

# Students' perceptions regarding the use of Duolingo to enhance grammar learning

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## Abstract

English grammar is still particularly challenging for EFL students; a language learning application like Duolingo, provides interactive exercises with gamified elements. While many studies emphasize the role of technology in language education, research on students' perceptions of using specific applications like Duolingo for grammar learning remains limited. Duolingo is widely praised for its interactive learning approach; there is a disconnect between its theoretical promise to enhance grammar skills and its practical effectiveness in this area, with some users reporting limited progress in grammar compared to other language components. This study investigated students' perceptions of using Duolingo to enhance English grammar learning through a descriptive qualitative approach, utilizing semi-structured interview with 15 students. Data were collected through a face-to-face interview. The findings revealed that students perceive Duolingo as an engaging and flexible tool to enhance grammar learning due to its gamification features and accessibility. Duolingo effectively supported basic grammar comprehension and motivated learners to engage in learning actively. However, students highlighted limitations, including the lack of in-depth explanations for complex grammar rules and challenges such as technical issues and pressure from the grading system. While Duolingo was viewed as a complementary tool, students emphasized integrating it with conventional classroom instruction to enhance comprehension through direct interaction and feedback. These findings suggest combining Duolingo with face-to-face instruction could provide a more balanced and practical approach to grammar learning.

**Keywords:** Duolingo; grammar learning; learning media

## INTRODUCTION

English proficiency has become an essential skill for academic and professional success. One of the most crucial aspects of the English language, particularly for EFL students, is grammar (Ahmad, 2017). Structurally, students' ability to express it is based on grammar. If they know grammar, they can observe the meaning and effectiveness of their language use (Hossain, 2017). Many students face difficulties and challenges in mastering grammar due to its complexity and the need for practice and consistency, especially in English as a foreign language (EFL). Conventional teaching often focuses on memorizing formulas or rules in tenses and repetitive exercises, which can make students disinterested.



In this digital era, some technologies have revolutionized language learning. Considered a new development in e-learning, mobile learning offers the chance to learn more effectively and efficiently (Bourekache & Kazar, 2020). One of the most popular language-learning applications is Duolingo, which has been downloaded by many users from all around the world due to its interactive and gamified approach to language acquisition. It offers an alternative method for practicing grammar through interactive exercises that integrate grammar with vocabulary and sentence construction, making the learning process more enjoyable and practical to do anytime and anywhere. According to Fauzan and Kasim (2020), in Indonesia, the use of integrated media in learning is starting to be done in some schools, especially in provincial capitals or big cities. However, despite the effectiveness of Duolingo in enhancing language proficiency through gamification, there is still little evidence regarding its effects on specific areas of language learning, such as grammar.

Even though Duolingo has been widely used, some important aspects of its usage and effectiveness remain unclear. For example, students' perception of using Duolingo to enhance their grammar learning is still minimal. Several previous studies have primarily focused on the general impact of Duolingo on grammar learning. They are research conducted by Redjeki and Muhajir (2020); Fadhilawati et al. (2023); Fatmawati et al. (2023); Youlanda and Wariyati (2023). The research findings show that students find Duolingo engaging and beneficial to their learning process, which helps improve their comprehension of grammar rules (Redjeki & Muhajir, 2020). Fadhilawati et al. (2023) found that students appreciated interactive methods that made learning fun and less intimidating, encouraging a more conducive learning environment. The study conducted by Fatmawati et al. (2023) showed a significant increase in vocabulary acquisition and overall language skills when using digital devices compared to conventional methods. The findings are further supported by Youlanda and Wariyati (2023), who noted that applications like Duolingo improve vocabulary and grammar and increase students' motivation to engage with the language outside formal educational settings.

Meanwhile, Fadilah (2022) conducted research on students' perceptions of using Duolingo in English language learning. The study focused on general language skills and did not specifically address grammar learning. Similarly, Purwanto and Syafryadin (2023) examined students' perceptions of Duolingo's effectiveness, particularly in vocabulary acquisition, highlighting its accessibility and motivational aspects. Another study shows that although most students perceive Duolingo as a valuable and motivating tool for learning English, there is an inconsistency between their views and their use of the app due to a lack of time to use it consistently (Inayah et al., 2020). Most studies have a general overview that this application significantly impacts language learning; more specifically, grammar is studied very little, with someone tackling its function. Exploring student perceptions is very important, as it can provide insights into the effectiveness of applications and potential areas for improvement. In addition, this research can guide educators in integrating technology into their teaching practices to maximize student engagement and learning outcomes.

