

A Comparative Study Of Student Perceptions On Vocabulary Learning Using Duolingo And Elsa

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ABSTRACT

In the current asynchronous teaching at Horizon University Indonesia, students are still using several English learning applications and media, such as Duolingo, ELSA, and others. These tools are employed as a means of remote learning specifically aimed at supporting the Global Workplace English Program (GWEP) at Horizon University. The purpose of using these media is to help Horizon students improve their English test scores (EFSET) as part of their preparation for entering the workforce, as well as to enhance their four English language skills. Based on this, we are conducting a study to determine which application is most suitable and can encourage students at Horizon-U to be more active, and motivated, and ultimately improve their vocabulary in English. Vocabulary is one of the language aspects which should be learned. Learning vocabulary is important because people can speak, write, read and listen. Moreover, people have to know the vocabulary first. It means that in learning vocabulary, people need to know and understand the meaning of vocabulary and how to use vocabulary in the right context.

In this research, the researcher used qualitative methods, including questionnaires and interviews, to gather information on students' perceptions. This study was conducted in two classes at Horizon-U, with 50 participants from GWEP 4 providing positive feedback about the Duolingo and ELSA applications. Therefore, the researcher aims to explore the students' perceptions of using Duolingo and ELSA, focusing on the topic "A Comparative Study of Student Perceptions on Vocabulary Learning Using Duolingo and ELSA."

Keywords: Duolingo, ELSA, GWEP, EFSET, Asynchronous, Vocabulary and Qualitative methods

ABSTRAK

Dalam pembelajaran asinkron saat ini di Horizon University Indonesia, mahasiswa masih menggunakan beberapa aplikasi dan media pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris, seperti Duolingo, ELSA, dan lainnya. Alat-alat ini digunakan sebagai sarana pembelajaran jarak jauh yang secara khusus ditujukan untuk mendukung program Global Workplace English Program (GWEP) di Horizon University. Tujuan penggunaan media ini adalah untuk membantu mahasiswa Horizon meningkatkan skor tes Bahasa Inggris mereka (EFSET) sebagai bagian dari persiapan mereka untuk memasuki dunia kerja, serta untuk meningkatkan empat keterampilan berbahasa Inggris mereka. Berdasarkan hal tersebut, kami melakukan sebuah penelitian untuk mengetahui aplikasi mana yang paling sesuai dan dapat mendorong mahasiswa Horizon-U untuk lebih aktif, termotivasi, dan pada akhirnya meningkatkan kosakata Bahasa Inggris mereka. Kosakata adalah salah satu aspek bahasa yang harus dipelajari. Mempelajari kosakata itu penting karena orang dapat berbicara, menulis, membaca dan mendengarkan. Lebih lanjut, seseorang harus mengetahui kosakata terlebih dahulu. Artinya, dalam mempelajari kosakata, orang perlu mengetahui dan memahami makna dari kosakata tersebut serta bagaimana menggunakannya dalam konteks yang tepat.

Dalam penelitian ini, peneliti menggunakan metode kualitatif, termasuk kuesioner dan wawancara, untuk mengumpulkan informasi mengenai persepsi mahasiswa. Studi ini dilakukan di dua kelas di Horizon-U, dengan 50 partisipan dari GWEP 4 yang memberikan tanggapan positif terhadap aplikasi Duolingo dan ELSA. Oleh karena itu, peneliti bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi persepsi mahasiswa dalam menggunakan Duolingo dan ELSA, dengan fokus pada topik "Studi Komparatif Persepsi Mahasiswa terhadap Pembelajaran Kosakata Menggunakan Duolingo dan ELSA."

