
The use of Duolingo in EFL learning: Students' and teacher's perception

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the use of Duolingo as a supplementary learning tool for Grade VIII students at SMP Mardi Yuana Rangkasbitung. Through interviews with the English teacher and ten students, the findings reveal high levels of engagement, with learners describing the app as game-like, convenient, and motivating. The teacher assigns two to three weekly missions to support out-of-class vocabulary practice, and this strategy aligns with broader research emphasizing the benefits of gamification for sustaining learner interest. While Duolingo's features—such as streaks, badges, and instant feedback—enhance students' motivation, both teacher and learners recognize potential risks related to digital distraction and screen overuse. To mitigate these issues, the teacher limits each homework session to 15 minutes and requires handwritten reflections to promote metacognitive awareness.

1. INTRODUCTION

Approximately 32% of people on the planet today are Gen Z pupils (Moorthy, 2023). They are frequently characterized as judgmental, unintelligent, and stereotyped, but they are also characterized as devoted, caring, considerate, tolerant, accountable, and resolute (Seemiller & Grace, 2016). Although it's unclear if members of Generation Z can be classified as such, they all have the trait of being digital natives (Pearson, 2018; Seemiller & Grace, 2016). They use a variety of technologies from an early age because they are the first generation to have never known a time without the Internet (Miliou & Angeli, 2021; Mohr & Mohr, 2017, Pearson, 2018; Seemiller & Grace, 2016).

In addition to using technology in their leisure time, Gen Z students are also exposed to it in their academic pursuits. Technology offers Gen Z students a compelling approach to learn, whether it is through the creation of presentations or the use of virtual reality, interactive simulations, and augmented reality (Kilag et al., 2023). The evolution of education itself reflects the relationship between learning and technology use. One important aspect of the twenty-first century has been the incorporation of technology into education. The goal of Education 4.0 was to connect technologies already in use with education, society, and businesses by integrating Industry 4.0 technologies (such as the Internet of Things, artificial intelligence, machine learning, and gamification) into education. In order to prepare students for the modern workforce, this method places a strong emphasis on digital literacy, critical thinking, and experiential learning (González-Pérez & Remírez-Montoya, 2022; Himmertoglu, Aydug & Bayrak, 2020; Kim, 2022).

On the other hand, Education 5.0 expands on these ideas by highlighting a seamless fusion of technology and human intelligence, in which AI works with students in addition to providing help. Through immersive technologies like augmented and virtual reality, it fosters critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills while promoting adaptive learning settings that meet individual learning needs (Rane et al., 2023). Personalized approaches, an adaptive learning environment, and interactive and experimental learning—such as the use of augmented reality to put students in real-world scenarios—are also features of

Education 4.0 and 5.0 that are essential for success in the modern and future worlds (Khandelwal et al., 2022; Rane et al., 2023).

The ability of the flipped classroom method to enhance language proficiency, particularly speaking, grammar, and communicative competence, has been extensively researched. After engaging in flipped classroom activities, research on Indonesian EFL learners have revealed notable post-test improvements (Lestari et al., 2024). By moving the delivery of knowledge to pre-class activities, this approach manages cognitive load and enables in-class sessions to concentrate on interactive learning and skill application (Xin & Zhang, 2024). The usefulness of flipped classrooms in higher education is highlighted by a meta-analysis, especially when structured preparatory activities are paired with in-person interactions (Chen et al., 2023). Meanwhile, by providing adaptive, gamified learning experiences, Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) has transformed self-directed learning, mostly through AI-powered apps like Duolingo. To improve motivation and self-efficacy, these applications incorporate gamification features such challenges, progress tracking, and incentives (Loewen et al., 2019). Compared to traditional techniques, studies indicate that mobile learning promotes sustainable and pleasant language acquisition (Jeong, 2022), however sustaining long-term engagement is still difficult.

