

# Students' Perception Of The Use Of Mobile Application Duolingo For Learning English

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**Abstract:** This study aims to find out the perception of English Department students at Universitas Ahmad Dahlan toward the use of Duolingo application for learning English and to explore the advantages and disadvantages of Duolingo for learning English according to them. The researcher applied the qualitative method involving six voluntary students and using interview techniques in data collection. By using the theory of perception and the typical characteristics of MALL, the writers found that the respondents have a positive perception of Duolingo usability, context, control, connectivity, mobility, blending, content, technical support, and cost. There are some advantages of Duolingo, such as attractive, fewer ads, and having gamifying content. While the disadvantages are that Duolingo cannot be used without internet connections, no further explanation in grammar, and cannot be used as the primary source of language learning.

**Keywords:** Students' Perception, Mobile English Learning, Duolingo

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Learning English as a foreign language has several challenges; one of these is the lack of opportunities to practice English out of the classroom, and that problem even occurs at the university level. The students were looking for a way to motivate them to become more independent of how they practice outside the classroom. Currently, technology takes part in education. Mobile devices have been gradually integrated into learning. The widespread use of smartphones and other portable and wireless gadgets has changed the landscape of technology-supported learning [1]. This broad usage of mobile devices has drawn lots of mobile applications in English Language Learning. Numerous apps are available for language learners to download through the access of the internet. One of those mobile applications is Duolingo. Vesselinov and Grego [2] found that 34 hours of learning using Duolingo is similar to 1 semester in a university language class. Inspired by this claim, the researcher aims to analyze the Universitas Ahmad Dahlan English Education Department students' viewpoint toward Duolingo as an English learning medium, followed by its advantages and disadvantages.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

In the dictionary, perception can be defined as the capability to see, hear, or understand something [3]. Therefore, perception is a personal judgment or in other words, how someone sees and understands something in a certain way. Positive perception comes from individual satisfaction about a particular object that becomes her/his source perception, the individual knowledge, and the individual experience of the object perceived [4]. Otherwise, negative perception comes from the individual dissatisfaction about a particular object that becomes her/his source perception, the individual ignorant, and the lack of experience of the object perceived. Mobile phones as M-Learning devices are more dominant and most popular mobile devices.

The term portable learning or 'M-learning' portrays learning of the students' is not characterized area or when the person utilizes the advantages of versatile innovation when learning. The qualities of versatile learning lie principally in the utilization of learning programs not reliant on schedule or spot that is in the amazingly effective utilization of the available time [5]. Therefore, the purpose of M-learning is to get what you want, where you want and when you want. Current mobile learning literature shows that mobile learning researchers have been exploring different avenues regarding various mobile learning attributes. Usability, collaboration, context, control, connectivity, mobility, content, blending, technical support, and cost are common mobile learning characteristics [6]. One of the mobile applications for learning English is Duolingo. It is a free language-learning application. This application is considered suitable for learning a foreign language, primarily the English language. This application is a game, but indeed not an entertainment game in general; games on Duolingo very closely linked with education, especially in learning a foreign language. This application combines elements of audio, visual, and questions surrounding the grammar of a language enjoyably. Vesselinov, et al. [2] investigates the Duolingo's effectiveness for English native speakers who want to study Spanish. The majority of the participants in the study like the product and most of them succeed in improving their knowledge of Spanish. The other research is conducted by Ahmed [7]. This study is a case study that involves one participant who used Duolingo to learn Spanish and English simultaneously for two months. The results display that Duolingo can promote acquiring two languages for beginners, but it has limitations. Additionally, Garcia [8] found that Duolingo could eventually work, but only for texts for which accurate and elegant translation was not critical. Moreover, Garcia [8] found that Duolingo lacks many of the bells and whistles available in state-of-the-art computer-assisted language learning (CALL).

