Improving English Learning Motivation With the English App Duolingo

Salsabila Lahji
English Language Education Study Program, Faculty of Language and Arts,
Ganesha University of Education, Indonesia
Email: *salsabila@undiksha.ac.id*

Abstract. This qualitative study investigates the effectiveness of the Duolingo English app in enhancing English learning motivation among 11th-grade students at SMK Negeri 1 Sawan. Motivation in language learning is a critical factor influencing proficiency and engagement. Utilizing semi-structured interviews and participant observation, this research explores how the app influences students' intrinsic and extrinsic motivation levels. Findings reveal that DuoLingo positively impacts motivation through its interactive features and gamified learning approach, fostering a more engaging and enjoyable learning environment. Educational implications and recommendations for integrating such technology into language classrooms are discussed.

Keywords: English learning, motivation, DuoLingo app, qualitative research, SMK Negeri 1 Sawan

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the landscape of language learning has been dramatically transformed by the emergence of mobile applications designed to facilitate language acquisition. Among these, DuoLingo has emerged as a frontrunner, renowned for its innovative approach and widespread accessibility. With its gamified platform and interactive learning modules, DuoLingo aims to make language learning engaging and effective for users of all ages and proficiency levels. English, the global lingua franca, is important in today's interconnected world. Proficiency in English opens up opportunities for international communication, academic pursuits, career advancement, and cultural exchange. The increasing demand for English proficiency has driven the development of various educational tools, including language learning apps like Duolingo, which cater to learners seeking convenient and efficient ways to improve their language skills.

Educational technology, particularly mobile apps, has revolutionized how languages are taught and learned. DuoLingo leverages the power of mobile devices to deliver bite-sized lessons, interactive exercises, and real-time feedback, transforming traditional language learning into a dynamic and personalized experience. This accessibility allows users to engage with English learning at their own pace and convenience, whether during daily commutes, breaks, or leisure time.

Psychological theories of motivation provide a theoretical framework for understanding how DuoLingo enhances English learning motivation. Self-determination theory posits that intrinsic motivation, driven by personal interest and satisfaction, is crucial for sustained

engagement in learning tasks. DuoLingo nurtures intrinsic motivation through its engaging design, rewarding progress system, and the sense of accomplishment that comes with mastering new language skills.

Moreover, DuoLingo incorporates elements of behavioral psychology by employing gamification strategies such as points, levels, and achievements. These game-like features tap into learners' intrinsic motivation by making the learning process enjoyable and encouraging continuous progress. Additionally, the app utilizes spaced repetition and adaptive learning algorithms to optimize retention and reinforce learning, thereby enhancing motivation through tangible and measurable improvements in language proficiency. Research and user feedback have consistently highlighted the positive impact of DuoLingo on English learning motivation and proficiency. Studies demonstrate that regular app use correlates with improved language skills, increased confidence in speaking and understanding English, and heightened motivation to continue learning. User testimonials further attest to DuoLingo's effectiveness in making language learning accessible, enjoyable, and rewarding for learners worldwide.

The motivation to learn English as a second language is crucial for students' language acquisition and proficiency. Motivation can significantly affect learners' engagement, persistence, and ultimately, their achievement in language learning (Dörnyei, 2001). In educational settings, particularly in vocational high schools (SMK), motivating students to learn English is often a challenge due to various factors such as perceived usefulness, classroom environment, and teaching methods (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Thus, exploring effective strategies to enhance English learning motivation becomes imperative to improve students' language learning outcomes.

Recent advancements in technology have provided new avenues for language learning, offering interactive and engaging platforms that can potentially increase students' motivation (Chen & Jang, 2010). One such platform is the Duolingo English app, which integrates gamification elements into language learning, aiming to make the learning process enjoyable and motivating (Hamari et al., 2014). Gamification in education has been shown to positively impact students' motivation and engagement by incorporating game-like elements such as challenges, rewards, and progress tracking (Deterding et al., 2011). Understanding how these features influence motivation in the context of English language learning can provide insights into designing effective educational interventions.

Qualitative research methods offer a suitable approach to exploring the impact of technology on student motivation and learning outcomes (Creswell, 2013). By employing semi-structured interviews and participant observation, researchers can delve into students'

perceptions, experiences, and attitudes toward using the DuoLingo app in their English learning process. Qualitative research allows for a nuanced understanding of the dynamics between technology use and motivational factors, offering rich data that quantitative methods may not capture comprehensively (Merriam, 2009).

