Applying Duolingo as English Learning Media: How do Students Perceive it?

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Abstract

The advancement of digital technology today has boosted opportunities for teachers to apply digital products in promoting teaching and encouraging the learning process. Knowing how students perceive the use of digital technology is playing a significant role in supporting the achievement of an accommodating learning environment for students. This study is intended to investigate the students' perception of Duolingo as an English learning medium. It belongs to qualitative descriptive research. The data were gathered from an online questionnaire and interview and then analyzed descriptively. The result demonstrates students perceived positively toward applying Duolingo Application as a tool to facilitate English language learning at Senior High school it is interesting, motivating, helpful, encourages students' confidence, and is compatible across Junior High school to University students. However, students also perceived it's weakness, it is too colorful and word repetition.

Keywords: Duolingo, Learning Media, Students' Perception

Introduction

Today's rapid technological changes promise a digitally mediated learning classroom, it changes the way teachers and students communicate. (Rizki & Davies, 2021; Alaboudi, & Alharbi 2021). Students are free to choose various kinds of digital technologies to access many kinds of information. It is also a good chance for teachers to maximize their roles and creativity as a facilitator. They can advantage their students in learning English by applying appropriate learning media (Rachmawati, 2016), particularly in this Covid 19 Panedmic Era.

Learning media plays important role in language learning (Laksmi, Yasa & Mirayani, 2021) It boosts learning inside and outside classrooms (Baru, Tenggara & Mataram, 2020); and direct student grasps the learning concept (Andriani, 2019). Duolingo is one of the digital applications that are applicable for EFL learning both inside and outside the classroom. This application is provided online learning which is available at https://en.duolingo.com/. It can be accessed through PC, Laptop, Android Apps, and iPhone. The teacher can use it as an English learning tool and accessible for students everywhere and anytime. Besides that, it is possible to measure students' English proficiency (Burstein, LaFlair, Kunnan., & Von Davier, 2021). This application has been applied by a pre-service teacher at SMA N 8 Batam during Pandemic covid at the 2020-2021 Academic Year.

To evaluate and make sure that this application is beneficial for the student while employed at SMA N 8 Batam, it is a need to investigate students' perspectives. Knowing students' perspectives is crucial to provide feedback in terms of the students 'learning experiences. Studies regarding the students' perception of using learning media in the pandemic Covid-19 have been remarkable, (Peimani., & Kamalipour, 2021; Pal & Patra, 2021; Paramahita, 2021; Windy, 2021; Dhamayanti, 202i). Next, particular studies which focus on Duolingo also have been existed (Hafifah, 2021; Jiang,

Rollinson, Chen, Reuveni, Gustafson, Plonsky, & Pajak, 2021; Kessler, 2021; Burstein, LaFlair, Kunnan & von Davier, 2021; Shortt, Tilak, Kuznetcova, Martens & Akinkuolie, 2021; Loewen, Crowther, Isbell, Kim, Maloney, Miller & Rawal, ,2019; Muddin, 2018).

However, there is still limited relevant study about students' perception toward Duolingo, it was only found in Dewangga's and Jaelani's studies. Dewangga's focus is to investigate university students' perceptions (Dewangga, 2020) while Jaelani's focus is to explore Junior High School (JHS) Students' perceptions (Jaelani, & Sutari, 2021). There is still no available scientific article on how Senior High School (SHS) students perceive Duolingo application in English language learning.

Hence, this study is important to explore how SHS students perceive the application of Duolingo in their English language learning. The result of this study is expected to serve new theory and be a basis for further research and further strategy for SHS teachers in using digital technology as a means in their language teaching and learning process.

Methods

This study applies a qualitative descriptive method. The primary data was taken from 30 SHS students of SMA 8 Batam, and the secondary data are taken from various relevant research articles from the year 2017-2021 The questionnaire is on 4 Likert scales which was modified from four components of the instrument of Information Technology Innovation developed by Moore and Benbasat (2001) namely relative advantage, ease of use, and compatibility, and image. The data was gathered by sending the online questionnaire, doing semi-structured interview and literature review. Finally, the data is analyzed descriptively.