## 3 METHODS

This research uses a descriptive qualitative research method. Qualitative research is depicted as an unfurling model that happens in a unique setting that empowers the researcher to build up a degree of detail from high contribution in the genuine encounters [9]. In this research, data sources are derived from six students of the English Education Department of Universitas Ahmad Dahlan Yogyakarta as the primary

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informants. Subject selection is made by selecting samples of some of the students who have been using the app Duolingo or familiar with and voluntarily participate in this research so that research results more representative. Data in this research are in the form of written text from the interview transcript and documentation. There were three steps in analyzing the data of this research, as proposed by Sugiyono [10]. The first step is a process of selection, concentration, attention, simplification, abstracting, and transformation of raw data that arises from the results of interviews, and the documentation of students' learning process using Duolingo. The students were required to use Duolingo for at least one week. The first interview was conducted on the fourth day of students' Duolingo usage, and the second interview was conducted on the seventh day of students' Duolingo usage. Additionally, the students were required to take notes on their learning progress with Duolingo each day. The second step is arranging the information to give the possibility of drawing conclusions and taking action. The third step is that the researcher draws conclusions based on data that have been processed through reduction and display data.

## 4 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

One of the students had been using Duolingo for a month, and five of them had been using it for a week. All of them also have Duolingo account on their mobile phone or laptop. Within seven days, the average students took two to six lessons in a day. The students start the lesson in Duolingo from the basic level after they did the placement test from Duolingo. The students' were interviewed twice in a week of Duolingo usage. The interviews were conducted on the third day of usage and the seventh day of usage. The researcher discusses the result based on the common characteristic of mobile learning proposed by Imtinan, Chang, and Issa [6] as follows.

### 4.1 Students' Perception toward the Duolingo's Usability

Based on the interview, four out of six students said that Duolingo is easy to use and not too complicated. Ari 1: "Menurutku sih gampang dipakenya, tidak terlalu ribet, bisa dipasang di semua smartphone juga jadi kita bisa belajar dimana pun." (I think it is easy to use, it is not too complicated, it can be installed in all compatible smartphones too so that we can study anywhere). The first participant adds that Duolingo can be used from varied background experiences; the learner still quickly started learning. Then, the second and third students also give enhance that Duolingo can be installed in all compatible smartphones so they can learn with Duolingo anywhere without ads interruptions. The sixth student adds that Duolingo is easy to use because of the understandable instruction. Thus it is not confusing. Moreover, Duolingo is understandable because it has fewer steps to perform the task, and some students considered that Duolingo has an appealing design. The first and the fourth students have the same idea that the design is cute, attractive, and colorful. Baiti 1: "Iya gampang, ga ribet juga karena ga banyak opsi-opsi yang ga penting gitu. karena tampilannya sederhana gampang dimengerti dan full-color." (Yes, it is easy, it is not complicated because there are not many available options. It is simple, full color, and easy to understand.) The second student stated that the picture in Duolingo is bright and attractive even though the picture is not a real-life picture, but it is still understandable. Usability relates to the ease of using mobile devices for learning purposes concerning screen size, battery life, size,

weight, memory, processing power, compatible applications, and user interface [11]. Based on the interview above, the students give their perception about the usability of Duolingo. Students positively perceive that Duolingo is easy to use, has fewer steps to do the task, has an appealing design, as well as has simplified the display.

### 4.2 Students' Perception toward the Duolingo's Collaboration

Mobile technologies support communication between students and teachers. So, mobile technologies may be used for collaborative learning activities in education [12][13]. Using Duolingo as a part of learning in the classroom may give some benefits. However, the first and fourth students assumed that Duolingo is not that good to be used in the classroom, even in the web version. The students said that we could create an account as a teacher then display the Duolingo lesson in front of the class and do the exercise together with the student. However, it is not sufficient because the students become passive, and the teacher only can give the task for the students who own a smartphone. Suliana 2: "Mungkin bisa karena ada website khusus untuk sekolah gitu, jadi kita bisa sign in sebagai guru atau sebagai murid. Kalau jadi guru nanti bisa bikin kelas terus murid-murid yang punya akun google bisa join ke kelas yang sudah kita create itu, tapi pembelajarannya jadi tidak efektif karena hanya diperuntukkan untuk anak yang punya smartphone aja" (because there is a website for schools so that we can sign in as a teacher or as a student. If you sign in as a teacher, you can make a class, and the students who have a Google account can join the class. However, it is still ineffective for students who do not have a smartphone). Several students believe that Duolingo can give peer-to-peer learning. The first student said that we could add friends to Duolingo and compete with them. Then, the rest of the students assumed that Duolingo provides a discussion forum. They can discuss the problem with some exercise with the other user by clicking the callout icon. The discussion forum is needed because, at some point, the explanation given by Duolingo is not clear enough. Moreover, the students can compete with the XP point in the leaderboard with another user. Thus, in students' perceptions, Duolingo has peer-to-peer learning; however, it does not support the classroom settings.