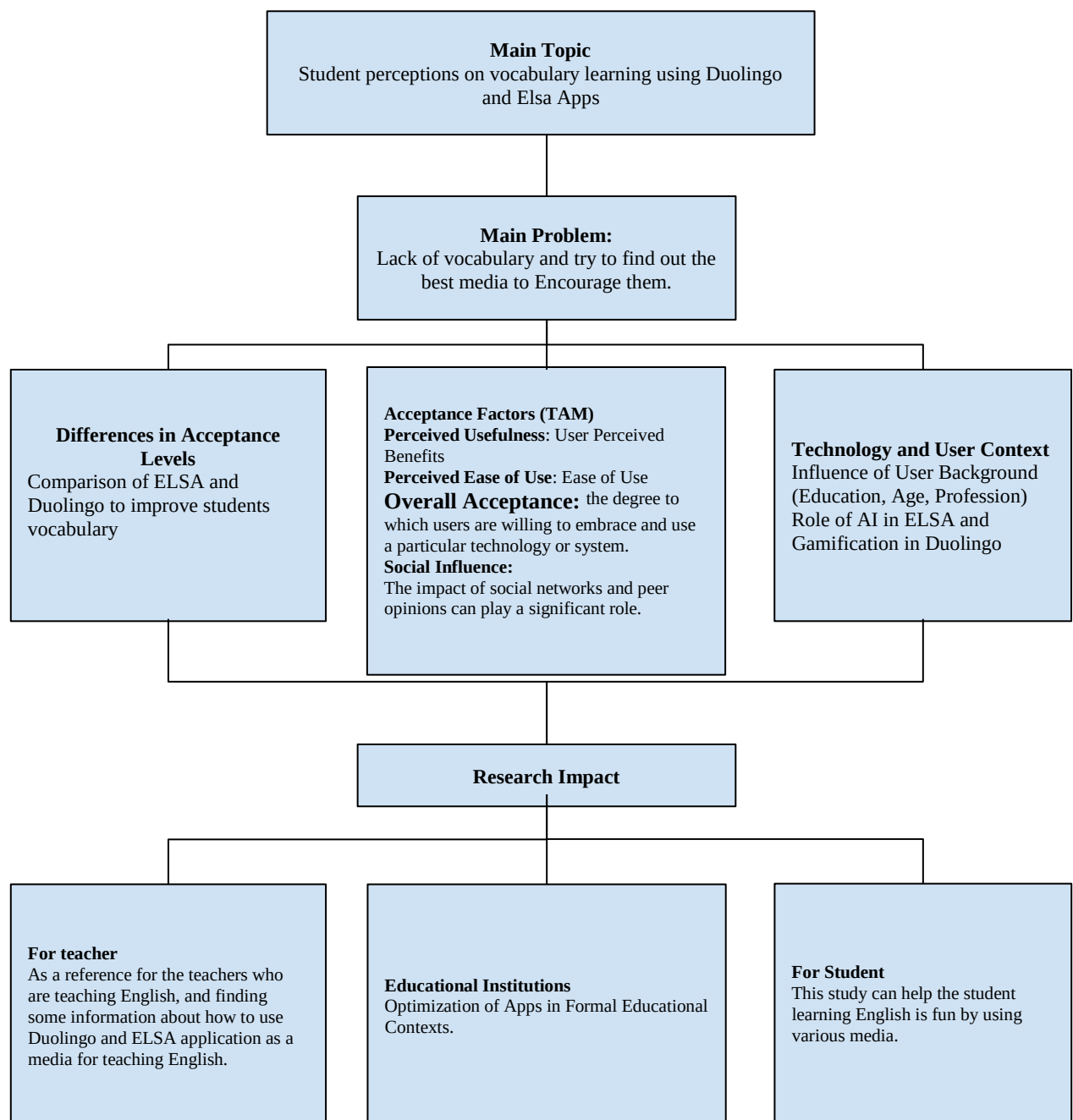
Kata kunci: Duolingo, ELSA, GWEP, EFSET, Asinkron, Kosakata, dan Metode Kualitatif

INTRODUCTION

Teaching and learning English vocabulary is crucial for Indonesian students aiming to master English as a foreign language. However, many students struggle with vocabulary acquisition, which hampers their ability to communicate effectively. Enhancing vocabulary fluency can be challenging, as numerous students demonstrate limited vocabulary knowledge. Therefore, it is essential for teachers to adopt effective techniques or methods that motivate students to expand their vocabulary. According to Larsen and Freeman (2002), teachers should implement appropriate methods and provide suitable media, teaching techniques, and strategies to help students communicate in the target language.

In today's educational landscape, the rapid advancement of technology plays a significant role in learning. As noted in the BEST CONFERENCE 2020 (Jaelani, 2020), the integration of technology into teaching has become increasingly important. To capture students' interest in vocabulary learning, many English teachers are incorporating technology and media, such as the Duolingo and ELSA applications, which are popular tools for vocabulary acquisition. As outlined in the Duolingo for Schools guidebook (2016) "Duolingo is the largest online language learning platform available". It offers a practical and enjoyable way for learners to practice English. The researcher observed that students were keen on using these applications for their studies. Consequently, this study aims to explore students' perceptions of using Duolingo and ELSA, leading to the topic: "A Comparative Study of Student Perceptions on Vocabulary Learning Using Duolingo and ELSA at Horizon University Indonesia."