Result and Discussion

This study investigates how SHS students perceive the use of the Duolingo Application (DA). There were four indicators adapted from Moore and Basbate which was directed to examine students' perceptions; are Relative Advantage (RA), Ease of Use (EU), Compatibility (C), and Image (I) Research results can be seen in the following figure:
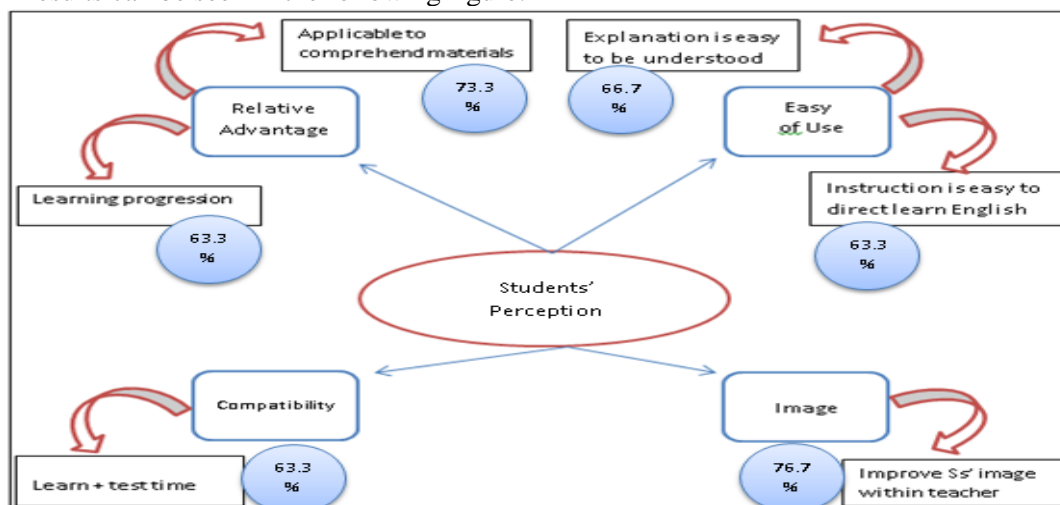

Figure 1. The result of Students Perception toward Duolingo

Investigating students' perception refers to the process of perceiving sensory information involves gaining awareness of or understanding it from students' view (Qiong,2017). It is crucial to achieving feedback from students' learning experiences. In terms of applying Duolingo as a means of learning English, it has to consider what are students experience while learning English utilizing Duolingo application? The answers are elaborated as follows:

First, regarding relative advantage, its focus is to investigate whether students receive better advantage through DA than previous learning media. The data show that DA is applicable to comprehend English learning content; it is valued positively which is indicating 66.7%. It is emphasized with students' interview results:

*"In my opinion, **I understand very well by being given clear material** from the Duolingo application and helping step by step in memorizing **vocabulary"***
*"Duolingo app is **easy to understand and the explanation of the material is also clear**"*

Besides that, the interview result above also shows that DA provides an advantage to promote students' learning progression (76.7%) particularly in Vocabulary, as the other student said: *"in my opinion, Duolingo app is very interesting because this app is good to use and teach a lot of language and **vocabulary**"*.It is in accordance with the two studies from Muddin A (2018) and Jaelani, Alan; Sutari, Dilla Rachmadanti,2021, they emphasize that DA is effective media to improve students' vocabulary. Moreover, students' respond to this study specify what English skills was progressed. students perceive that DA was applicable for writing because she said DA is possible to compose sentences as stated in review data: *"I love it, miss, because Duolingo app can **compose sentences, guess picture and much more can be learned**"*.

Above and beyond, Jiang, et all (2021) and Hafifah (2021) study prove that DA is also effective to teach and improving students' speaking skill. Therefore, it can be concluded that Duolingo is prospective to help a teacher to adapt the available materials in the DA and help learners understand the learning content or materials. This finding is relevant to Dewangga's study (2020) that DA features are helpful for the student in mastering English. Though, this is inversely proportional to what was written by Loewen, Crowther, Isbell, Kim, Maloney, Miller & Rawal, (2019). That their respondents expressed frustration with instructional materials provided in DA.

