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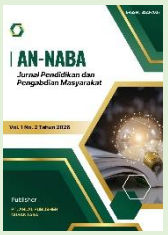

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Students' Perception of Using Duolingo Application as a Supplementary Tool for Vocabulary Learning at MTs NW Bungtiang

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Abstract

Vocabulary mastery is a fundamental aspect of English language learning. However, students at MTs NW Bungtiang still experience difficulties in remembering and using English vocabulary because the learning process is dominated by conventional teaching methods. In addition, digital learning applications such as Duolingo have not been optimally utilized. Therefore, this study aims to explore students' perceptions of using the Duolingo application as a supplementary tool for vocabulary learning at MTs NW Bungtiang and to identify its advantages and disadvantages from the students' perspectives. This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive research design. The data sources were the principal, the English teacher, and students of MTs NW Bungtiang. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation, then analyzed using data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The findings show that students have positive perceptions of using Duolingo because its interactive features, gamification elements, and flexibility enhance learning motivation, interest, and independent vocabulary learning. However, several challenges were also identified, including limited internet access, insufficient teacher guidance, and the application's limited explanation of grammar. Therefore, Duolingo is considered more appropriate as a supplementary learning tool rather than a replacement for classroom instruction.

Keywords: students' perception, Duolingo, vocabulary learning, digital learning media.

INTRODUCTION

English is a vital subject, particularly in facing increasingly global developments. As an international language, English is used in various fields, such as education, technology, communication, and science, making its mastery a necessity. In the educational context, English proficiency serves not only as a subject but also as a skill that supports students' overall learning success (Budiman et al., 2023). However, in reality, English learning in the classroom has not been running optimally. Many students still have difficulties understanding the material, especially in mastering vocabulary, which makes them less confident when speaking or writing in English.

Vocabulary plays a crucial role in English learning because it serves as the primary foundation for understanding the various materials taught. Vocabulary mastery enables students to recognize and comprehend the meaning of words in texts, making reading easier. Without adequate vocabulary mastery, students will have difficulty following the learning process, both in understanding teacher explanations and in completing assignments (Machfudi & Afidah, 2022).

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The actual situation of vocabulary learning at MTs NW Bungtiang shows that students still face various obstacles. Some students still have difficulty remembering and understanding vocabulary, and even tend to quickly forget words they have previously learned. This is inseparable from the learning process in the classroom, which is still dominated by conventional methods such as lectures, note-taking, and memorization, thus not providing a meaningful learning experience for students. Furthermore, student interaction in learning is still limited, so they are less active in using vocabulary directly. This condition has an impact on low student motivation to learn English, which ultimately affects their level of vocabulary mastery.

Digital learning applications have great potential as a more engaging and innovative alternative learning medium compared to conventional methods. Through interactive features such as practice questions, educational games, and direct feedback, learning applications can provide a more enjoyable and less monotonous learning experience for students. Furthermore, the use of digital applications also provides flexibility in learning, as they can be accessed anytime and anywhere according to students' needs (Alenezi et al., 2023). One of the widely used applications is Duolingo, which is categorized under Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL). This application presents vocabulary learning in an engaging way through various interactive exercises and games (gamification), thereby increasing student interest in learning (Apoko et al., 2023).

Students' perception plays an important role in determining the success of the learning process, especially in the use of technology-based learning media. Students' perceptions can influence their interest and level of engagement in learning activities. When students have a positive perception of a learning medium, it can enhance their motivation and encourage active participation in the learning process. On the other hand, negative perceptions may hinder the effective use of learning media, preventing the achievement of learning objectives (Lubis et al., 2023).

Based on the background above, it can be concluded that vocabulary mastery plays a crucial role in English language learning. However, the actual conditions in the field, particularly at MTs NW Bungtiang, indicate that students still face several challenges, such as difficulty in remembering vocabulary, low learning motivation, and the use of conventional teaching methods. On the other hand, the development of technology offers opportunities through digital learning applications such as Duolingo, which have the potential to make vocabulary learning more interactive and flexible. Nevertheless, the use of such applications in the classroom has not been fully optimized, has not been integrated into the learning process, and students' perceptions of their use are still unclear. Therefore, this study aims to explore students' perceptions of using Duolingo as a supplementary tool for vocabulary learning and to identify its advantages and disadvantages from the students' perspectives.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive research design. The qualitative approach was used to explore and understand in depth students' perceptions of using Duolingo as a supplementary tool for vocabulary learning. This approach focuses on meaning, experiences, and students' subjective views. Therefore, the data collected are in the form of words, opinions, and descriptions of students' experiences in using the application.