The research problem map below illustrates the core issue addressed in this study and how it branches into several interconnected sub-problems. This visual framework helps clarify the focus of the research, namely, the comparison of student perceptions in vocabulary learning through Duolingo and ELSA. It outlines the key elements such as learning motivation, application effectiveness, vocabulary improvement, and the role of student engagement—each contributing to a deeper understanding of the main research objective.



Picture 1. Research Problem Map

The problem map of the research outlines the key components of a study that examines the subject aimed at understanding students' perceptions of English language learning applications, specifically ELSA and Duolingo, using the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). The main focus of this research is to understand the factors influencing user acceptance and engagement with these applications. The primary issue identified is the lack of English vocabulary, which compels classroom facilitators to seek engaging media to encourage students to learn English more diligently. To address this, the research will explore several sub-problems. First, the study will observe the differences in students' perceptions of using the Duolingo and ELSA applications, aiming to identify factors that contribute to the enhancement of students' vocabulary. This includes analyzing perceived benefits, ease of use, and usage of both applications within the TAM framework. Second, these findings will provide insights into improving vocabulary for foreign language learners and enhancing the learning experience using more enjoyable media. Third, for educational institutions, this research will offer recommendations on how to better integrate these applications into formal educational environments.

1. Research Question

Based on the background previously mentioned, the formulation of the study can be articulated as follows:

What is the students' perception of using the Duolingo and ELSA applications as media for vocabulary learning?

2. Research Objectives

Student perceptions on vocabulary learning using Duolingo and ELSA Applications.

3. Significance of the research

This study is expected to be beneficial for those who are involved in the English teaching process:

- a. As a reference for the teachers who are teaching English, and finding some information about how to use Duolingo and ELSA application as a media for teaching English.
- b. This study can help the teacher to find out which media are able to encourage the students for learning English.
- c. This study can help the student learning English is fun by using various media.

METHODOLOGY

a. Research Design

This study will utilize a qualitative research design, emphasizing the collection of rich, descriptive data through semi-structured interviews. This approach allows for flexibility in exploring student experiences while providing a framework for comparison between the two applications.

b. Participants

The participants will include 50 GWEP 4 students from various programs at Horizon University who have used both Duolingo and ELSA for vocabulary learning. Participants will be selected using purposive sampling to ensure a diverse representation of experiences and backgrounds.

c. Data Collection Methods

1. Semi-Structured Interviews:

- Each interview will last approximately 30-45 minutes and will be conducted in a quiet, comfortable setting to encourage open discussion.
- An interview guide will be developed to include key topics such as user experience, engagement, perceived effectiveness, and personal preferences. Open-ended questions will facilitate in-depth responses.

2. Examples of questions include:

- **Perceived Usefulness (PU):**

- How do you perceive the usefulness of Duolingo in improving your language skills compared to traditional learning methods ?
- In what ways do you think ELSA enhances your pronunciation and vocabulary?

- **Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU):**

- How easy do you find it to navigate and use the Duolingo app for your language learning?
- What challenges, if any, do you face when using ELSA to improve your vocabulary?

- **Overall Acceptance:**

- To what extent do you feel motivated to use Duolingo regularly for language practice? Why?
- How likely are you to recommend ELSA to your peers based on your experience with the app?

- **Social Influence:**

- How have your friends or classmates influenced your decision to use Duolingo or ELSA?
- Have you received support or encouragement from teachers regarding the use of these apps for language learning?

These questions can help gather insights into users' perceptions and experiences with Duolingo and ELSA based on the principles of the Technology Acceptance Model.

d. Data Analysis

Interviews will be audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using thematic analysis. This method involves coding the data to identify recurring themes and patterns related to student perceptions. The analysis will focus on both similarities and differences in experiences with Duolingo and ELSA, providing a comprehensive understanding of how each application supports vocabulary learning.