### 4.3 Students' Perception toward the Duolingo's Context

The student believes that if the learner already mastered all the vocabularies in Duolingo, they can quickly solve the questions that have the same topic or related to the vocabularies in Duolingo. Shifa 2: "Bisa saja ambil contoh saja vocabulary tentang buah-buahan atau binatang yang ada di Duolingo, misal kita nemu soal tentang itu dan sudah menguasai semua vocabularinya nanti kita bisa dengan mudah menyelesaikan soal tentang buah-buahan atau binatang." (Yes, take an example of fruits or animals vocabularies in Duolingo, when we find questions about them and already mastered all of the vocabularies, then we can quickly solve questions) The other students assumed that the learner could have a simple conversation in English by remembering or mastering several phases in Duolingo, and the learner can get a strong foundation for learning and practicing more English. Mobile learning presents learners with a variety of contexts where they can learn and experiment in real-world situations [14]. The student may be able to have a

simple conversation because Duolingo provides them with some simple sentences related to everyday life. Besides, the rest of the students give an opinion that the topic in Duolingo is related to everyday life.

#### 4.4 Students' Perception toward the Duolingo's Control

All the students agreed that Duolingo could give engagements to learn English better. The students believe that Duolingo has provided some features in order to attract students' attention. Five out of six students found that the learning reminder is a great tool to keep them practicing every day. In addition, they can compete with other users on the leaderboard. Maintaining their position in the leaderboard is challenging for them. The second student adds that the reward system in Duolingo is motivating because when you can finish some tasks, you can get a reward called Lingot, which you can use to buy clothes for the Duolingo mascot or buy the shortcut to make the learning more accessible. All of the students agreed that Duolingo could help them to improve their language mastery and language skills. The students also explain how Duolingo can help them to improve their language learning. Several participants answer that their grammar mastery improved because they can learn the grammar implicitly by finishing each task and observing the sentence pattern. Shifa 1 : "Skill translation dan pronunciation dan listening sedikit meningkat dan vocabulary bisa lumayan mengingat-ingat lagi yang pernah dipelajari." (Translation skills, pronunciation, and listening increased slightly and could recall the vocabulary that had been studied). Besides, the students can recall their memories about the forgotten vocabularies. The students can fix their pronunciation, and then they can use it in their daily communication. Besides, the feedback given by Duolingo helps the students to comprehend more about the topic they are learning and can give them the correct answer if their answer is wrong. Shifa 1 : "Soal di Duolingo itu kalau kita ngerjainnya salah, maka diulang ulang terus sampai kita bisa bener ngerjainnya. Nah itu akan sangat teringat sama materinya karena berulang ulang. Terus kalau salah nanti juga dibenerin sama Duolingo. Jadi bisa tau jawaban yang benar bagaimana" (If we answer the question wrong, then it keeps repeating until we really do it. It will remember the material very much because it was repeated again. If wrong, it will be done by Duolingo. So you can know the correct answer). Control refers to the amount of grip a teacher or a learner has on the learning process for smooth continuity and best outcomes [15]. It shows that Duolingo gives control for the students to keep learning by giving them motivation with its engagement and gives a solution for each problem.

#### 4.5 Students' Perception toward the Duolingo's Connectivity, Mobility, and Cost

Connectivity relates to how effective a learner can access the required information or learning material on a mobile device [16]. Duolingo can be used when there is an internet connection or wifi connection. Shifa 2 : "Yang saya suka dari Duolingo ini bisa di pakai dimana saja yang penting ada koneksi internet atau wifi. Terus bisa latihan speaking dan listening juga." (What I like about Duolingo is that it can be used anywhere when there is an internet connection or wifi. Also, you can practice speaking and listening too). Moreover, mobility is sometimes used as an interchangeable term with flexibility and portability [16]. Duolingo is a mobile application that can be used and be carried everywhere because it is

installed on the smartphone. Ari 2 : "Saya suka karena mudah dibawa kemana-mana soalnya tertanan di smartphone kita jadi bisa latihan sewaktu-waktu." (I like it because it is easy to carry everywhere because it is installed in our smartphone so that we can practice it any time). Therefore, the students give the positive perception that Duolingo is different from other learning applications that the mobile learning design and implementation produce high costs for institutions, and learners may need to pay for the mobile data usage. This application provides a free service; there is no need to pay for download it. It just needs an internet connection only.