This research was conducted at MTs NW Bungtiang, located in Bungtiang Village, Sakra Barat District, East Lombok Regency, West Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. The research was conducted over

approximately two months, from May to July 2026. The selection of this research site was based on several considerations: the students' unfamiliarity with Duolingo as a learning tool, the accessibility of the location, the school's permission and support, and the Islamic boarding school environment that supports independent learning.

The data in this study were classified into two types: primary data and secondary data. Primary data were collected directly from the participants, namely the principal, the English teacher, and students of MTs NW Bungtiang who used Duolingo as a supplementary tool for vocabulary learning. Secondary data were supporting data obtained from school documents, books, journals related to vocabulary learning and mobile learning, and previous studies relevant to the use of Duolingo.

Data collection techniques included interviews, observations, and documentation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore students' perceptions, experiences, and opinions in depth. Non-participant observation was used to directly examine how students used Duolingo in their vocabulary learning activities. Documentation was used to support and complement the data collected from interviews and observations.

The collected data were analyzed using qualitative data analysis techniques consisting of three main steps: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Data reduction involved selecting, focusing, simplifying, and transforming raw data obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation. Data display involved organizing and presenting the data in a systematic way so that it is easier to understand. Conclusion drawing and verification involved drawing conclusions based on the analyzed data and verifying them continuously throughout the research process.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the data, several techniques were employed. Credibility was ensured through triangulation (comparing data from different sources, techniques, and times) and member checking (confirming the data or interview results with participants). Transferability was ensured by providing a detailed and clear description of the research setting, participants, and research process. Dependability was ensured by documenting all research processes systematically. Confirmability was ensured by keeping records of data such as interview transcripts, observation notes, and documentation, and linking the findings clearly to the data obtained in the field.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. The Condition of English Learning at MTs NW Bungtiang

English learning at MTs NW Bungtiang has generally been carried out well. The English teacher has made efforts to deliver the lessons according to the learning objectives, and the students have participated in classroom activities as expected. However, based on interviews with the principal, the English teacher, and several students, there are still some challenges, especially in learning English vocabulary.

The principal explained that one of the most common difficulties experienced by students is remembering the vocabulary they have learned. This does not mean that the teaching process is ineffective. Instead, it reflects the nature of language learning, where students need continuous practice to retain new words. Simply memorizing vocabulary is not enough if students rarely use it in their daily learning activities. For this reason, the school believes that students need more engaging learning media that can make vocabulary learning more enjoyable and less monotonous.

A similar view was shared by the English teacher. The teacher admitted that vocabulary instruction has mostly relied on textbooks and written exercises. Although these methods are still important as part of classroom learning, they do not always encourage active participation from every student. Some students are able to remember new vocabulary easily, while others still struggle to understand and recall the words they have learned. This situation encourages the teacher to look for alternative learning media that can involve students more actively during the lesson.

The students' experiences also reflected this situation. Most of them admitted that they often forgot new vocabulary if they did not review it repeatedly. They also felt that learning only from textbooks sometimes became repetitive and reduced their motivation to study. After using Duolingo, many students found the learning process much more enjoyable because the application presents vocabulary through various interactive activities. Instead of only reading words, they could look at pictures, listen to pronunciation, and immediately complete different kinds of exercises. These learning activities helped them understand and remember new vocabulary more easily.

These findings suggest that vocabulary learning should involve more than memorization. Students need opportunities to practice, review, and apply new words in different learning activities. The more frequently they encounter and use vocabulary, the more likely they are to remember it. This finding supports Nation's (2013) theory, which argues that vocabulary acquisition develops through repeated exposure and continuous practice in different contexts.

2. Students' Perceptions of Using Duolingo as a Supplementary Tool

The findings of this study show that Duolingo was positively received by the principal, the English teacher, and the students. Although each participant viewed the application from a different view, they generally agreed that Duolingo serves as an effective supplementary tool for vocabulary learning.

From the principal's perspective, Duolingo represents an innovative approach to language learning that deserves to be implemented in schools. He explained that today's students grow up in a digital environment, making it important for teaching methods to adapt to technological developments. As long as the application is used for educational purposes and under the teacher's supervision, the school fully supports its implementation.

The English teacher also expressed positive opinions about the application. Initially, the teacher was unsure how students would respond to learning through a mobile application. However, after Duolingo was introduced, the students became noticeably more active, more willing to answer questions, and appeared to enjoy the learning process more than before. The teacher also observed that some students became more confident in using English vocabulary during classroom activities.