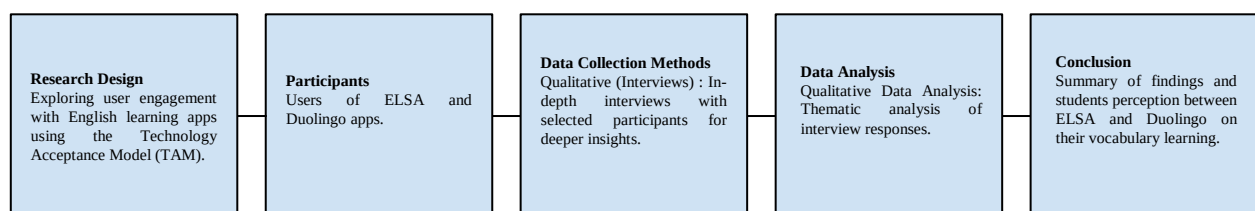
e. Expected Outcomes

This research is expected to reveal several key themes regarding student perceptions of vocabulary learning through Duolingo and ELSA. Anticipated findings may include:

- Differences in engagement levels, with students potentially favoring one application over the other based on their learning preferences.
- Insights into how gamification and speech recognition technologies impact motivation and retention of vocabulary.
- Identified challenges faced by students when using each application, providing recommendations for improvements.

f. Ethical Considerations

The study will adhere to ethical guidelines, ensuring that participants provide informed consent and understand their right to withdraw at any time. Data will be anonymized to protect participants' identities, and all findings will be reported in aggregate form to ensure confidentiality.



Picture 2. Research stages

Research Design the study is designed to explore how students engage with English learning applications—specifically Duolingo and ELSA—by using the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) as the guiding framework. This model helps examine key factors such as perceived usefulness, ease of use, user acceptance, and social influence, providing a structured lens to

understand student perceptions in a digital language learning context. Participants the participants in this study are students who actively use the Duolingo and ELSA applications for learning English. These users are selected to provide firsthand insights based on their direct experiences with the apps, ensuring that the data collected is rich and relevant to the study objectives. Data Collection Methods the research employs a qualitative data collection approach, specifically through in-depth interviews. This method is chosen to gain deeper insights into users' thoughts, feelings, and experiences while using both apps. The interviews allow participants to elaborate on their motivations, challenges, and overall learning journey, which would not be easily captured through quantitative methods. Data Analysis the data collected from interviews will be analyzed using thematic analysis. This process involves identifying, organizing, and interpreting recurring themes or patterns in the participants' responses. Thematic analysis is appropriate for qualitative research because it enables the researcher to derive meaning from complex and subjective data, especially when exploring personal perceptions and attitudes. Conclusion the final stage summarizes the key findings from the study. It highlights students' perceptions of the effectiveness, usability, and impact of ELSA and Duolingo in supporting vocabulary development. The conclusion compares the strengths and limitations of each app based on user feedback and connects the findings back to the TAM framework, offering meaningful insights for educators, developers, and learners.

RESULTS

This section presents the findings of the study and discusses them in relation to the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), focusing on student perceptions of using Duolingo and ELSA for vocabulary learning. Thematic analysis of interview data revealed several key themes: perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, motivation and engagement, social influence, and application-specific challenges.

1. Perceived Usefulness (PU)

Many participants expressed that both Duolingo and ELSA contributed positively to their vocabulary development, though in different ways. Duolingo was often praised for its structured lessons and gamified experience, which helped students review vocabulary regularly. One student commented:

“Saya merasa Duolingo sangat membantu karena setiap hari saya bisa latihan sedikit-sedikit, jadi kosakata saya bertambah secara bertahap.”

In contrast, ELSA was viewed as particularly useful for improving pronunciation and listening comprehension. Several students noted that ELSA helped them become more confident in speaking and pronouncing new vocabulary correctly. A participant shared:

“ELSA sangat membantu untuk tahu cara pengucapan kata yang benar, dan saya jadi lebih percaya diri kalau harus ngomong dalam bahasa Inggris.”

These responses indicate that while both applications are perceived as useful, students tend to associate Duolingo with vocabulary expansion and ELSA with pronunciation accuracy.

2. Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU)

Overall, students found both applications easy to use, though Duolingo was perceived as more user-friendly due to its simpler interface and game-based structure. Many students appreciated the intuitive navigation and short, manageable lessons. One student said:

“Duolingo gampang dipakai, fiturnya jelas, dan saya bisa belajar kapan saja, walau cuma lima menit.”

On the other hand, some students found ELSA slightly more complex, especially in the beginning. Challenges mentioned included needing a quiet environment for speech recognition and difficulties understanding instructions if their pronunciation was too inaccurate. However, after some practice, most students adapted and found the app manageable.