Consequently, this research fills this gap by investigating students' perceptions of using Duolingo to enhance their English grammar learning. By focusing on the students' subjective experiences, this research hopes to add to the literature on the role of technology in language education and provide practical recommendations for teachers and students.

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## Duolingo

Duolingo uses entertaining gamification features to encourage English language learning. It is a language learning application based on gamification to teach foreign languages, it can be installed on the web and mobile such as iOS and Android, to encourage users, and the software employs gamification strategies like leaderboards, streaks, and points (Munday, 2016). These components foster the regular involvement that is necessary for language acquisition. Some of the key features of Duolingo that make it a helpful tool for self-directed language learning are as follows: Learning outside of the classroom, gamification, adaptive learning, and bite-sized instruction (Dhari, 2024). Gamification, which includes points, levels, and daily rewards, has increased user engagement and retention. As revealed by Loewen et al. (2019), the features make language learning more fun and encourage users to learn consistently daily. Teachers can improve their students' grammar proficiency by implementing Duolingo into the classroom and taking advantage of its features, which include interactive activities, real-time feedback, and engaging content (Fadhilawati et al., 2023). One of the best features of the program, according to many reviews, is Duolingo Stories, which blends interesting content with helpful instruction on reading, listening, and comprehending dialogues (Redjeki & Muhajir, 2020).

## Students' perceptions of Duolingo

Gregory (2015) defines perception as an active process involving the brain's interpretation of sensory information, forming meaning through previous experiences and knowledge to make sense of information that may be incomplete or ambiguous. In education, students also have perceptions about the methods and tools used by their teachers. Students' perceptions are formed based on the platform's effectiveness, convenience, and appeal when using an app like Duolingo. Students are happy and interested in using Duolingo because it does not appear monotonous, and students can start from basic, intermediate, or high, depending on their abilities, before beginning to learn (Novitasari & Purnamaningsih, 2022). It is also supported by Fadilah (2022) that the use of Duolingo can make the students interested in learning and understand more about the learning material, as well as pay attention to class management. It can be concluded that Duolingo can increase students' interest and motivation to learn, help them understand the material better, and pay attention to classroom management.

## Grammar learning

Grammar learning can be defined as the process by which students acquire language rules and structures to improve their communication skills (Mahdin et al., 2019). This aligns with the research conducted by Baron (2020), which states that grammar serves as one of the fundamental pillars of language, without which effective communication is impossible. Roca and Manla (2023) further argue that grammar is essential to ensure clarity and precision in oral and written communication. In addition, students who have mastered learning grammar can convey information, exchange ideas, and communicate (Imanudin et al., 2021). Learning grammar is an important process that enables students to grasp the rules and structures of language to improve their communication skills clearly and accurately in spoken and written forms.

## Benefits of grammar learning in English language learning

Improving linguistic accuracy is one of the most well-known advantages of learning grammar. Rosmiaty et al. (2023) showed that explicit grammar instruction can improve students' writing skills, including sentence structure, cohesion, and overall text quality. Learning grammar can improve language accuracy, ensure clear communication, prevent misunderstandings, and help create a good impression (Qizi, 2023). According to Hossain

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(2017), students cannot use English confidently and flawlessly if they do not grasp its grammatical principles. It can be said that mastering grammar is crucial for increasing writing proficiency, linguistic precision, clear communication, avoiding misunderstandings, and self-assurance when using English successfully. Students are not able to use English accurately or with confidence if they do not have a solid command of grammar.

## METHOD

In this research, the researchers used descriptive qualitative study. As Creswell (2009) defined it, qualitative study is an approach to exploring and understanding the meanings individuals or groups attribute to a social or human problem. This study used it to understand the students' perceptions of using Duolingo to enhance grammar learning. This method is highly suitable for investigating the depth and complexity of individual and subjective experiences, making it well-aligned with the research question.

## Respondents

The respondents were taken from an informal education at a course in Pare with a total number of students is about 15 students consisting of 8 females and 7 males aged 18-25 years with basic level skills. Those students had one month of experience using Duolingo. A purposive sampling method was used to select the respondents. The researchers selected the students as they are considered representative in providing various perceptions on using Duolingo to enhance grammar learning. The students also have characteristics that suit the purpose of the study, such as a relatively high level of student engagement and variations in grammar ability.

