

Gamifying the Classroom: How Teachers Use Duolingo Kids to Boost English Vocabulary

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ABSTRAK

Di tengah era digital, penguasaan kosakata bahasa Inggris telah menjadi kompetensi yang krusial bagi siswa sekolah dasar. Sayangnya, pendekatan konvensional yang monoton seringkali mengurangi minat mereka dalam belajar. Studi ini mengeksplorasi bagaimana aplikasi Duolingo Kids mampu mengubah stigma belajar yang membosankan menjadi pengalaman belajar yang menyenangkan. metode *narrative literature review* di sekolah dasar di kawasan Pondok Rajeg, terungkap bahwa guru-guru menganggap aplikasi ini sebagai alat yang efektif untuk membangkitkan antusiasme siswa melalui visual yang menarik dan interaksi audio yang realistis. Namun, temuan penting dalam penelitian ini menekankan bahwa teknologi hanyalah alat; kesuksesan sejati tetap berada di tangan guru sebagai pembimbing yang menyeimbangkan interaksi digital dengan kebutuhan sosial di kelas. Penelitian ini menawarkan perspektif baru tentang bagaimana gamifikasi dapat mengubah tantangan belajar kosakata menjadi proses penemuan yang menyenangkan bagi generasi muda.

Kata kunci: Duolingo Kids, Kosakata, Perspektif Guru, Motivasi, MALL

ABSTRACT

In the digital age, mastery of English vocabulary has become a crucial competency for elementary school students. Unfortunately, conventional monotonous approaches often reduce their interest in learning. This study explores how the Duolingo Kids app can transform the stigma of boring learning into an enjoyable learning experience. A narrative literature review method in elementary schools in the Pondok Rajeg area revealed that teachers consider this app to be an effective tool for stimulating student enthusiasm through attractive visuals and realistic audio interactions. However, a key finding in this study emphasizes that technology is only a tool; true success remains in the hands of teachers as mentors who balance digital interaction with social needs in the classroom. This study offers a new perspective on how gamification can transform the challenge of learning vocabulary into an enjoyable discovery process for the younger generation.

Keywords: Duolingo Kids, Vocabulary, Teacher's Perspectives, Motivation, MALL

INTRODUCTION

In this era of rapid globalization, English language skills are no longer just an added value, but a basic necessity, especially in terms of vocabulary. Vocabulary is the main foundation; without adequate mastery of words, students will find it difficult to read, write, let alone speak in a foreign language. However, the main challenge often faced in elementary schools is low student motivation. Conventional methods, which tend to be monotonous and rely solely on memorizing lists of words, often make students feel bored and consider

learning English a burden (Juniansyah & Kurniawan, 2024).

This situation requires educators to be more creative in utilizing technology in the classroom. One approach that is currently trending is Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL). The integration of technology through smartphone applications offers a more flexible and independent way of learning (Riva et al., n.d.) In the context of teaching young learners, game-based or gamified applications have been proven to transform a rigid learning environment into a more enjoyable one.

According to (Warmansyah et al., 2024) game elements such as challenges, levels, and instant rewards are very effective in maintaining the focus of children who have limited attention spans.

One platform that is very popular and is starting to attract the attention of teachers is Duolingo Kids. Unlike the standard version, Duolingo Kids is specifically designed with attractive visuals and interactive audio that is child-friendly (Al-hakmani, 2025). The use of audio from native speakers in this application not only helps students learn new words, but also improves their pronunciation from an early age (Saraswati et al., 2021) This is in line with the theory that a low-pressure learning environment or one with a low “affective filter” will make students more courageous in experimenting with language (Yusda et al., 2020).

Although the technological potential is enormous, the success of integrating these applications in the classroom depends heavily on the role of teachers. Teachers are no longer merely a single source of information, but facilitators who bridge the gap between technology and student needs. However, in practice, many teachers still face a dilemma between the convenience of technology and technical challenges and classroom management (Yogyakarta, 2024). Therefore, understanding the teachers' perspective is crucial to see the extent to which Duolingo Kids can truly motivate students or become a new challenge for educators.