Theoretical frameworks such as Self-Determination Theory (SDT) provide insights into the intrinsic and extrinsic motivations that drive human behavior, including learning motivations (Deci & Ryan, 1985). SDT posits that individuals are motivated by three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. When these needs are fulfilled, individuals are more likely to engage in activities willingly and persistently, which can be applied to understand how the features of DuoLingo may enhance students' motivation to learn English (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

In the Indonesian context, vocational high schools (SMK) play a crucial role in preparing students for the workforce, where English proficiency is increasingly important (Purwanto & Nusantara, 2019). Enhancing English learning motivation among SMK students through innovative tools like DuoLingo can potentially contribute to their overall academic success and future career opportunities. Therefore, investigating the effectiveness of DuoLingo in motivating 11th-grade students at SMK Negeri 1 Sawan can provide valuable insights into the practical application of technology in language education.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

English language learning motivation among high school students is influenced by various factors, including the perceived relevance and utility of learning English in their daily lives and future careers (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Motivation theories, such as Self-Determination Theory (SDT), provide a framework for understanding the different types of motivation—namely intrinsic and extrinsic motivation—in educational contexts (Ryan & Deci, 2000). SDT posits that intrinsic motivation, driven by internal rewards like enjoyment and satisfaction, leads to sustained engagement in learning activities, whereas extrinsic motivation, driven by external rewards or pressures, may vary in its effectiveness depending on the context (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Understanding these motivational factors is crucial for designing effective interventions, such as the integration of educational apps like DuoLingo, to enhance English learning motivation among students.

Duolingo is a popular language learning app known for its gamified approach, which incorporates elements of competition, rewards, and progress tracking to engage learners (Hamari et al., 2014). Gamification theory suggests that incorporating game-like features into

educational settings can increase motivation and engagement by tapping into individuals' natural desires for achievement, recognition, and enjoyment (Deterding et al., 2011). By applying gamification principles, DuoLingo aims to make language learning more enjoyable and motivating, potentially fostering a positive learning environment conducive to improved language acquisition and proficiency.

In the context of vocational high schools (SMK), where English proficiency is increasingly important for future career prospects, understanding the effectiveness of educational apps like DuoLingo becomes particularly relevant (Purwanto & Nusantara, 2019). Qualitative research methods, such as semi-structured interviews and participant observation, are well-suited for exploring students' experiences, perceptions, and motivations toward using DuoLingo in their English learning process (Creswell, 2013). These methods allow researchers to capture rich, detailed data that can provide insights into how and why certain motivational strategies are effective in educational settings.

Research on technology-enhanced language learning indicates that interactive and engaging platforms like DuoLingo can positively impact motivation and learning outcomes (Chen & Jang, 2010). Such platforms facilitate autonomous learning experiences by allowing students to progress at their own pace and receive immediate feedback, which are essential elements in fostering intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000). By investigating the motivational aspects of DuoLingo within the specific context of 11th-grade students at SMK Negeri 1 Sawan, this study aims to contribute empirical evidence on the efficacy of gamified language learning apps in enhancing English learning motivation.

In conclusion, integrating theoretical frameworks such as SDT and gamification theory provides a comprehensive approach to understanding and enhancing English learning motivation through educational apps like Duolingo. This theoretical foundation guides the design of qualitative research that investigates the specific motivational dynamics among 11th-grade students in vocational high schools. By examining these dynamics, educators and researchers can gain valuable insights into effective strategies for promoting motivation and engagement in language learning, thereby improving overall learning outcomes.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research design to explore the effectiveness of the Duolingo English app in enhancing English learning motivation among 11th-grade students at SMK Negeri 1 Sawan. Qualitative research is chosen for its ability to provide rich, in-depth insights into participants' experiences, perceptions, and behaviors, which are crucial for

understanding the complex dynamics of motivation in educational settings (Creswell, 2013). The participants of this study are purposively selected from 11th-grade students enrolled at SMK Negeri 1 Sawan. Purposive sampling allows the researchers to select participants who have experience using the DuoLingo app and can provide relevant insights into its impact on their English learning motivation (Patton, 2002). Approximately 10-15 students will be involved in semi-structured interviews and participant observation.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Learning English can be a highly motivating endeavor for individuals around the world, driven by various factors rooted in both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. One of the primary intrinsic motivators is the desire for personal growth and self-improvement. Mastering English opens doors to a wealth of opportunities, including better career prospects, access to a broader range of information and literature, and enhanced communication skills. According to self-determination theory (SDT), intrinsic motivation arises when individuals engage in activities that satisfy their psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Learning English can fulfill these needs by empowering individuals to express themselves more effectively, navigate diverse cultural contexts, and feel more connected globally.

