

EFL STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES ON INTEGRATING DUOLINGO INTO ORAL COMMUNICATION ACTIVITIES

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ABSTRACT

English speaking skills play a vital role in education and professional settings, yet many university students, especially beginners, face challenges in developing fluency and confidence. The integration of technology and artificial intelligence has become an alternative solution to support speaking practice, with Duolingo emerging as a widely used platform. However, most previous studies focused on different applications or advanced learners, leaving a gap in understanding how beginner-level students perceive Duolingo in speaking activities. This study aims to explore the perceptions of second-semester students in the English Study Program at Universitas Pasir Pengaraian toward the use of Duolingo as a supplementary tool in speaking learning. Employing a qualitative descriptive method, data were collected from 22 participants through questionnaires and interviews to capture their experiences and opinions. The findings reveal that students generally have positive perceptions, highlighting Duolingo's interactive features, gamification, instant feedback, and mobile accessibility, which motivate consistent practice and vocabulary development. Nevertheless, some limitations were identified, such as insufficient natural conversation, pronunciation accuracy, and cultural context. In conclusion, while Duolingo cannot fully replace authentic communication, it is perceived as a valuable complementary tool that enhances engagement and supports speaking skill development when integrated with classroom learning and real-life interaction.

Keywords: Students' Perceptions, Duolingo, Speaking Activities, English Language Learning, Educational Technology

INTRODUCTION

English has become an international language that plays a vital role in education, professional development, technology, and global communication. Proficiency in English provides students with the opportunity to access academic resources from around the world, participate in cross-cultural exchanges, and build professional networks. Among the four language skills, speaking is often regarded as one of the most essential yet most challenging skills to master. It requires learners not only to understand grammatical structures and vocabulary but also to use them effectively in real-time communication. For many learners, especially those in their early years of study, speaking in English is accompanied by anxiety, lack of confidence, and limited exposure to authentic communication. These challenges highlight the need for innovative learning strategies that provide students with consistent practice and motivation in developing their oral communication skills.

The development of technology, particularly artificial intelligence (AI), has transformed language learning in significant ways. AI-based applications

provide learners with flexible and interactive learning opportunities that extend beyond the classroom environment. Research by Kamalov, Santandreu Calonge, and Gurrib (2023) emphasizes that AI serves as a major driving force in education, enabling efficient and personalized learning experiences. Similarly, Zou et al. (2020) argue that AI-powered speech evaluation programs help students improve key aspects of speaking such as fluency, pronunciation, and idea organization. This growing integration of technology into language learning reflects a broader shift in education, where digital tools are increasingly recognized as essential for promoting student engagement, autonomous learning, and language development.

One of the most widely used AI-supported platforms is the Duolingo application, launched in 2011 by Luis von Ahn and Severin Hacker. Duolingo combines artificial intelligence and gamification to create an enjoyable and accessible language learning experience. The application offers features such as interactive exercises, real-time feedback, progress tracking, and gamified rewards

that encourage learners to maintain consistency. Its mobile accessibility further allows students to practice anytime and anywhere, making it a practical tool for supplementing formal classroom instruction. Studies such as Shortt et al. (2023) have highlighted Duolingo's impact on language learning, noting its ability to motivate learners through gamification elements like daily streaks, achievement badges, and leaderboards. Ahmed (2016) also emphasizes Duolingo's role as a platform that promotes independent learning across multiple languages, including English, Spanish, and German. In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), Duolingo is seen as an innovative resource that combines flexibility with interactive and engaging content.

Despite these advantages, Duolingo has also been criticized for its limitations, particularly in relation to speaking development. While the application strengthens vocabulary and grammar through repetition and translation exercises, it does not fully replicate natural conversation or cultural context, both of which are essential for achieving communicative fluency. Research indicates that learners often need opportunities for authentic interaction in

addition to structured practice provided by language learning applications (Zou et al., 2020). This raises an important issue: while Duolingo may serve as a useful supplement to speaking practice, it cannot function as a complete substitute for real-life communication. This tension between the expected benefits of digital tools and the realities of language acquisition highlights the need for further investigation into how students, particularly beginners, perceive the usefulness of such applications.

