

## **DUOLINGO & English Vocabulary: How Students Acquire New Vocabulary by Playing the Game**

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doi: <https://doi.org/10.37745/ijelt.13/vol12n418>

Published June 30, 2024

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**Citation:** Maya Amelia (2024) DUOLINGO & English Vocabulary: How Students Acquire New Vocabulary by Playing the Game, *International Journal of English Language Teaching*, Vol.12, No.4, pp.1-8

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**ABSTRACT:** *This article discusses about the use of an android mobile application, Duolingo, to improve students of junior high school vocabulary mastery. Purpose of study: The study aims to find out how is the process of the students acquire vocabulary through playing the game? and, can the application improve the student's vocabulary mastery? Method: It is a case study involving 30 students as participants. Questionnaires and vocabulary Test were given to the students after playing the game for several times. Result: It is found that most of the students are excited and enjoying playing the game. Gamification is the most favorite features according to them. They acquire many vocabularies after playing the game based on the vocabulary Test result. Conclusion: It is concluded that Duolingo, an android application, is increasing the student's motivation in learning English as well as improves their vocabulary mastery.*

**KEYWORDS:** Duolingo, English vocabulary, vocabulary acquisition, game in teaching, vocabulary mastery

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Mastering vocabulary is assumed to be an important aspect of learning English for students. It is required for all language skills and is essential for communication with others. Students can only improve their language skills if they have mastered vocabulary. Vocabulary teaching and learning is central to the theory of ELT. Words have a central place in culture, and learning words is seen by many as the main task (an obstacle) in learning another language. Interest in vocabulary - from researchers, teachers and teacher researchers - is likely to continue to grow a pace. (Carter, 2001)

Teaching vocabulary to students is not always simple, as a result of their exposure to music and movies, young people are frequently viewed with aloofness. Nonetheless, acquiring new vocabulary expands one's ability to speak, write, and comprehend English. There are many ways of strategy that can be used by students to improve their vocabulary mastery. However, not many students know how the effective ways to improve their vocabulary in English. Those who had low achievement in vocabulary master indicated difficulties in vocabulary learning. Teachers must use creative methods and exciting media to introduce students to the language and help them develop their vocabulary. Patesan et al (2019) states that vocabulary should be recognized as a central element in language teaching, as English has the "largest vocabulary in the world." Educated native speakers of English are supposed to know approximately 20,000-word families or 70,000 words, while educated non-native speakers know less than one quarter of the native speakers' vocabulary. (PATEŞAN, BALAGIU, ZECHIA, & Bălcescu, 2019)

Technology has brought people into a new era of teaching and learning, making the learning process more attractive, flexible, and motivating. It also increases learning productivity and efficiency. Students can use computers, the internet, or other technology to help them learn, and they can download language learning applications to help them in the language learning process. One of the popular application among the students to be used to learn English from their smartphone is Duolingo.

Many research has shown the effect of Duolingo, as an android application, for learning English. Marisa and Mulyani (2023) seek to determine ways to improve Duolingo's usage for English language learning in Indonesia, keeping in mind concerns about accessibility, efficacy, and other elements that might have an impact on their students' academic performance. (Mulyani & Suryadi, 2023). Meanwhile, based on her research Sari states that Duolingo is a solution for teachers to teach vocabulary (Sari L. P., 2023) The students' perceptions of learning vocabulary through Duolingo were overwhelmingly favorable. The application was found to be effective in learning vocabulary because it is simple to use, entertaining, fun, and free of advertisements. (Sari, Hadina, & Yoni, 2023)

## **METHOD**

The study however was conducted at the junior high school. The study aims to find out how is the process of the students acquire vocabulary through playing the game? Can the application improve the students' vocabulary mastery? It is a case study involving 30 students as participants.

Questionnaires and vocabulary Test were given to the students after playing the game for several times.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### *How is the process of the students acquiring vocabulary through playing the game?*

This first finding tells about the process occurred since the beginning to the end of the lesson to describe the condition of the students before introduced with the application, after they installed the application into their phones, as well as the situation while the students were experiencing playing the game of English with Duolingo.