The students' responses supported the teacher's observations. Nearly all of them stated that they enjoyed using Duolingo because of its attractive interface, simple design, and interactive learning activities. They described the learning experience as more enjoyable because it felt similar to playing a game rather than attending a traditional lesson. They were motivated to complete exercises, collect points, and unlock new levels. Without realizing it, these activities encouraged them to practice English vocabulary continuously.

One interesting finding was that several students continued using Duolingo even outside the classroom. Some of them regularly opened the application at home to review vocabulary that had been

introduced during class. They explained that learning with Duolingo felt less stressful than memorizing long vocabulary lists, making them more willing to study independently. This finding suggests that the application encourages students to develop independent learning habits beyond the classroom.

Although Duolingo offers many benefits, both the teacher and the students agreed that it cannot replace the role of the teacher. The application provides useful vocabulary practice and introduces new words effectively, but students still need their teacher's explanations, especially when they encounter difficult vocabulary or grammar points. The teacher also plays an essential role in providing real-life examples, answering students' questions, and guiding them throughout the learning process.

3. The Impact of Duolingo on Vocabulary Learning

One of the main objectives of implementing Duolingo in this study was to explore how the application supports students in learning English vocabulary. Based on the interviews conducted with the principal, the English teacher, and students from Grades VII and VIII, it was found that Duolingo provided a learning experience that was different from their usual classroom activities.

The English teacher observed noticeable improvements after Duolingo was introduced into the classroom. According to the teacher, students became more familiar with new vocabulary because each lesson included repeated practice. The words that students had already learned reappeared in different exercises instead of disappearing after one lesson. This repeated exposure allowed students to encounter the same vocabulary several times, making the words easier to recognize and remember.

The students shared similar experiences. Most of them explained that they could remember vocabulary more easily after learning through Duolingo. This was because every word was introduced through a variety of activities, such as matching pictures with words, choosing the correct answer, arranging sentences, listening to pronunciation, and repeating similar exercises several times. They believed that this learning process was much more enjoyable than simply reading vocabulary lists from textbooks. Some students even admitted that they sometimes forgot they were studying because the activities felt more like playing a game than attending a lesson.

Another interesting finding was the change in the way students learned vocabulary. Before using Duolingo, many students relied mainly on memorizing lists of isolated words without fully understanding how they were used. After using the application, they began learning vocabulary through pictures, audio, and contextual exercises. This approach made learning more meaningful because students not only learned the meaning of a word but also understood how it could be used in simple contexts.

The interview findings suggest that Duolingo also reduced students' anxiety when learning new vocabulary. In previous classroom activities, some students hesitated to answer questions because they were afraid of making mistakes. When using Duolingo, however, they became more willing to try because the application immediately provided feedback on their answers. If they answered incorrectly, they could instantly identify their mistakes and try again without feeling embarrassed in front of their classmates.

These findings support Nation's (2013) theory, which states that vocabulary acquisition develops through repeated exposure. Learners need to encounter the same vocabulary repeatedly in different situations before it can be stored in their long-term memory. The students' experiences

during this study clearly demonstrate how repeated practice through Duolingo contributed to vocabulary retention.

4. The Impact of Duolingo on Students' Learning Motivation

Besides supporting vocabulary learning, Duolingo also had a positive influence on students' learning motivation. Based on interviews with the principal, the English teacher, and the students, the classroom atmosphere became noticeably more active after the application was introduced.

The English teacher explained that before using Duolingo, some students appeared less enthusiastic during vocabulary lessons. This was not because they disliked English as a subject but because the classroom activities were often repetitive. After Duolingo was introduced, the learning environment changed considerably. Students became more curious, asked more questions, and showed greater enthusiasm when completing the exercises. Even students who were usually quiet began participating more actively in classroom discussions.

One of the main reasons why students became more motivated was the gamification system incorporated into Duolingo. Every completed lesson rewarded students with experience points (XP), higher levels, streaks, and other achievements. Although these rewards were simple, they created a sense of challenge that encouraged students to continue learning. Many students expressed satisfaction when they achieved their daily goals and were motivated to maintain their learning progress every day.

Interestingly, students' motivation was not influenced solely by the rewards provided by the application. Several students explained that they continued learning because they felt that their English ability was gradually improving. They became more familiar with new vocabulary and felt more confident when answering questions in class. This growing sense of achievement naturally increased their willingness to continue studying English.