#### 4.6 Students' Perception toward the Duolingo's Blending

In Duolingo, learning is combined with a variety of learning approaches. The courses are translating, listening, writing, and speaking, or pronunciation. However, the student argues that the main lesson is to translate the words or sentences from Indonesia into English or vice versa. The learners answer it by typing or selecting the correct words from the words bank. If the learners have no idea with the translation word, they can click on the word in specific questions, and then the explanation about the text will appear. The first student assumed it is like a flashcard for vocabulary building. In Duolingo, learning is combined with a variety of learning approaches. Ari 1 : "Saya pikir ini efektif karena Duolingo menggunakan bermacam metode dari visual, audio, dan menulis untuk meningkatkan belajar kita. Saat menyelesaikan satu pelajaran, Duolingo memberi tahu seberapa jauh kita belajar dari target harian kita dengan skor XP itu, dan secara tidak langsung mendorong kita untuk terus berlatih untuk mencapai tujuan kita." (I think this is effective because Duolingo uses a variety of methods, ranging from visual, audio, and writing to improve our learning. When completing a lesson, Duolingo tells us how far we learn from our daily targets with XP scores, and indirectly encourages us to continue to practice achieving our goals) The courses are translating, listening, writing, and speaking, or pronunciation. However, the student argues that the main lesson is to translate the words or sentences from Indonesia into English or vice versa. The learners answer it by typing or selecting the correct words from the words bank. If the learners have no idea with the translation word, they can click on the word in specific questions, and then the explanation about the text will appear. The first student assumed it is like a flashcard for vocabulary building. Ally (2009) defines blended learning as a variety of learning approaches with virtual and physical learning resources combined appropriately. Based on that statement and the result of the interview above in Duolingo, it is found that students give positive perceptions in various learning approaches in Duolingo, namely listening, speaking, pronouncing, and writing or typing.

#### 4.7 Students' Perception toward the Duolingo's Content

The concept of learning in Duolingo is like playing games; the learner can complete the levels to get some reward, and the point gained can be ranked on the leaderboard. The third and fifth students add that the gamification concept in Duolingo makes the learning feels easy, exciting, and motivating. Shifa 1: "Learning feature yang menonjol menurut saya adalah penyajiannya yang seperti bermain game. Kalau bisa menyelesaikan level-levelnya gitu bisa dapet kayak lencana, terus nilai kita bisa dirangking di leaderboards..." (The learning feature that is deemed to me, in my opinion, is the presentation that is like playing a game. If you can complete

the levels so you can get like a badge, then our values can be ranked on the leaderboards ...) Besides, there are listening and speaking practices for interactive learning. The students agree that the exercises in Duolingo are bite-sized. The learner only needs several minutes to finish one exercise. The bite-sized content can satisfy the learner because it is fun and easy to digest the material. Ari 1: "Rata-rata, untuk menyelesaikan setiap pelajaran butuh tiga sampai empat menit dan itu ngerjainnya berurutan..." (On average, to complete each lesson, it takes three to four minutes, and it is done in sequence ...). The bite-sized content in Duolingo gives instant information, such as what is promoted by the fourth student. She immediately gets the correct answer when answering the exercise wrong. Traxler [17] stated that mobile learning is "spontaneous, informal, bite-sized, light-weight, context-aware, connected, personalized, and interactive." From the students' perception, it indicates the type of content in Duolingo suitable for mobile learning.