## Instruments

The researchers used interviews. In order to achieve a balance between structure and flexibility, a semi-structured interview was utilized. In this method, the interviewer had a predetermined list of questions but still provided flexibility to explore further or dig deeper into the respondents' answers based on their responses. To enhance the data validity, respondent validation was employed, where participants were asked to review and confirm the accuracy of the interpretations. This ensured that the researchers' interpretations aligned with the respondents' intended meanings and reduced potential misinterpretations. The participants had discussions that covered various topics, including motive, opinions about learning grammar with Duolingo, advantages, disadvantages, and comparison with another method (Dhari, 2024; Irzawati & Unamo, 2023). The researchers asked questions, and the respondents answered them in depth. There were 5 questions, and the interview was conducted face-to-face to obtain clear and in-depth information using audio recording.

## Procedures

For the first step, the researchers asked permission to the course where the study was conducted. The researchers set up a meeting with the selected respondents who had been chosen based on the research criteria: they were active Duolingo users with relatively similar grammar proficiency levels. It was done after obtaining permission. The meeting was conducted face-to-face. The interviewer ensured that the respondents had given permission for the interview to be recorded throughout the conversation and explained the goal of the study to them. Prepared questions were asked at the start of the interview, but the interviewer was free to offer follow-up questions in response to the respondents'

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responses. Every interview was captured using audio recording so that the material could be subsequently analyzed and transcribed.

## **Data analysis**

According to Creswell (2014), six processes were involved in data analysis. First, data were arranged and ready for analysis, including interview transcription. The second was reviewing the information to gain a broad understanding and jot down preliminary thoughts. The third involved using the coding process to carry out in-depth analysis. The fourth step was creating themes and descriptions using the coded data. The next stage was to present the results in a narrative format with themes, quotes, and various participant viewpoints. Interpreting the data was the last phase. Analytic generalization was used to interpret the data.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Students' perceptions regarding the use of Duolingo to enhance grammar learning**

Participants' responses during the interviews provided valuable insights into their experiences using Duolingo to enhance their grammar learning. The following excerpts from the interviews highlight key themes, such as motivation, perception of grammar learning, advantages, challenges faced, and comparison with conventional learning. These responses were analyzed to better understand students' perceptions, how Duolingo contributed to their language learning process, and their challenges.

#### ***Motive***

The results showed that the main motivation of participants in using Duolingo to learn grammar was because the platform offered flexibility, interactive learning methods, and a fun experience. Most respondents considered learning with Duolingo not boring because it is packaged like a game. Shortt et al. (2023) found that gamification elements such as point systems, levels, and reward incentives increased user engagement and learning motivation. It is proven by what was conveyed by respondent 1, "Because in Duolingo, you can play while learning, so it's not boring when learning." In addition, several respondents appreciated its flexibility, as expressed by Respondent 3: "Duolingo can be used anywhere and anytime. Very flexible." These findings align with reports that Duolingo is designed for self-paced learning outside the classroom, allowing users to study on their schedule via any device (Dhari, 2024). This flexibility makes it easy for participants to integrate language learning into their daily routines without time or place constraints. Another motivating factor was the desire to deepen grammar skills for long-term goals, as expressed by Respondent 5: "I want to understand English more deeply, especially grammar for the future." Competitions and rankings in the application also encouraged enthusiasm for learning, as admitted by Respondent 9: "Because I like to play, and there are competitions in Duolingo that make me more enthusiastic." The main motivation for using Duolingo lies in its flexibility, interactive approach, and gamification elements that increase engagement and enable the integration of learning into daily routines.

#### ***Grammar learning***

Participants generally had positive perceptions of grammar learning using Duolingo, although there were some shortcomings. Respondent 2 highlighted the clarity of the learning stages: "Clear stages make learning easy to understand." However, some respondents felt that grammar learning was not in-depth enough, as Respondent 1 said:

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"Fun, but sometimes confusing because the explanations incomplete." Respondent 5 added that the platform is more suitable for users with basic grammar: "Less suitable for beginners because it focuses more on vocabulary." It shows that Duolingo is effective for grammar enrichment but requires assistance for beginner learners. These results reflect the duality of participants' experiences in using Duolingo. On the one hand, clear learning stages and an interactive format can increase interest in learning and provide a fun learning experience. On the other hand, the lack of in-depth explanations of grammar is a challenge, especially for beginners who need more structured guidance.

