



STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS ON THE USE OF DUOLINGO AS GAMIFICATION TOWARD THEIR VOCABULARY MASTERY AT MTS AK-FAKHRIYAH BATURAJA

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the attitudes of eighth-grade students at MTs Al-Fakhriyah Baturaja toward the usage of Duolingo as a gamified learning tool to help them acquire their vocabulary. The research used a descriptive qualitative approach. Purposive sample of the eighth-grade population at MTs Al-Fakhriyah Baturaja yielded 21 students from class VIII-B. Data were gathered by a closed-ended questionnaire and open-ended interviews. The questionnaire data were analyzed using a percentage-based approach, whereas the interview data were investigated using Miles and Huberman's (2014) interactive model, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drafting.

The data revealed that students had a positive view of Duolingo's ability to help them acquire vocabulary. They found the application to be engaging, interactive, and successful in aiding their comprehension, retention, and application of new language. Furthermore, Duolingo's gamification features, such as points, levels, and prizes, were thought to improve students' motivation, engagement, and confidence in learning English. These findings suggest that gamified tools, such as Duolingo, can promote a more student-centered and motivating vocabulary learning experience.

Keywords: *Duolingo, gamification, vocabulary mastery*

Introduction

In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Indonesia, vocabulary is critical in helping students improve their reading, speaking, writing, and listening skills. However, many junior high students continue to struggle with vocabulary mastering, particularly memorizing, sentence application, and long-term retention. Traditional methods, such as rote memorization and textbook-based exercises, frequently fail to engage students and do not promote effective vocabulary retention.

To solve this issue, researchers investigated the usage of digital applications with gamification. Duolingo is one such software that uses game-like elements like incentives, repetition, and rapid feedback to make language learning more engaging and encouraging. Siregar and Marlina (2023) and Ahdal (2020) found that gamified platforms can boost vocabulary retention and learning motivation. These findings



are further supported by the Involvement Load Hypothesis (Usman et al., 2021), which highlights the importance of cognitive engagement in language learning.

Despite these hopeful improvements, few research has examined how students assess the efficacy of gamified learning tools such as Duolingo in the Indonesian EFL environment, particularly at the junior high school level. Understanding students' viewpoints is critical since it reveals the true influence of gamification on their learning experience, engagement, and vocabulary retention.

As a result, the purpose of this study is to investigate students' perspectives of using Duolingo as a gamified learning tool to improve their vocabulary mastery. The study was done at MTs Al-Fakhriyah Baturaja and focused on eighth-grade students who had previously used the application. The findings are likely to help build more engaging and successful vocabulary education tactics in EFL courses.

Theoretical Framework

1. Vocabulary Mastery

Vocabulary is a critical component of learning a foreign language. Thornbury (2002) asserts that vocabulary serves as the cornerstone of all communication. Students who lack a significant vocabulary will find it difficult to grasp and communicate their views. Similarly, Richard (2002) claims that vocabulary is essential for language comprehension and communication. Nation (2001) splits vocabulary knowledge into two categories: receptive and productive. Receptive vocabulary entails identifying and comprehending words when reading or listening, whereas productive vocabulary entails the ability to use words in speaking and writing. Students' motivation also plays a role in vocabulary acquisition. Deci and Ryan (2000) state that children who are intrinsically driven learn more effectively and retain terminology better. Motivation influences learners' motivation to engage in vocabulary practice and continue in the face of difficult.

2. Gamification

Gamification is the use of game elements like points, rewards, and competition in non-game settings, such as education. According to Ahdal (2020), gamified learning promotes vocabulary acquisition through repetition and feedback. According to Hamzah and Yusuf (2023), gamification is a technique for increasing learners' interest and motivation. Usman et al.'s (2021) Involvement Load Hypothesis highlights that tasks that require a high level of mental effort result in greater vocabulary retention. This is backed by Paivio's (2007) Dual Coding Theory, which explains that learners recall vocabulary more effectively when exposed to both verbal and visual inputs at the same time. Although traditional vocabulary education is still frequently used, digital platforms with gamified aspects are gaining popularity. Rahayu (2023) believes that these platforms provide a more engaging and effective manner to enhance vocabulary acquisition.