These findings suggest that learning motivation does not always develop because of external pressure from teachers. In many cases, motivation grows when students genuinely enjoy the learning process itself. A positive learning experience encourages students to spend more time practicing without feeling forced. This pattern was clearly observed throughout the implementation of Duolingo in this study. The findings are consistent with Deterding et al. (2011), who argue that incorporating game elements into learning activities can increase learners' engagement and motivation.

5. Duolingo Features that Support Vocabulary Learning

The interview findings revealed that students' positive perceptions of Duolingo were influenced not only by the application itself but also by its various learning features. Each feature offered a different learning experience, helping students stay interested while studying English vocabulary.

The English teacher explained that the most helpful features were the practice activities and the instant feedback provided after each exercise. According to the teacher, these features enabled students to recognize their mistakes immediately. Whenever students selected an incorrect answer, the application instantly provided corrections, allowing them to learn from their errors without waiting for the teacher to review their work.

Most students shared similar opinions. They particularly enjoyed the variety of practice activities available in the application. Instead of answering only multiple-choice questions, they completed exercises such as matching pictures with words, arranging sentences, listening to pronunciation, and typing correct answers. The variety of learning tasks prevented boredom and kept students engaged throughout the lessons.

In addition to the practice exercises, students frequently mentioned that the pictures and audio recordings helped them understand vocabulary more easily. When a word was presented together with an image and its pronunciation, they found it easier to remember both its meaning and pronunciation. This learning experience was very different from memorizing vocabulary lists consisting only of written words without visual support.

Another group of features that students appreciated included XP, streaks, levels, and rewards. Although these features appear simple, they significantly influenced students' motivation to continue learning. Several students explained that they tried to maintain their daily streak because they did not want to lose their progress. Others felt proud whenever they reached a higher level, which encouraged them to keep opening the application and completing more lessons.

Overall, the findings suggest that the greatest strength of Duolingo lies not only in the learning content but also in the way the content is delivered. Vocabulary lessons that might otherwise seem ordinary become more engaging because they are presented through a combination of pictures, audio, interactive exercises, and a reward system. This combination helps maintain students' interest even when they review the same vocabulary multiple times.

6. The Advantages of Using Duolingo as a Supplementary Tool

The findings of this study indicate that Duolingo offers numerous benefits for students learning English vocabulary. The principal, the English teacher, and the students all expressed positive opinions about the application.

According to the English teacher, one of the most noticeable improvements was the increase in students' classroom participation. During lessons that incorporated Duolingo, students became more willing to answer questions, more confident in completing exercises, and more focused throughout the learning process. This was a significant contrast to previous lessons, during which some students were less involved because they felt bored or lacked confidence.

In addition to making learning more engaging, Duolingo also helped students practice vocabulary through a variety of activities. Instead of simply memorizing words, students listened to pronunciation, matched words with pictures, arranged simple sentences, and completed repetitive practice exercises. This variety of activities created a more dynamic learning experience and prevented students from becoming bored.

Another important advantage identified in this study was Duolingo's ability to promote independent learning. The teacher reported that several students continued using the application at home without being instructed to do so. This demonstrates that students gradually developed the habit of reviewing vocabulary independently outside the classroom. Such learning habits are particularly valuable because they extend learning opportunities beyond formal classroom instruction.

Another strength of Duolingo is its immediate feedback system. Whenever students answered correctly, they immediately received confirmation and could continue to the next activity. When they

answered incorrectly, the application instantly identified their mistakes and allowed them to correct them. This immediate feedback enabled students to improve their understanding without waiting for the teacher to check their work.

The greatest strength of Duolingo lies in its successful combination of learning and game elements within a single application. This combination creates a learning environment that feels enjoyable while still maintaining clear educational objectives. Students often felt as though they were playing a game, while at the same time they were expanding their vocabulary, practicing pronunciation, and reviewing previously learned material. This enjoyable learning experience helped maintain students' interest and encouraged them to continue learning consistently.

7. The Challenges of Using Duolingo as a Supplementary Tool

Although Duolingo offers many benefits, the findings of this study also revealed several limitations in its implementation. The challenges identified were related not only to the application itself but also to the school's facilities and students' access to digital resources.

The most frequently mentioned challenge was internet connectivity. The English teacher explained that unstable internet connections occasionally interrupted classroom activities, causing delays when students accessed learning materials or submitted their answers. As a result, some students had to wait longer before continuing to the next activity. Similar experiences were reported by several students, especially when they used the application at home, where internet quality varied considerably.