### *Students smartphones*

Duolingo is an android application that were not already known by most of the students in junior high school at the time of the research. Most of the students were having their own smartphones, but most of the application installed in their smartphones were war games such as Mobile Legend, FF, and some football games. The memory was already full by the game, so they were asked to uninstall one or two application before installing Duolingo into their phones. For the record that not all of students had smartphones ready to install the game, so the class were divided into groups.

### *Introducing Duolingo*

Having known that the students were not familiar with Duolingo application, and this was the first time for them to be asked to install the game that specifically utilized for improving their vocabulary, the researcher introduced the application and taught the students how to play the game in the app. By displaying the content of the laptop the application that can also be accessed through the google chrome browser, the students were asked one by one to answer and complete the task given on the display. The class becoming noise because they scrambled to participate answering the task.

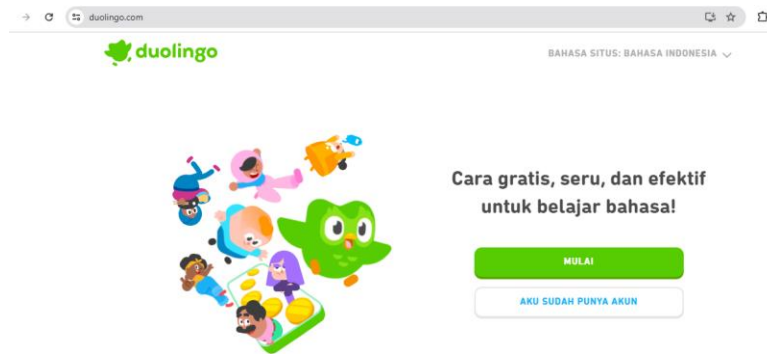


Figure 1 Accessing Duolingo through browser on PC/Laptop

#### *Duolingo on the students' smartphone*

After several times working together completing the task from Duolingo displayed from the researcher computer, the students were instructed to install the application into their phone. The class then was divided into six groups consists of five students for each group. Each group had two or three smartphones installed with the application. They started to play the game started from the very beginner level guided by the researcher.



Figure 2 screenshot of Duolingo on student's smartphone

#### *Can the application improve the students' vocabulary mastery?*

Questionnaire were given to students after they were playing the game for several times. The spent about 45 minutes to play the game before answering the questions related to their experience learning English using Duolingo. Follows are the result of the responses given by students after playing the game.

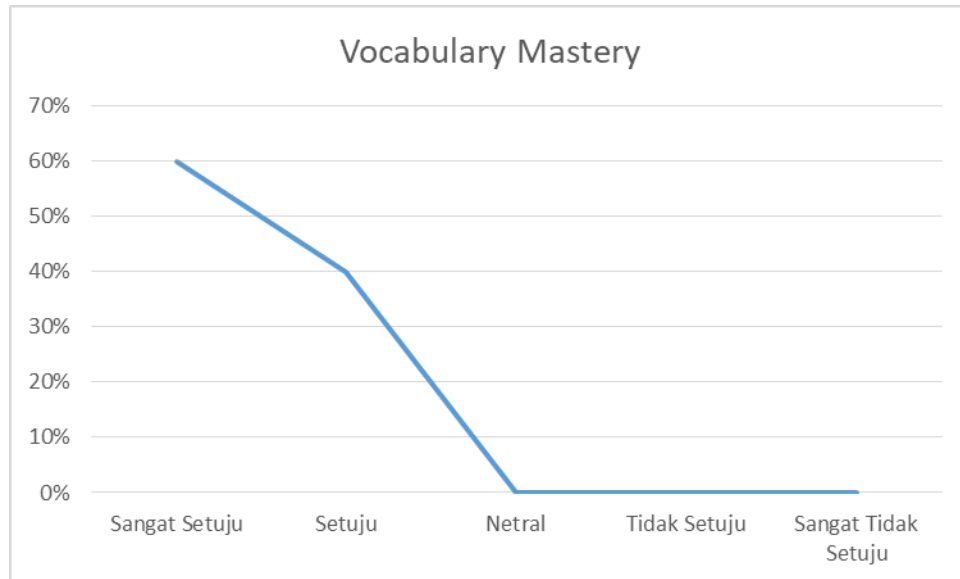
Question: *Do you feel you're learning motivation has increased after playing Duolingo games?*