### ***Advantages***

Duolingo is considered to provide significant benefits in learning grammar. Some main benefits include increasing vocabulary and grammar knowledge and developing other skills, such as speaking and listening. It is supported by research from [Fadilah \(2022\)](#) that Duolingo can help students learn English, especially listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Respondent 1 said, "There are speaking and listening features that make learning feel like playing." Respondent 2 also emphasized the completeness of the tense material in this application: "The arrangement of tenses in Duolingo is complete, helping to improve accuracy." It is consistent with previous research from [Redjeki and Muhajir \(2020\)](#) showing that Duolingo can help students reduce grammatical errors in their writing and improve their understanding of language structures. In addition, this application allows learners to interact with other users from various countries, as expressed by Respondent 9: "Enriching vocabulary and learning with friends from other countries." The direct correction feature also helps users understand their mistakes, as admitted by Respondent 13: "After doing the exercises in Duolingo, I can remember grammar rules such as the use of 's' for a singular subject in the simple present tense." This finding aligns with research conducted by [Fatmawati et al. \(2023\)](#), which shows a significant influence of the Duolingo application on students' mastery of the simple present tense.

### ***Challenges faced***

Although Duolingo offers a variety of benefits, respondents identified some challenges. One of the main challenges is the need to be careful in answering questions because a small mistake can cause you to lose your "life," as expressed by Respondent 1: "You have to be careful because a small mistake can cause you to lose your 'life.'" In addition, unstable internet connections often disrupt learning, as Respondent 2 complained: "Unstable internet, especially during speaking sessions." Some respondents also felt that the vocabulary choices used sometimes did not match their habits, as expressed by Respondent 9: "Duolingo sometimes only accepts certain vocabulary, for example, 'search' instead of 'look for.'" Another obstacle is the limited features in the free version, as acknowledged by Respondent 13: "My heart runs out quickly in the free version, making me lazy to continue learning." Even though Duolingo has great potential as a technology-based learning tool, these findings highlight challenges that can impact users' learning experiences. Duolingo's "lives" system, designed to increase attention to detail, can pressure for users. These risks reduce motivation to learn, especially for students who may make minor mistakes. Additionally, the reliance on a stable internet connection creates barriers where internet access is suboptimal, as is often the case in areas with limited digital infrastructure.

### ***Comparison with conventional learning***

A significant difference was found between grammar learning in the classroom and using Duolingo. Respondents considered that classroom learning was more focused and allowed

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them to ask questions directly to the teacher, as expressed by Respondent 2: "In class, you can ask questions directly." However, classroom learning is often monotonous, while Duolingo is more fun because it uses a game system. Respondent 1 stated, "In class, it is sometimes monotonous, while in Duolingo, it is like playing a game." The flexibility of time is also an advantage of Duolingo, as acknowledged by Respondent 5: "In Duolingo, we can learn anytime and however we want." However, some respondents felt that Duolingo and classroom learning complement each other, with the class providing a theoretical basis and Duolingo serving as a support. The interview results showed a difference in the experience of learning grammar in class compared to using Duolingo. Classroom learning is considered more structured because of direct interaction with the teacher, which allows students to ask questions and receive detailed explanations. However, classroom learning is often considered monotonous. On the other hand, Duolingo offers a more engaging approach through gamification, creating a fun learning environment that increases students' motivation.

## CONCLUSION

The results of this study indicate that Duolingo has excellent potential to improve grammar learning. Participants generally perceive this application positively because of the similarity of time, interactive approach, and gamification elements that can increase learning motivation. Duolingo provides a fun learning experience by integrating learning into daily routines and enriching grammar and other skills such as listening and speaking. However, this study also found several challenges, such as the need for a stable internet connection, limited features in the free version, and lack of in-depth understanding of grammar, which are obstacles for novice users. The "lives" system in the application also sometimes provides additional pressure that can reduce learning motivation.

In addition, compared to classroom learning, Duolingo is considered more flexible and engaging. However, classroom learning is still meaningful in providing a more focused theoretical foundation and allowing direct interaction with teachers. Therefore, combining classroom learning and using Duolingo as a supporting tool can create a more balanced and practical learning experience. This study contributes to developing technology-based English learning methods, although it is still limited to English course students in Pare. Further research is recommended to explore ways to integrate Duolingo with face-to-face learning and solutions to challenges, such as adding more in-depth grammar explanation features.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

Author 1: Conceptualization, Methodology, and Writing Manuscript. Author 2: Validation, Theoretical Analysis, and Reviewing

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**Conflict of Interest Statement:** The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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## APPENDIX

This is a list of questions used in the interview. The questions are adapted from [Irzawati and Unamo \(2023\)](#)

Table 1. Interview Sheet

No	Questions
1.	What was your reason for choosing Duolingo to learn grammar?
2.	What do you think about learning grammar through Duolingo?
3.	In your opinion, what are the advantages of using Duolingo when learning grammar?
4.	What disadvantages or challenges do you experience when using Duolingo to learn grammar?
5.	What do you think about the comparison between studying using Duolingo and studying in class or through textbooks?