#### 4.8 Students' Perception toward the Duolingo's Technical Support

Technical support is required if the learners face any problems with uploading and maintaining mobile learning content [18], [19]. Most of the students have never experienced significant technical problems. The second student said that if there are any technical problems, the students can open the FAQ. The FAQ is a list of questions and answers relating to a particular subject. It gives necessary information for users. Ari 2 : "Kalau teknis sih belum yaa.. kalau ada kendala teknis nantikan ada pusat bantuan jadi bisa lihat FAQ." (Not yet ... even if there are technical problems, there is a help to see the FAQ) The other feature in Duolingo is the microphone, where the learners use for recording our voice when they do the speaking exercise. The fifth student did not have any significant problem with it. The microphone can be turned on or turn off; it depends on the situation or when you cannot use the microphone amidst the crowd. However, it is different when the learners use Duolingo in the web version. The learner has to use Google Chrome as the default web browser. It happened because of the microphone only available in Google Chrome only. Tri 2 : "Pernah sekali waktu buka Duolingo yang versi web gitu, mikrofonnya ga bisa dipakai terus aku buka yang pusat bantuan ternyata kalo di web itu bukanya harus pake Chrome." (Only once, when I open the web version of Duolingo, the microphone cannot be used, so I open the help center, it turns out if in the web version you have to use Chrome) From the interview above, it proved that Duolingo gives enough technical support for the learner.

#### The Advantages and Disadvantages of Duolingo

There are several advantages and disadvantages to Duolingo. The prominent advantages of Duolingo are free and easily accessible. The qualities of versatile learning lie principally in the utilization of learning programs not reliant on schedule or spot that is in the amazingly effective utilization of the available time [5]. Duolingo can be accessed anytime, as long as it has an internet connection. Therefore, it will not be a loss to try to download it because the learners will not lose financially. The design is simple, clear, and attractive, and it is less of an ad, so it is not confusing. content should support with graphics video and other multimedia elements; it can be presented with interactive games or quizzes [12]. Duolingo has a concept like a game that makes it fun to learn with. The learners can

compete with their friends in the leaderboard by gaining a point, and it will give the learner some reward in the form of lingots when completing some exercises. As a result, it is powerful enough to motivate the learner to keep practicing. It is in line with the study from Vesselinov and Grego [2] that most of his participants succeed in improving their knowledge of Spanish. Moreover, Duolingo is interactive and has many choices of exercises such as listening, vocabulary, and pronunciation. Thus, we are able to know how to pronounce the right words, and we can enrich vocabulary mastery. However, along with the advantages of Duolingo, there are disadvantages. Duolingo will work when there is an internet connection. Connectivity, in reverence of mobile technologies, refers to how mobile devices can connect wirelessly using a variety of cellular and wireless access technologies such as GPS, EDGE, GPRS, GSM, 3Gs, 4Gs, WiMAX, Wifi, WLAN [6]. However, Duolingo will not be useful when we live in a remote area without internet access. In the listening exercise, we must hear and write what we hear, but the voice that comes out is the unnatural sound. The sentences sometimes are odd and unusual. Moreover, when learners learn something new, they need more explanation to understand. Nevertheless, grammar explanations are absent; thus, they have to comprehend the grammar rules by ourselves. These findings are in line with a study from Garcia [8] that Duolingo lacks many of the bells and whistles available in state-of-the-art computer-assisted language learning (CALL). Furthermore, when the learners answer the wrong question, the application only displays the correct answer and continues to switch to the next question. So, we are not allowed to correct it.

## 5 CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

The students have a positive perception towards the use of Duolingo in the aspect of usability, context, control, connectivity, mobility, blending, content, technical support, and cost. Duolingo is a useful tool for learning English because it has many benefits to support students' learning process. This application is easy to use and motivates them to learn English. They also felt comfortable and enjoyed learning English using Duolingo. Furthermore, the majority of the students agreed that using Duolingo is useful for interestingly learning Basic English. However, there were several drawbacks to the use of Duolingo in the learning process, for example, the unnatural sentences, no grammar explanations, and it is not suitable for classroom settings. Duolingo had been proven as one of the mobile learning media that teach English from the basic, present the learning in a fun and enjoyable content and promotes self-learning. However, Duolingo cannot be used as a single medium for language learning. The students may find and add another supplementary media to support the language learning to the max. The researcher suggests to other researchers to use Duolingo in their students' teaching and learning activities due to its benefits.

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