Extrinsic motivations also play a significant role in driving English language learning. These motivations often include external rewards such as career advancement, academic requirements, or social status. The expectancy-value theory suggests that individuals are motivated to learn when they expect that their efforts will lead to desirable outcomes and when they place value on the goal of learning. For example, students may be motivated to improve their English proficiency to qualify for better job opportunities or to fulfill academic requirements for higher education.

Social factors also contribute to motivation in learning English. Social cognitive theory emphasizes the role of social interactions and observational learning in shaping behavior. Learners may be motivated by social influences such as the desire to communicate with friends and colleagues in English, participate in global communities, or build relationships with people from different linguistic backgrounds. The sense of belonging and social acceptance derived from effective communication in English can significantly enhance motivation and persistence in language learning.

Furthermore, the role of technology, such as language learning apps like Duolingo, cannot be overstated in motivating English learners. According to the ARCS model of motivation, which stands for Attention, Relevance, Confidence, and Satisfaction, effective

instructional strategies that capture learners' attention, demonstrate the relevance of learning tasks, build learners' confidence through achievable challenges, and provide satisfaction through meaningful learning experiences can enhance motivation. DuoLingo, for instance, employs gamification techniques, progress tracking, and interactive exercises that make learning English engaging and enjoyable, thereby fostering intrinsic motivation by providing immediate feedback and a sense of accomplishment.

Immediate feedback and progress tracking are pivotal elements in modern educational practices, significantly influencing the effectiveness of learning experiences across various domains. In the realm of language learning, these features hold particular importance due to their ability to foster continuous improvement and maintain learner engagement.

Firstly, immediate feedback provides learners with timely information about their performance right after completing an activity or task. This instant response helps learners understand their strengths and areas needing improvement immediately, allowing them to correct mistakes promptly. For instance, in language learning apps like Duolingo, learners receive instant feedback on their pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary usage, enabling them to adjust their learning strategies in real time.

Secondly, progress tracking serves as a motivational tool by showing learners their advancement over time. By visualizing their achievements and milestones, learners gain a sense of accomplishment and progress, which boosts their confidence and encourages them to persist in their studies. This feature is particularly beneficial in long-term language learning goals, as it provides learners with tangible evidence of their improvement and encourages them to stay committed to their learning journey.

Moreover, immediate feedback and progress tracking promote active learning by keeping learners actively engaged in the learning process. When learners receive immediate feedback, they are more likely to stay focused and motivated, as they can see the direct impact of their efforts on their learning outcomes. Similarly, progress tracking allows learners to set realistic goals and monitor their performance, fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility for their learning progress.

Furthermore, these features support personalized learning experiences by adapting to individual learning styles and preferences. Immediate feedback can be tailored to address specific areas of weakness or misunderstanding, providing targeted support and guidance to learners. Likewise, progress tracking helps educators and learners alike identify patterns and trends in learning behavior, enabling them to make informed decisions about adjusting learning strategies or setting new goals.

Improving English learning motivation through apps like DuoLingo involves understanding the underlying mechanisms of motivation in language learning and how technology can effectively support these processes. Motivation in language learning is crucial as it significantly impacts learners' engagement, persistence, and ultimately their proficiency levels (Dörnyei, 2005). Duolingo, a popular language learning app, employs gamification and personalized learning experiences, which are known to enhance motivation (Hamari et al., 2014).