3. Previous Related Studies



Several prior studies investigated the use of Duolingo in language acquisition. Masita (2022) evaluated how tenth-grade students at SMA Negeri 1 Kasimbar perceived Duolingo's effectiveness in boosting vocabulary knowledge. Using a qualitative method of questionnaires and interviews, the study discovered that students rated Duolingo positively, praising its interactive elements and motivational design. However, others cited technological difficulties and insufficient explanations of specific vocabulary items. The study found that Duolingo is successful when combined with teacher support and other learning resources.

Similarly, Utami (2020) investigated students' attitudes toward Duolingo as a language learning application. Her findings revealed that Duolingo's user-friendly and engaging features increased student motivation and independent learning. However, a lack of teacher connection and insufficient speaking practice were identified as negatives. The study emphasized teachers' complementary role in increasing the effectiveness of mobile applications.

Urrohmah (2022) investigated junior high school students' impressions of Duolingo as a mobile-assisted tool for grammar instruction. The findings revealed that students responded positively to gamified elements like levels, streaks, and rewards, which increased their motivation. However, the limited grammar explanations necessitated additional teacher support. These studies are similar to the current research, notably in terms of investigating students' perspectives and the motivational influence of Duolingo's gamification aspects. This study, however, is unique in that it focuses explicitly on vocabulary mastery among eighth-grade children and investigates how Duolingo enhances vocabulary retention through gamified learning, a topic that has received little attention in previous research.

Method

1. Research Method

This study used a qualitative case study methodology to investigate students' attitudes toward utilizing Duolingo as a gamified tool for improving vocabulary proficiency. Moleong (2021) defines qualitative research as a holistic and descriptive approach to understanding phenomena such as behavior, perception, and motivation. The qualitative method was chosen because of its capacity to provide detailed information about students' experiences with Duolingo, specifically their engagement, motivation, and obstacles. Unlike quantitative methods, which focus on numerical results, this approach prioritizes subjective learning experiences and contextual knowledge. It provides customizable data gathering via interviews and surveys, allowing for a more in-depth investigation of how gamification helps to vocabulary mastery. Data credibility was improved using triangulation, which combined questionnaires and interviews.

2. Population and Sample



The population for this study included all eighth-grade students at MTs Al Fakhriyah Baturaja, a total of 118 individuals across five classes (VIII.A-VIII.E). Only class VIII.B, which included 22 pupils, has used Duolingo during English lectures. As a result, the research sample was chosen via purposive sampling, specifically class VIII.B. Purposive sampling, according to Creswell (2012), is appropriate when participants have specific characteristics relevant to the study's objectives.

3. Research Instruments

In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary instrument (Huberman & Saldana, 2020), actively involved in data collection and interpretation. In this study, data were collected using a closed-ended questionnaire and interviews. The questionnaire was handed to all 22 students in class VIII.B, and 10 individuals were interviewed to acquire further information. A standardized set of closed-ended questions and an interview guide were employed as instruments to ensure data collection consistency and validity (Brinkmann, 2022).

4. Data Collection Techniques

The study used two primary data collection methods: questionnaires and interviews.

- **Questionnaire:**
The questionnaire, adapted from Masita (2022), had 14 closed-ended items assessing motivation, ease of use, and engagement. The materials were given in Bahasa Indonesia to guarantee that the students could understand and access them. Indicators were:
 - Motivation (Items: 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 11, 13, 14)
 - Ease of Use (Items: 10, 12)
 - Engagement (Items: 4, 5, 8, 9)
- **Interview:**
Face-to-face interviews were conducted according to a guide developed from Jaelani and Rachmadanti (2020). The goal was to collect extensive information about students' personal experiences with Duolingo to supplement and expound on questionnaire answers.

5. Trustworthiness of the Data

To assure data validity, the researcher used four qualitative trustworthiness criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Adler, 2022; Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

- **Credibility:**
Triangulation and member checking ensure accurate portrayal of participants' perspectives (Soysal & Turkmen, 2024).
- **Transferability:**
Ensured by providing thick descriptions of participants, classroom context, and how Duolingo was used (Geertz, 1973).