3. Motivation and Engagement

The gamified elements in Duolingo, such as streaks, rewards, and levels, were found to be highly motivating. Students reported a sense of accomplishment and consistency in learning. A participant explained:

“Karena ada level dan hadiah, saya jadi termotivasi untuk terus buka aplikasinya setiap hari.”

ELSA, while less gamified, motivated students through personalized feedback and goal-setting features. Some students preferred this approach, especially those who were more focused on improving specific pronunciation goals rather than earning points or badges. These findings support the idea that both applications can enhance learner motivation, albeit through different strategies—gamification in Duolingo versus personalized, performance-based feedback in ELSA.

4. Social Influence

Several students stated that their friends or classmates influenced them to try and continue using the applications. Group discussions, peer recommendations, and classroom encouragement contributed positively to sustained usage. One student noted:

“Awalnya saya tahu Duolingo dari teman, terus banyak yang pakai juga, jadi makin semangat karena bisa saling bandingkan progres.”

Teacher support also played a role, especially when instructors integrated the apps into learning tasks or provided encouragement to use them outside class hours.

5. Challenges and Suggestions

While students appreciated the benefits of both applications, some limitations were also mentioned. For Duolingo, a few students pointed out that the vocabulary presented was sometimes too basic or not aligned with academic needs. Meanwhile, ELSA was sometimes seen as overly reliant on internet connectivity and required more quiet space for optimal use.

Participants suggested combining both applications as a more effective learning strategy: using Duolingo for daily vocabulary review and ELSA for pronunciation practice. This hybrid approach aligns well with the principle of multi-modal learning.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study confirm the relevance of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) in understanding students' interaction with digital learning tools. Both perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use significantly influenced the students' acceptance of Duolingo and ELSA. Duolingo, with its gamified and easy-to-navigate platform, succeeded in engaging users and encouraging frequent vocabulary practice. ELSA, on the other hand, proved particularly valuable in improving pronunciation and providing real-time feedback, albeit with a slightly steeper learning curve. These results also highlight the importance of social influence, as peer and teacher encouragement contributed to students' continued use of the apps. Overall, the study underscores that incorporating educational technology in vocabulary learning—when aligned with students' needs and preferences—can lead to increased motivation, better retention, and a more enjoyable learning experience.

CONCLUSIONS

This study explored student perceptions of using Duolingo and ELSA for vocabulary learning within the context of the Global Workplace English Program (GWEP) at Horizon University Indonesia. The findings indicate that both applications offer distinct benefits and contribute meaningfully to students' English language development. Duolingo was consistently appreciated for its structured lessons and gamified format, which encouraged regular vocabulary practice and increased learner motivation. In contrast, ELSA was particularly valued for its focus on pronunciation and listening comprehension, offering real-time feedback that helped students gain confidence in speaking. In terms of usability, both applications were generally perceived as user-friendly. Duolingo's simple interface and short, engaging lessons made it easy for students to incorporate learning into their daily routines. ELSA, while requiring more initial adjustment due to its speech recognition features, was also manageable after some practice. Motivation and engagement were influenced by different features in each app. Duolingo motivated users through game-like elements such as points and streaks, while ELSA offered personalized progress tracking and goal-setting. Social factors—such as peer influence and teacher support—also played an important role in encouraging consistent app usage.

While students recognized the value of both platforms, they also noted some limitations. Duolingo's vocabulary content was sometimes viewed as too basic, and ELSA required quiet environments and stable internet connections to function optimally. As a result, many participants recommended using both apps in combination: Duolingo for routine vocabulary review, and ELSA for pronunciation improvement. This blended approach supports a multimodal learning strategy that caters to different aspects of language acquisition.

Importantly, the study found that both Duolingo and ELSA were effective tools for increasing students' English vocabulary. Students reported noticeable improvements in their ability to recognize, recall, and use new words appropriately in context, showing that mobile-assisted language learning can play a significant role in vocabulary development. Overall, the study supports the relevance of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) in explaining student engagement with digital learning tools. By aligning technology with learner needs, platforms like Duolingo and ELSA can effectively enhance vocabulary learning, increase student motivation, and create a more enjoyable and productive language learning experience.

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It is my hope that the findings of this research will contribute meaningfully to the development of more effective language learning strategies and inspire further exploration into the use of educational technology in English language instruction.

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