This study seeks to explore in greater depth how teachers integrate Duolingo Kids into vocabulary teaching and the real impact of this application on student learning motivation in elementary schools. Through a comprehensive understanding from the teacher's perspective, it is hoped that this study can provide practical recommendations for more effective use of digital media in the future.

METHOD

This paper used a narrative literature review approach to analyze previous studies on the gain an in-depth understanding of teachers' real experiences in integrating the Duolingo Kids app into their classrooms. This method was chosen because the researchers wanted to understand the “story” behind the use of technology—from how

teachers develop strategies to how they respond to the dynamics of student motivation in the field (Li et al., n.d.)

In total, seven (7) peer-reviewed journal articles. The articles reviewed in this paper were collected through online academic databases, primarily Google Scholar, by using keywords such as *Duolingo Kids*, *Vocabulary*, *Teacher's Perspectives*, *Motivation*, *MALL*. Peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2019 and 2024 were included in the selection process. Articles were selected based on their discussion of the challenges faced by teachers and their focus on the integration of technology, particularly Duolingo Kids, into vocabulary learning.

In general, studies examining the use of the Duolingo app in English language learning show similarities in terms of both research methods and results. The majority of studies apply a descriptive or simple quantitative approach using questionnaires and vocabulary tests as data collection instruments, which are then analyzed using percentages, average scores, and basic statistical tests. The research findings consistently show that Duolingo is able to help improve students' vocabulary and learning motivation through the game elements presented in the application. However, all articles emphasize that Duolingo should not be used as the only learning medium, but needs to be combined with structured learning and teacher guidance in order to achieve maximum learning outcomes.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on data analysis from interviews and observations, this study found that the integration of the Duolingo Kids app had a significant impact on students' motivation to learn English vocabulary. The findings of the study were grouped into three main themes of challenges and opportunities: (1) Increased student engagement through gamification features, (2) The effectiveness of independent vocabulary learning, and (3) Obstacles to the use of technology in the classroom.

The table summarizes the reviewed literature, detailing the authors, methodology, and significant outcomes regarding the use of Duolingo as a tool for enhancing vocabulary mastery.

Author(s) & year	Title	Research method	Participant/context	Key findings(challenges)
Article 1	<i>Improving Student's English Vocabulary Using Duolingo Application</i>	Classroom Action Research (CAR)	15 students of 12th grade at SMA Negeri 1 Selakau.	Students low mastery of basic vocabulary before the application intervention was carried out.
Article 2	<i>The Effect of Duolingo Application on Students' English Vocabulary Mastery.</i>	Quasi-experimental (Post-test only design)	8th-grade students at a Junior High School in Jember	Lack of technology utilization in schools even though students are already proficient in using smartphones.
Article 3	<i>Gamification of Duolingo in Rising Student's English Language Learning Motivation.</i>	Case Study (Observation & In-depth interview)	5 students of 2nd-grade at SMK Ngunut 1 Tulungagung	High dependence on internet connection, limited PC features, and lack of specific material for Asian students.
Article 4	<i>Duolingo in English Education: Evidence-based Perspectives on Learning Outcomes.</i>	Systematic Literature Review (20 articles)	Various EFL/ESL learning contexts from 20 reviewed articles	The lack of real-time interaction limits the development of higher-order skills.
Article 5	<i>Duolingo Application in English Teaching Practice: Teacher's Perception</i>	Descriptive Qualitative	15 English teachers from various schools in Medan	Teachers in the past had difficulty designing media that could consistently attract students' interest.
Article 6	<i>Autonomous Mobile-Assisted Language Learning for Young Learners Using Duolingo.</i>	Qualitative Case Study	Young learners and their parents in Indonesia	The results of this small-scale study are difficult to generalize to a wider population without further study.
Article 7	<i>Enhancing Early Childhood English Vocabulary: Teachers' Perspectives on Optimizing the Duolingo Application</i>	Descriptive Quantitative (Survey)	Early childhood teachers in Indonesia	Duolingo cannot stand alone as a single source; it requires strong integration of classroom structure and management by teachers.

