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THE USE OF GAMIFICATION IN LANGUAGE LEARNING: A STUDY ON EFL STUDENTS USING DUOLINGO

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi bagaimana mahasiswa EFL (English as a Foreign Language) memanfaatkan fitur gamifikasi dalam aplikasi Duolingo serta bagaimana fitur-fitur tersebut memengaruhi motivasi dan keterlibatan mereka dalam pembelajaran bahasa Inggris. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan studi kasus kualitatif dengan melibatkan lima mahasiswa dari program studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris di salah satu universitas di Bogor sebagai partisipan. Data dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner tertutup dan wawancara semi-terstruktur. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa fitur gamifikasi seperti Experience Points (XP), streak harian, tantangan, dan papan peringkat digunakan secara aktif oleh mahasiswa sebagai alat bantu dalam membentuk rutinitas belajar mandiri dan meningkatkan semangat belajar. Fitur-fitur tersebut juga terbukti mampu mendorong motivasi intrinsik serta menciptakan keterlibatan belajar yang lebih tinggi dibandingkan metode pembelajaran konvensional. Kesimpulan dari penelitian ini adalah bahwa elemen gamifikasi pada Duolingo berperan penting dalam menciptakan pengalaman belajar yang menyenangkan, fleksibel, dan berkelanjutan bagi pelajar EFL. Implikasi dari temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa integrasi gamifikasi dalam pembelajaran digital dapat menjadi strategi yang efektif untuk meningkatkan kualitas pembelajaran bahasa asing, khususnya dalam konteks pendidikan tinggi.

Kata Kunci: *Gamifikasi, Duolingo, Motivasi, EFL*

ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore how EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students utilize gamification features in the Duolingo application and how these features influence their motivation and engagement in learning English. This research employed a qualitative case study approach involving five students from the English Education program at a university in Bogor as participants. Data were collected through closed-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The findings reveal that gamification features such as Experience Points (XP), daily streaks, challenges, and leaderboards are actively used by students as tools to build independent learning routines and enhance their learning enthusiasm. These features also significantly promote intrinsic motivation and foster greater engagement compared to traditional learning methods. The study concludes that gamification elements in Duolingo play a crucial role in creating a fun, flexible, and sustainable learning experience for EFL learners. The implication of these findings suggests that integrating gamification into digital learning can be an effective strategy to enhance the quality of foreign language education, particularly in higher education contexts.

Keywords: Gamification, Duolingo, Motivation, EFL

INTRODUCTION

Technological advancements in the 21st century have brought significant changes to the field of education, particularly in supporting more effective and interactive teaching and learning processes. One positive impact of this development is the increase in students' motivation and participation in learning when technology-based media are utilized in the classroom. According to Ahmad (2012), around 70% of students admitted that the use of technology-based media significantly increased their interest in learning. This aligns with the view of Yin and Fitzgerald (2015), who stated that technology-based learning media, including mobile learning, facilitate access to materials and enhance student engagement in the learning process.

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One innovation that has emerged from these technological developments is gamification, which refers to the application of game elements—such as points, badges, challenges, and leaderboards—in non-game contexts, including education (Deterding et al. 2011). According to Kapp (2012), gamification creates enjoyable learning experiences and can motivate students to actively participate in the learning process. These gamified elements have been shown to fulfill basic psychological needs such as competence, autonomy, and social connection (Hamari and Koivisto 2015), which are crucial for increasing learning motivation.

In the context of English language education in Indonesia, Redjeki and Muhajir (2021) demonstrated that the use of Duolingo as a gamified learning platform in EFL grammar classrooms significantly improved students' motivation and active involvement. Their study highlights that gamification is not only effective in theory but can also bring meaningful engagement and routine into real educational practice. This local finding further supports the relevance of gamification tools such as Duolingo in enhancing the language learning experience.

Duolingo is one of the most popular language learning applications that integrates gamification principles. Founded by Luis von Ahn and Severin Hacker in 2011, this application aims to provide quality language education accessible to everyone. With its engaging design and features such as XP (experience points), daily streaks, timed challenges, achievement badges, and leaderboards, Duolingo offers a fun "learn while playing" approach (Habibie 2020; Jašková 2014; Munday 2016).

For EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students, applications like Duolingo can serve as a solution to the limited opportunities for English practice in daily life. Duolingo enables them to practice independently, flexibly, and enjoyably. Several studies also show that consistent use of Duolingo can improve students' English skills in reading, writing, listening, and speaking (Fitriani and Mokodompit 2025; Gragera 2024). However, some limitations have also been noted, such as a lack of direct focus on communicative competence (Usrul Bin Sani 2023). Therefore, this study aims to explore how EFL students utilize gamification features in the Duolingo application and how these features influence their motivation and engagement in learning English.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative case study approach. The research was conducted at a university in Bogor, involving five students from the English Education program as participants. All participants had been actively using the Duolingo application for more than one month. The limited number of participants was deliberately chosen to allow the researcher to gather in-depth information about individual experiences.

Data were collected using two primary techniques: closed-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire used a five-point Likert scale to measure participants' perceptions of Duolingo's gamification features. Meanwhile, the interviews aimed to gain deeper qualitative insights into the participants' experiences and perspectives on the effectiveness of gamification in supporting English language learning.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the research findings and discussion, which aim to explain how EFL students utilize gamification features in the Duolingo application and the extent to which these features influence their motivation and engagement in learning English. Data were obtained through questionnaires and in-depth interviews with five respondents who had been using Duolingo for over a month. Based on the analysis, two main themes emerged, which form the focus of this discussion: (1) EFL Students' Utilization of Duolingo's Gamification Features, and (2) The Impact of Gamification on Students' Motivation and Learning Engagement.

Theme 1: EFL Students' Utilization of Duolingo's Gamification Feature

The study found that EFL students actively used the gamification features in the Duolingo application as part of their learning strategies. Features such as Experience Points (XP), daily streaks, levels, daily challenges, and leaderboards were not only seen as entertaining elements but also as tools to monitor learning progress and build self-directed learning routines. Most participants stated that the presence of these features encouraged them to study consistently every day and gave them a sense of control over their own learning process.

Students' active engagement with these features can be explained through the Self-Determination Theory (Deci and Ryan 1985), which emphasizes that intrinsic motivation can grow when

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individuals feel autonomous and competent in the activities they undertake. Additionally, the presence of a leaderboard introduced a healthy element of competition, in line with McClelland's Achievement Motivation Theory (1961), which asserts that individuals are motivated to improve their performance when clear and measurable achievement indicators are present. These findings also support Werbach and Hunter's (2012) claim that well-designed gamification can enhance user engagement even in non-game activities such as learning.

Theme 2: The Impact of Gamification on Students' Motivation and Learning Engagement

The study also found that the use of gamification features significantly enhanced students' motivation and engagement in learning. All participants reported feeling more enthusiastic and focused when learning with Duolingo compared to traditional methods. Features such as XP, reward systems, challenges, and daily streaks served as positive reinforcements that motivated students to continue their learning activities, as explained in Skinner's (1953) behaviorist theory.

Moreover, the game-like atmosphere created a fun learning environment, which, according to Hamari et al. (2014) and Jaelani et al. (2020), is an important factor in building intrinsic motivation through emotional engagement. Furthermore, participants also felt that the application allowed them to manage their own time, materials, and learning duration, indicating the presence of self-regulated learning, as discussed by Zimmerman (2002). Thus, gamification in Duolingo not only provides short-term motivation through rewards but also fosters long-term motivation characterized by active engagement, learner autonomy, and sustained commitment to learning.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study indicate that the gamification features in the Duolingo application—such as XP, streaks, challenges, and leaderboards—are actively used by EFL students as tools to support autonomous, flexible, and enjoyable English language learning. These features not only help track learning progress but also significantly enhance students' intrinsic motivation and engagement in the learning process. Through a game-like learning approach, Duolingo creates a non-monotonous learning experience and encourages long-term learning consistency. These findings suggest that gamification can be an effective strategy for improving the quality of foreign language education in the digital era.

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