Previous studies have examined various AI-based applications for speaking practice. For instance, Nabilah et al. (2024) explored students' perceptions of the ELSA Speak app, finding generally positive feedback due to its AI-based corrections and interactive topics. Similarly, Pricilia and Rahmansyah (2023) studied Yoodli AI and highlighted its accessibility and flexibility. Han (2020) examined the use of voice-based chatbots in Korea, reporting significant improvements in students' speaking competence and confidence. Other studies have focused on applications such as TALK (Rafif et al., 2023) and Cakap (Qomariyah et al., 2024), both of which were perceived positively but were limited by small sample sizes or focus on school students. A recent study by Lo et al. (2025)

examined Thai university students' perceptions of Duolingo for enhancing listening and speaking skills, showing promising results but without a deeper focus on speaking activities or the experiences of beginner learners.

From this review, it is evident that there remains a gap in research. Most studies focus on AI applications other than Duolingo or examine learners at more advanced stages. When Duolingo is studied, the emphasis is often on listening skills or general language learning rather than speaking-specific outcomes. Furthermore, very little research has explored the perceptions of beginner-level university students, such as those in their first year of study, who face unique challenges in acquiring speaking skills. This gap is significant because beginners' perceptions can reveal how accessible and motivating these tools are for learners just starting their language learning journey.

The theoretical foundation of this study is built on the concept of perception. Perception, as defined by Nes, Sundberg, and Watzl (2023), is a sensory experience that provides a direct representation of the outside world. In educational contexts, perceptions influence how students evaluate the usefulness and effectiveness of learning tools. Davis (1989), through the

Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), further emphasizes that learners' perceptions of usefulness and ease of use determine their attitudes and behavioral intentions toward adopting new technologies. Applied to language learning, these frameworks suggest that students' positive or negative perceptions of Duolingo can shape not only their willingness to engage with the application but also the effectiveness of the learning process itself.

Speaking, as a complex and productive skill, also provides an important theoretical lens for this study. Hughes (2013) defines speaking as a process of communication involving the use of language to convey ideas, emotions, and information in social contexts. Zare-Behtash and Sarlak (2017) identify five components of speaking ability: vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, fluency, and organization. These components reflect the multidimensional nature of speaking, which requires more than memorization of words—it requires the integration of multiple linguistic and cognitive skills. In this regard, Duolingo's features may support some components, such as vocabulary and pronunciation, but may not fully address others, such as fluency in natural conversation.

This study therefore seeks to investigate students' perceptions of Duolingo specifically in the context of speaking activities. The focus is on second-semester students of the English Study Program at Universitas Pasir Pengaraian, who are beginners in speaking English at the university level. By examining their perceptions, this study aims to understand both the supportive and challenging aspects of using Duolingo in speaking practice. Such an investigation is important because it provides insights into how Duolingo functions as a supplementary tool for learners who are at an early stage of their language development.

The novelty of this research lies in its focus on beginner university students' perceptions of Duolingo for speaking activities, an area that has received limited attention in previous studies. While earlier research has demonstrated the effectiveness of AI applications for language learning in general, little is known about how new learners perceive and respond to Duolingo's features when applied to speaking practice. By addressing this gap, the study contributes to a more

nanced understanding of the role of AI-supported applications in EFL contexts. Furthermore, the findings can inform educators and curriculum designers about the potential of integrating digital tools into classroom learning in ways that support not only language acquisition but also learner motivation and confidence.

In summary, English speaking skills remain a central yet challenging aspect of language learning for many students, particularly beginners. Technology and AI offer promising support, with Duolingo standing out as one of the most widely used platforms. However, existing studies reveal a gap in understanding beginner-level students' perceptions of Duolingo in speaking activities. This study aims to fill that gap by exploring the perceptions of second-semester English students at Universitas Pasir Pengaraian. By analyzing their experiences, this research highlights both the strengths and limitations of Duolingo as a supplementary learning tool, offering valuable implications for the integration of educational technology in enhancing speaking skills.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURES

Perception

Perception is a psychological process through which individuals receive,

interpret, and assign meaning to information from their environment. Nes, Sundberg, and Watzl (2023) define perception as a sensory experience that directly represents the external world. Unlike cognition, which involves higher-order processes such as reasoning or problem-solving, perception is more immediate and phenomenological, allowing individuals to interpret objects and stimuli in a direct manner. In the context of education, perception plays a crucial role because students' views and interpretations of learning tools strongly influence their motivation, acceptance, and performance outcomes.

Davis (1989) further conceptualized perception in his Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), highlighting perceived usefulness (PU) and perceived ease of use (PEOU) as key constructs. PU refers to the degree to which learners believe that using a technology enhances their performance, while PEOU relates to the extent to which a learner perceives technology as free of effort. These two elements, combined with learners' attitudes toward technology, shape their behavioral intention to adopt and continue using it. Within language education, this model explains why students might choose to adopt or reject

applications such as Duolingo. If learners perceive Duolingo as useful for improving speaking performance and find it easy to use, they are more likely to integrate it into their learning routines.

