges faced by students in using the Duolingo application as a progressive tool for learning

English language skills were boredom and lack of consistency in using the application. Some students felt that learning activities became monotonous if they were done continuously without variation. In addition, the commitment to learning every day is often hampered by a busy schedule, lack of motivation and distractions from all directions such as notifications from social media, games or other entertainment.

Overall, this study shows that Duolingo serves as an effective support tool for out-of-class English learning, especially in improving vocabulary and learning motivation. However, this application should be used as a complement, not a substitute for conventional face-to-face learning methods with teachers, to achieve more comprehensive learning outcomes. This study provides an initial foundation for understanding students' experiences using Duolingo. It is hoped that in the future, further research can explore broader experiences by involving participants from various educational levels or geographic backgrounds. In addition, a more in-depth study of the effectiveness of specific Duolingo features, such as speaking exercises or grammar lessons, can also provide additional insights for the development of technology-based foreign language learning applications in the future.

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