- **Dependability:**
Maintained by documenting the entire research process, allowing for potential replication by future researchers.
- **Confirmability:**
Strengthened by keeping detailed records and following a systematic thematic analysis, minimizing researcher bias (Shenton, 2004).

6. Data Analysis Techniques

The data analysis process followed qualitative procedures suggested by Umarti and Wijaya (2020), involving categorization, synthesis, and conclusion drawing.

- **Questionnaire:**
Responses were analyzed using a percentage formula (Sudijono, 2018):
$$P = \frac{F}{N} \times 100\%$$

P = Percentages
F = Frequency of Answer
N = Number of Sample
- **Interview:**
Interview data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's (2014) interactive model, involving:
 1. **Data Reduction** – selecting and focusing on relevant data, eliminating redundancy.
 2. **Data Display** – organizing data in tables or categories for easier interpretation.
 3. **Conclusion Drawing** – synthesizing the findings to answer the research questions based on verified data (Gunawan, 2017).

Findings and Discussion

The study's findings revealed that students had generally positive impressions of using Duolingo as a gamified tool to help them acquire language. Based on questionnaire results and interviews with eighth-grade students at MTs Al Fakhriyah, the data revealed three key aspects: motivation, ease of use, and engagement.



Table 1 presents the summary of the questionnaire responses

Indicator	Most Chosen Response	Percentage
Motivation	Strongly Agree	55.95%
Ease of Use	Agree	57.14%
Engagement	Strongly Agree	46.99%

Students perceived Duolingo as a fun and engaging application that supported their Learning motivation. One student responded, "Yes, because the Duolingo application is fun," highlighting the impact of gamification aspects like levels, points, and prizes in raising interest in learning. This is consistent with prior studies by Utami (2020) and Urrohmah (2022), who discovered that gamified features greatly increased student motivation and involvement in language acquisition. In addition, Duolingo was deemed useful and applicable in the classroom. A student said, "No, because Duolingo is very useful in class to solve difficult problems," indicating that the app's assignments were viewed as relevant and supportive of real-world learning needs. This is consistent with Masita's (2022) findings that student's value Duolingo's ability to help them improve their vocabulary skills independently.

The ease of usage also influenced pupils' positive sentiments. One student said, "Yes, because the Duolingo application has many exciting features," indicating that both functionality and interface made it easier for students to engage in learning activities. The app's easy design most likely decreased cognitive barriers, allowing pupils to focus on learning new words. Furthermore, the pupils' engagement with English went beyond the app. One student said, "Yes, because I often imagine using English when I see things," hinting that Duolingo may have aided in vocabulary internalization in everyday situations. Another responded, "Yes, because English is fun and not boring," indicating a shift in attitude toward the topic.

These findings show that Duolingo's gamified approach helps with vocabulary learning not only by increasing student motivation and engagement, but also by encouraging autonomous and pleasurable learning experiences. However, like in prior research, some students reported constraints such as a lack of teacher explanation or deeper context, indicating that Duolingo works best when combined with other forms of training.

Finally, as a gamified learning tool, Duolingo improves students' vocabulary mastery by making learning more interactive, accessible, and motivating. The findings support the notion that mobile-assisted gamification tools can help to create better student-centered English language learning environments.

Conclusion



This study indicated that students perceive Duolingo positively as a gamified tool for improving their vocabulary acquisition. The interactive elements, repetition, and reward system boosted student motivation and engagement, making vocabulary acquisition more pleasurable and effective. These findings lend support to the ideas of gamification theory, implying that Duolingo can increase emotional, cognitive, and behavioral involvement in vocabulary learning.

Based on the findings, English teachers are encouraged to use Duolingo as a supplement to vocabulary instruction to boost student motivation and retention. Students are also encouraged to use the application for self-directed learning outside of the classroom setting. Educational institutions should make digital tools available to students and give teacher training. Future academics should investigate additional language skills and learning environments to gain a better grasp of gamified learning's influence.

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