*Graphic 1. Student's motivation toward learning English through Duolingo*

Based on the graphic 1 above, which asked whether their motivation improved after playing and learning English vocabulary through Duolingo, it shows that 77% students have chosen “Highly Improved”, 3% “Improved”, and 0% (zero percentage) for the answer. It can be concluded that most of the students were motivated in learning English using Duolingo.

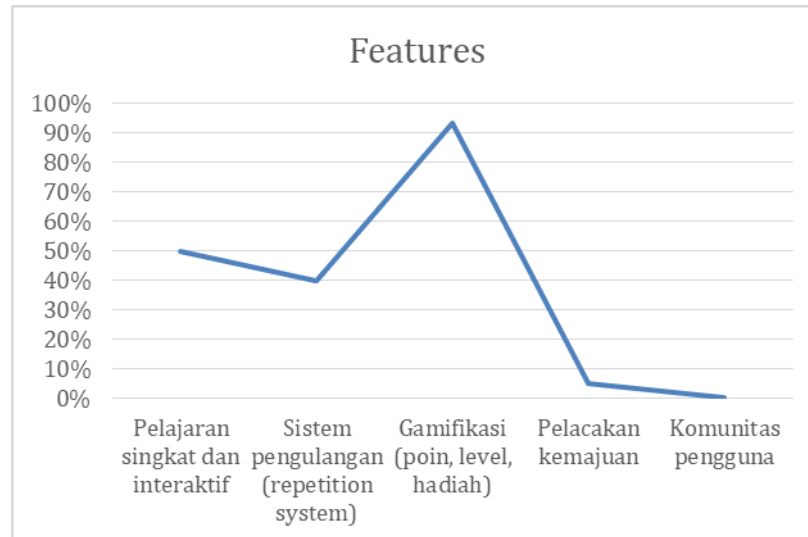
Question 2: To what extent do you agree with the following statement: "Duolingo helped me improve my English vocabulary."



*Graphic 2. Student's response toward Duolingo for improving their English vocabulary*

Question two was asking the students about their agreement toward the statement stating that Duolingo is improving their English vocabulary. The response was satisfying because 60% of students stated very agree, 40% were agree, and zero percent for other three options. It means that all of the student's vocabulary were improved by playing Duolingo.

Question 3: *What features do you like most about Duolingo for English vocabulary learning? (select all that apply)*



This question was giving a chance for students to choose multiple answer according to the features of game in Duolingo. It was found that 50% of the students, or about 15 students, choose the “Short and Interactive Lessons”, 40% of students, about 12 students choose Repetition system”, 93,3% or about 28 students choose “Gamification (points, levels, prizes), and the rest were zero percent.

Based on the discussion above describe that the process of the students acquiring vocabulary in by playing games in Duolingo was started by showing them about the important of using their smartphones for learning English especially in improving their vocabulary. Installing games that supporting the language learning should always be the main reminder for students regarding to their needs to improve their English. Furthermore, based on the questions given in the questionnaire shows that motivation in learning English can be started by teaching them about installing and playing Duolingo.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the findings that answering the research questions above it can be concluded that the playing Duolingo is increasing the student’s motivation in learning English as well as improves their vocabulary mastery. The students prefer the gamification feature of the game because of its level, point, and reward as the interesting things for them. However, deeper research that is investigating the use of Duolingo in improving students English skills is interesting to be conducted with more long term period of experiments.

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