The functions of perception in learning have been explored by Agustina, Sukma, and Damanik (2024), who argue that students' perceptions act as a filter through which they assess the effectiveness of digital tools. This aligns with Moorthy, Wang, and Bovik (2011), who explain that perception studies are often employed to evaluate subjective experiences, such as visual or auditory quality, and are essential in validating user experiences. From this perspective, perception not only describes students' subjective judgments but also provides insights into the design and improvement of educational technologies.

Moreover, perception can be categorized into objective and subjective types. According to Material and Singh (2021), objective perception can be measured through performance in discrimination tasks, while subjective perception captures learners' conscious experience of stimuli. Similarly, Vágvölgyi et al. (2016) classify perception into sensation, illusion, and body image, showing that perception is not a passive reception but an interpretive process. Zadra

and Clore (2011) add that perception is shaped by emotional states, meaning that a student's mood or motivation can alter how they perceive the usefulness of an application. This indicates that perception is dynamic, personal, and context-dependent, making it a critical factor in educational research.

Duolingo Application

Duolingo is one of the most popular language learning applications worldwide, known for its free access and innovative gamified features. It was developed in 2011 by Luis von Ahn, a computer science professor from Guatemala at Carnegie Mellon University, together with his doctoral student Severin Hacker from Switzerland. Their vision was to create a platform that democratizes language learning by providing free, high-quality language instruction accessible to all learners regardless of socioeconomic status. The application has since expanded to more than 40 languages and gained millions of users globally (Ahmed, 2016).

Duolingo integrates artificial intelligence (AI) with gamification principles to enhance user engagement. Huynh, Zuo, and Iida (2016) highlight that its design includes features such as experience points (XP), daily streaks,

achievement badges, leaderboards, and virtual currency (gems). These gamification elements are strategically implemented to promote motivation, persistence, and enjoyment in language learning. Shortt et al. (2023) emphasize that Duolingo is not only attractive due to its free model but also because it provides interactive tasks that adapt to learners' levels, reinforcing personalized learning pathways.

Several studies have identified the benefits of Duolingo. Astarilla (2018) reports that the application is user-friendly, motivates learners, and supports vocabulary development. Its accessibility on mobile devices enables learners to practice anytime and anywhere, giving them flexibility in managing their study schedules. Moreover, gamification increases learners' willingness to practice consistently, which is particularly important for skills such as speaking that require regular exposure.

Nevertheless, limitations remain. Zou et al. (2020) argue that while AI-based applications such as Duolingo provide effective feedback on fluency, pronunciation, and organization, they cannot replace authentic interaction. Duolingo's focus on translation-based tasks and sentence drills may strengthen

vocabulary and grammar but fails to provide learners with natural conversation or cultural context. Therefore, while Duolingo serves as a valuable supplementary tool, it must be integrated with real-life communication and classroom interaction to achieve comprehensive speaking proficiency.

Speaking

Speaking is one of the most complex skills in language learning, requiring the integration of linguistic knowledge, cognitive processes, and social interaction. Hughes (2013) defines speaking as a process of conveying ideas, emotions, and information in a social context through spoken language. Unlike reading or writing, speaking occurs in real-time and demands immediate processing and production of language.

Zare-Behtash and Sarlak (2017) outline five components of speaking ability: vocabulary, grammar, fluency, pronunciation, and organization. Vocabulary provides the lexical items necessary for expression, while grammar ensures the logical structure of sentences. Fluency refers to the ability to speak smoothly without unnatural pauses, pronunciation relates to accurate articulation and intonation, and

organization involves structuring ideas coherently. Together, these components form the foundation for effective oral communication.

Speaking activities have been categorized into different types. Guebba (2021) identifies imitative, intensive, responsive, transactional, interpersonal, and extensive speaking tasks. Imitative activities focus on repeating sounds and phrases, while intensive tasks emphasize grammar and sentence formation. Responsive speaking includes short replies to questions, whereas transactional speaking involves information exchange. Interpersonal speaking focuses on maintaining social relationships, and extensive speaking requires longer monologues such as speeches or presentations. For EFL learners, practicing across these types is essential to develop communicative competence.