Next, in terms of Ease of Use, it focuses to explore the degree to which students believe that using the Duolingo Application is free of mental and physical effort. The finding shows that both instruction (66.7%) and explanation (63,3%) provided by DA are understandable. Students do have not to think hard and do much energy to involve in the instruction. DA come up with the concept of learning through games, and it makes students enjoy it and have fun English learning. It is relevant to Kessler, Matt (2021) study that he conclude students' perception toward learning activities in Duolingo is beneficial and enjoyable. Then, it is strengthened with the interview result as follows:

*"I think, it is clear Mis, because Duolingo app is about **learning English easily** and **fun Miss**"*
*"Yes, it is very clear Miss. The app is **learning while playing** and I am happy to use the app is not boring".*
*"Duolingo app **is easy to understand** and the app can **learn and play**"*

It is also in line with a study by Huynh, Zuo & Iida (2018) who concluded that there is a 'Winning Streak" element of educational gamified in Duolingo. It transforms the regular learning activity to be serious gaming language learning. Then, Loewen, S., Crowther, Isbell, Kim, Maloney, Miller & Rawal, (2019) also noted that their research respondents perceived DA's flexibility and gamification. Nonetheless, because DA is online-based media, students perceived difficult for them to use it with unstable or no internet connection. It is relevant to the study proposed by Muddin (2018) and Jaelani & Sutari (2021). Moreover, students perceived the layout as not interesting, it is too colorful, and there is repetition in terms of vocabulary used. It is as stated in the interview result below:

*"not interesting I use this application which is **too colorful and there is always a repetition of vocabulary."***
*"less interesting because it is **too colorful and less varied in vocabulary**, miss."*

Then, concerning Compatibility, it refers to the level of students perceive DA to be congruent with their current values, needs, and previous experiences. The result data performs DA is suitable to learners' learning needs and time required(63%). It is because DA offers some stages in learning that can be chosen by students according to their level. It is relevant to a study done by Jiang, Rollinson, J., Plonsky & Pajak (2020). They summarize there is beginning until the difficult level in Duolingo, and each level comprises some units language learning. Then the proficiency of the score level is comparable to the students at higher or university level. It is also confirmed through the interview that students said:

*"Yes, Duolingo app very interest Miss. Because Duolingo app fun learning **and there is a level-up** for those who have completed the tests." "I like it and not boring because **there are some levels** for those who have completed the tests."*

Lastly, about Image, it emphasizes the degree to which the use of DA is perceived to enhance students' status by his/her teachers, friends, or classroom. The data in Figure 1 shows 76% of students feel the confidence to talk to their teachers, and even possible to speak to English native speakers. It is because DA is not only for language learning but also to level up English Proficiency. It is such an idea by Burstein, LaFlair, Kunnan, & von Davier (2021). Who mentions Duolingo is An innovative, digital-first, computer-adaptive English language proficiency test.

Conclusion

This study aims at investigating students' perception toward the implementation of Duolingo Application as English learning media. There are four indicators to be measured, First, in terms of the degree to which DA is perceived as being better. Students perceive DA as sharing advantages to comprehend English language learning, promote students' English learning progression, and motivate students to enjoy English language learning, and to practicing with gamification-based learning. Second, in term of Ease of Use, The finding shows that both instruction and explanation is understandable, and easy to be learned. DA come up with the concept of learning through games, and it makes students enjoy and have fun in English language learning. Third, concerning Compatibility, The result performs DA is suitable for learning English. Fourth the learning needs encourage required it possible to be chosen by students according to their level. Fourth, DA encourages students' confidence. Overall students perceive positively the application of Duolingo in English language learning at SHS Schools students. It is promising to help teachers teach English. It can be concluded that this study is relevant to the previous study in term of students' perception about Duolingo at University students by Dewangga (2020) and at Junior High School students by Jaelani & Sutari, (2021). However, SHS students perceived negatively the colorful layout and vocabulary repetition/monotonous in DA.

Acknowledgments

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