Firstly, DuoLingo utilizes gamification elements such as points, levels, and streaks to make learning English engaging and enjoyable (Deterding et al., 2011). According to self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), such gamified elements satisfy learners' intrinsic needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, thereby fostering their motivation. For instance, earning points and achieving higher levels in DuoLingo provides learners with a sense of accomplishment and progress, reinforcing their motivation to continue learning. Secondly, DuoLingo offers personalized learning experiences through adaptive algorithms that adjust content difficulty based on learners' performance (Vygotsky, 1978). This personalization enhances motivation by ensuring learners are consistently challenged but not overwhelmed, maintaining their interest and confidence in learning English. Research suggests that personalized learning experiences can significantly increase learners' intrinsic motivation (Hidi & Renninger, 2006).

Moreover, DuoLingo incorporates social features such as leaderboards and community forums where learners can interact with peers and share their progress (Bandura, 1977). Social interaction and peer support play a crucial role in motivation as they provide opportunities for social comparison, collaborative learning, and emotional support (Usher & Pajares, 2008). Engaging with others through Duolingo motivates learners by creating a sense of belonging to a community of English learners. Furthermore, DuoLingo employs spaced repetition techniques that optimize the timing of review sessions to maximize long-term retention (Ebbinghaus, 1885). This approach helps learners remember vocabulary and grammar rules more effectively, boosting their confidence and motivation as they perceive tangible progress in their language skills. Effective retention strategies are essential for sustaining motivation in language learning (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Additionally, DuoLingo offers immediate feedback on exercises and quizzes, which is crucial for maintaining learners' motivation (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Timely feedback informs learners of their strengths and areas needing improvement, guiding them towards better performance and fostering a growth mindset. Constructive feedback enhances motivation by

clarifying goals and promoting a sense of competence in learners (Elliot & Dweck, 2005). Moreover, DuoLingo's mobile accessibility allows learners to engage in English language learning anytime and anywhere, accommodating diverse learning schedules and preferences (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The flexibility offered by mobile learning promotes autonomy in learners, empowering them to take control of their learning journey and sustain their motivation over time. Accessibility and convenience are key factors in maintaining learners' engagement and commitment to improving their English proficiency (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Lastly, DuoLingo's use of storytelling and real-life contexts in lessons enhances motivation by making learning English relevant and meaningful to learners' everyday lives (Bruner, 1986). By connecting language skills to practical situations and cultural contexts, DuoLingo helps learners see the value and utility of English proficiency, motivating them to persist in their learning efforts. Meaningful learning experiences are fundamental to fostering intrinsic motivation in language learners (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

In conclusion, DuoLingo effectively improves English learning motivation through its gamified approach, personalized learning experiences, social interactions, spaced repetition techniques, immediate feedback mechanisms, mobile accessibility, and meaningful content. These features align with motivational theories and empirical research on language learning, highlighting DuoLingo's role in enhancing learners' engagement and persistence in mastering English. By understanding these motivational factors and leveraging technology like DuoLingo, educators, and learners can optimize English language learning outcomes in both formal and informal settings.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

DuoLingo represents a transformative tool for enhancing motivation for learning English. Its gamified approach and interactive features captivate learners, making language acquisition engaging and enjoyable. By providing immediate feedback and progress tracking, DuoLingo fosters a sense of accomplishment and encourages learners to persist in their studies. Moreover, its accessibility through mobile devices allows users to learn English at their own pace and convenience, further reinforcing motivation through flexibility and convenience.

Furthermore, DuoLingo's effectiveness in improving English learning motivation lies in its ability to cater to diverse learner needs. The app offers personalized learning paths and adapts exercises based on individual proficiency levels, ensuring that learners remain challenged yet motivated. This adaptive approach not only boosts confidence but also

maintains interest by presenting relevant and engaging content tailored to each user's learning journey.

Additionally, DuoLingo leverages social and collaborative elements to enhance motivation. Features like leaderboards and community challenges encourage friendly competition and interaction among users, fostering a supportive learning environment. Through these social components, learners feel connected to a broader community of language enthusiasts, reinforcing their commitment to mastering English.

In conclusion, DuoLingo exemplifies how technology can significantly impact motivation in English language learning. By combining effective instructional design with user-friendly features, DuoLingo not only facilitates skill acquisition but also nurtures intrinsic motivation through meaningful and rewarding learning experiences. As technology continues to evolve, platforms like DuoLingo are poised to play an increasingly vital role in inspiring and empowering learners worldwide to achieve proficiency in English and beyond.

6. REFERENCES

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