Increased Student Engagement Through Gamification

The results of the study show that the integration of Duolingo Kids significantly increases student motivation in learning vocabulary through several key aspects. The use of gamification features such as a points system, levels, and interactive characters has been proven to increase enthusiasm for learning. Teachers noted that students feel as if they are playing a game rather than learning formally, which triggers active participation and longer concentration compared to conventional methods. The visual and audio characters in this application effectively reduce student anxiety and create a pleasant learning environment (Saraswati et al., 2021)

This application supports independent learning, where students can learn at their own pace. Instant feedback and vocabulary repetition in various contexts (audio, visual, text) strengthen long-term memory and boost students' confidence without the pressure of direct assessment from teachers (Yusda et al., 2020). Although effective, teachers face challenges in the form of infrastructure limitations such as unstable internet connections and the risk of digital distractions for students. Teachers emphasize that this application serves as a tool, but the role of educators remains crucial as guides to provide context for language use in real communication and ensure that technology is used appropriately according to pedagogical needs (Yogyakarta, 2024).

Effectiveness of Independent Vocabulary Learning

Duolingo Kids integration allows students to learn at their own pace (independent learning), which is in line with teachers' views on encouraging independent learning in students. One of the key features that supports this is the provision of instant feedback, which allows students to correct their mistakes independently and immediately (Mostafa et al., 2024). In addition, repetition of vocabulary in various contexts—such as visual, audio, and text—has been proven to strengthen students' long-term memory of new words (M & Deris, 2019).

The use of audio from native speakers in this application not only helps students master vocabulary, but also improves their pronunciation from an early age (Riva et al., n.d.). This non-

stressful learning environment creates what is known as a low affective filter, where students feel more confident to practice repeatedly without feeling pressured by direct assessment from teachers (Yusda et al., 2020). Therefore, this application serves as an effective independent learning medium to enrich students' vocabulary (Ruchliyadi et al., 2024)

Challenges in Technology Use and Teachers' Perspectives

Although it has had a positive impact on motivation, teachers reported several obstacles in implementing Duolingo Kids in schools. The main obstacle is infrastructure limitations, where unstable internet connections often hinder students' access to the app's features. In addition, there are challenges in the form of digital distractions; without strict supervision (Jaelani, A., Rafli, Z., & Murtadho, F. (2025), students tend to be distracted by non-educational features on their devices (Saraswati et al., 2021).

From a pedagogical perspective, teachers emphasize that technology cannot completely replace the role of teachers. Teachers continue to play a crucial role as facilitators who bridge the gap between technology and the real needs of students, especially in providing context for the use of vocabulary in real-world communication (Harahap & Daulay, 2023). Therefore, the success of this application's integration depends heavily on the teacher's ability to balance digital interaction with appropriate instructional guidance in the classroom.

CONCLUSION

The integration of the Duolingo Kids app into English vocabulary learning has been proven to transform the classroom atmosphere into a more dynamic and enjoyable one through a gamification approach. Interactive features such as a points system, levels, and attractive visual characters not only increase student enthusiasm, but also create a low-pressure learning environment or one with a low "affective filter." This encourages students to learn independently at their own pace, where instant feedback and the use of audio from native speakers effectively strengthen long-term memory and improve pronunciation from an early age.

Although this technology offers great potential in improving motivation and vocabulary

mastery, its success is highly dependent on teacher guidance in the classroom. Challenges such as limited internet infrastructure and the risk of digital disruption indicate that this application cannot stand alone as the sole learning medium. Therefore, the role of teachers remains a crucial element as facilitators who bridge digital interactions with social needs, ensuring that technology is used appropriately to provide a real communication context for students.

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