2. METHOD

Using a qualitative descriptive approach based on semi-structured interviews, the study investigated how students and teacher viewed Duolingo as an AI-powered tool for learning English as a foreign language (EFL). At SMP Mardi Yuana Rangkasbitung, information was collected from a carefully chosen sample of 10 Grade VIII students and one English instructor who had either used or been exposed to Duolingo in the classroom throughout the 2024–2025 school year. Pseudonyms were used to maintain confidentiality, and the teacher, kids, and their guardians gave their informed consent before any data was collected. Interviews were used to obtain data. In analyzing data, Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis was utilized.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The interview data indicate a consistent and widespread use of Duolingo among students at *SMP Mardi Yuana Rangkasbitung*. The English teacher reported assigning “two or three Duolingo missions a week so pupils could rehearse vocabulary on the bus ride home,” noting that the platform’s badge and reward system helps sustain motivation, even among students who are typically reluctant to complete homework. All ten Grade VIII students confirmed they had completed multiple Duolingo assignments throughout the semester, and several described the tasks as “game-like” and “easier than worksheets,” with one student remarking that “the owl reminds me to study so I don’t forget.” These comments suggest that Duolingo is not only accessible and convenient but also effective in facilitating routine out-of-class practice.

Students’ positive attitudes toward Duolingo mirror findings from the broader literature. Studies such as Loewen et al. highlight that learners tend to appreciate the flexibility and gamification features of the app, which contribute to greater engagement and persistence. This aligns closely with our participants’ emphasis on streaks, colour-coded feedback, and instant scoring, which make English homework feel “less boring.” High motivation is particularly important in light of evidence from Vesselinov and Grego (2012), who found that approximately 34 hours of Duolingo exposure can produce learning gains roughly equivalent to one semester of formal instruction—provided learners maintain consistent usage. The students’ enthusiastic engagement indicates the app’s potential as a supplemental learning tool within under-resourced school contexts.

From the teacher’s perspective, the integration of mobile-assisted language learning is also well-aligned with the habits of Generation Z. As she explained, “Gen Z learns fastest when the lesson is already inside the device they love,” suggesting that smartphone-based tasks may meet learners where they are. Her stance resonates with a 2024 survey of North American educators in which 97% endorsed Duolingo as a reliable language learning support tool. However, in the local context, the teacher intentionally limits its use to homework rather than live classroom instruction to prevent excessive in-class screen time while still benefiting from the app’s motivational pull. This approach reflects a pragmatic balance between innovation and classroom management.

Despite the overall positive perceptions, both the teacher and students acknowledged potential drawbacks. Two students admitted that notifications from other applications sometimes “drag us to TikTok,” highlighting the risk of off-task behaviour when learning depends on personal devices. This concern is supported by studies showing that multitasking with phones or laptops during study is associated with lower academic performance. Additionally, research on children’s media exposure warns that excessive daily screen time can negatively influence language development, with one report citing a six-fold increase in language delay among children who spend two or more hours daily in front of screens. Although the students in this study fall outside the youngest risk group, the teacher has proactively introduced safeguards by limiting homework sessions to 15 minutes and requiring handwritten reflections, which encourage metacognitive

awareness and reduce passive interaction with the app. These measures underscore the importance of balancing technological benefits with mindful, guided use.

4. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that Duolingo serves as an effective supplementary tool for supporting English language learning among Grade VIII students at SMP Mardi Yuana Rangkasbitung. Students showed consistent engagement with the app and expressed high levels of enthusiasm toward its gamified features, which made out-of-class learning feel enjoyable and accessible. The teacher's deliberate use of Duolingo as homework rather than in-class instruction also proved strategic, allowing her to leverage students' digital habits without increasing classroom distractions. At the same time, concerns about off-task mobile use and excessive screen exposure highlight the importance of implementing practical safeguards. By limiting homework duration and requiring written reflections, the teacher successfully balanced motivation with metacognitive development.

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