Besides internet-related issues, the teacher pointed out that Duolingo provides limited explanations of grammar and vocabulary usage in broader contexts. The application mainly focuses on practice activities, which sometimes allow students to identify the correct answers without fully understanding the underlying language concepts. Consequently, the teacher still needed to provide additional explanations to ensure that students developed a deeper understanding of the material rather than simply memorizing correct responses.

Several students expressed similar opinions. They hoped that Duolingo would include more explanations in Indonesian, provide additional examples of vocabulary used in everyday situations, and offer more speaking activities. Some students also suggested that certain learning features should be available offline so that they could continue studying even without internet access.

Despite these limitations, the interview findings showed that students remained highly interested in using Duolingo. Most of them believed that the advantages of the application outweighed its shortcomings. They considered problems such as unstable internet connections and limited explanations to be manageable because teachers could provide additional guidance and classroom activities to reinforce their understanding.

These findings suggest that the limitations of Duolingo are primarily technical rather than pedagogical. In other words, the application already functions effectively as a supplementary vocabulary learning tool, but its implementation would become even more successful if supported by reliable internet access, appropriate digital devices, and continuous teacher guidance throughout the learning process.

8. The Role of Teachers and the School in Using Duolingo as a Supplementary Tool

The successful implementation of Duolingo in this study was influenced not only by the application itself but also by the active role of the teacher and the support provided by the school. Although Duolingo offers various features that encourage independent learning, students still need guidance to ensure that the application is used effectively and in line with the learning objectives.

The principal explained that the school supports the integration of technology into the learning process as long as it serves educational purposes. This support was evident from the beginning of the study, when the school granted permission for the research to be conducted, arranged the research schedule so that it would not interfere with regular classroom activities, and provided special permission for students to use their smartphones during the implementation of the research. These actions demonstrate the school's openness to educational innovation while still maintaining school regulations and learning discipline.

The teacher also played an essential role throughout the implementation of Duolingo. Besides introducing the application and explaining how to use it, the teacher clarified the learning objectives for each lesson and guided students whenever they encountered difficulties. Whenever students struggled to understand vocabulary or experienced technical problems while using the application, the teacher immediately provided additional explanations and assistance. This guidance made students feel more confident because they always had someone to consult whenever they encountered difficulties.

The teacher consistently connected the vocabulary activities in Duolingo with the materials taught in the classroom. This approach helped students view Duolingo as an extension of classroom instruction rather than as a separate learning activity. By integrating the application with classroom lessons, students were able to apply what they learned through the application in meaningful classroom contexts, leading to a deeper understanding of the vocabulary.

These findings indicate that technology and teachers complement rather than replace one another. While technology creates a more engaging learning environment, teachers ensure that meaningful learning actually takes place. In fact, the teacher's role becomes even more important because teachers guide students in using technology effectively, responsibly, and purposefully. These findings are consistent with Mishra and Koehler's (2006) Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework, which emphasizes that technology becomes most effective when it is integrated with appropriate pedagogical strategies and strong subject knowledge.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion, it can be concluded that students at MTs NW Bungtiang had positive perceptions of using the Duolingo application as a supplementary tool for vocabulary learning. Most students found that Duolingo made learning English vocabulary more enjoyable, interactive, and less monotonous than learning only through textbooks. The combination of pictures, audio, practice activities, instant feedback, and gamification features encouraged students to participate more actively throughout the learning process and helped them remember new vocabulary more easily.

The findings also show that Duolingo contributed to increasing students' motivation to learn English. Many students became more enthusiastic about participating in classroom activities, while

some continued practicing independently at home. This indicates that the application not only supported classroom learning but also encouraged students to develop independent learning habits.

In addition, the study identified several advantages and challenges of using Duolingo. The main advantages include interactive learning activities, repeated vocabulary practice, immediate feedback, and engaging game-like features that make learning more enjoyable. However, several challenges were also found, such as unstable internet connections, limited explanations of grammar and vocabulary use, and students' dependence on digital devices. These limitations indicate that Duolingo cannot replace the role of the teacher. Instead, it should be used as a supplementary learning tool while teachers continue providing explanations, guidance, and support during the learning process.

Overall, the researcher concludes that Duolingo is an appropriate supplementary tool for vocabulary learning at MTs NW Bungtiang. When combined with effective teacher guidance and school support, the application can create a more engaging learning environment, encourage active participation, and improve students' vocabulary learning experiences.

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