However, learners face significant challenges in developing speaking skills. Rahayu and Siregar (2018) note that many students struggle due to limited vocabulary, lack of practice opportunities, and nervousness when speaking. Zou et al. (2020) also emphasize that speaking in academic contexts demands not only linguistic accuracy but also skills in pronunciation, intonation, and interactive

competence. These challenges make speaking a particularly difficult skill for beginner learners in higher education.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to investigate students' perceptions of the Duolingo application in supporting speaking activities. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the aim was to explore participants' experiences and viewpoints in depth rather than to measure variables statistically. By focusing on descriptions and interpretations, this research was able to capture the complexity of students' attitudes toward the use of technology in language learning.

The respondents of the study were 22 students in the second semester of the English Study Program at Universitas Pasir Pengaraian. These students were chosen because they represent beginner-level learners in speaking at the university level, who often face challenges in fluency, pronunciation, and confidence when practicing English orally. To maintain confidentiality, respondents were not identified by name but were represented anonymously as participants in the study. This ensured that their responses could be

reported freely without personal disclosure, in line with ethical research standards.

The main instrument for data collection was a questionnaire that combined both closed-ended and open-ended items. The closed-ended questions used a Likert scale to measure levels of agreement regarding Duolingo's usefulness, ease of use, motivation, and impact on speaking practice. Meanwhile, the open-ended questions invited students to provide more detailed explanations about their experiences and opinions. In addition, documentation of classroom activities was used to complement the questionnaire data. The use of these instruments provided both quantitative trends and qualitative insights into how Duolingo was perceived by the participants.

Data collection procedures were carried out by distributing the questionnaires to participants during their scheduled class hours, after they had been introduced to and practiced using Duolingo for speaking-related exercises. The

researcher explained the purpose of the study and assured students of anonymity and voluntary participation. Responses were then collected and organized for further analysis. In qualitative research, the researcher is also the primary instrument, meaning that interpretation and categorization of responses were guided by the researcher's understanding of the data.

The data were analyzed using the steps of qualitative data analysis proposed by Miles and Huberman, namely data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. In the reduction stage, raw data were organized and simplified into meaningful units, focusing on responses relevant to perceptions of Duolingo. The display stage involved presenting data in tables and descriptive summaries to show

patterns and trends. Finally, the conclusion drawing stage synthesized the findings to reveal the overall perceptions of the students. Triangulation between closed-ended and open-ended responses ensured credibility and trustworthiness of the analysis.

Through this methodology, the study was able to systematically explore students' perceptions of Duolingo for speaking practice. The combination of questionnaires, documentation, and interpretive analysis provided a rich and reliable account of how beginner-level university students experienced the integration of an AI-based language learning application into their speaking activities.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data were collected through a questionnaire administered to 22 EFL students who participated in oral communication activities integrated with Duolingo. The questionnaire consisted of 20 items measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5). The questionnaire explored students' perceptions regarding engagement, motivation, vocabulary

development, speaking confidence, and the overall usefulness of Duolingo in supporting oral communication activities.

The findings revealed that students generally held positive perceptions toward the integration of Duolingo into oral communication activities. The overall mean score was **4.21**, indicating a high level of agreement with the positive statements presented in the questionnaire.

Table 1 presents the descriptive results of each dimension.

Table 1. Students' Perceptions of Duolingo Integration in Oral Communication Activities (N = 22)

Dimension	Mean	Category
Learning Motivation	4.35	High
Student Engagement	4.27	High
Vocabulary Development	4.18	High
Speaking Confidence	4.12	High
Perceived Usefulness	4.14	High
Overall Mean	4.21	High

The results showed that **learning motivation** obtained the highest mean score (M = 4.35). Eighteen students (81.8%) agreed or strongly agreed that Duolingo encouraged them to participate more actively in oral communication activities. Students reported that the gamified features, rewards, and interactive exercises increased their enthusiasm for learning English. The second highest score was found in **student engagement** (M = 4.27). Most respondents indicated that Duolingo made classroom activities more interactive and enjoyable. Seventeen students (77.3%) agreed that the application helped them remain focused during speaking activities

and encouraged continuous participation. Regarding **vocabulary development**, the mean score was 4.18. Students perceived that Duolingo provided useful vocabulary and expressions that could be applied during oral communication tasks. Approximately 72.7% of respondents agreed that the application helped them learn new words and phrases relevant to daily communication.

Similarly, **perceived usefulness** received a high mean score of 4.14. Sixteen students (72.7%) believed that Duolingo effectively supported classroom learning by providing opportunities to practice English independently outside the classroom. The lowest, although still high,

score was observed in **speaking confidence** ($M = 4.12$). Fifteen students (68.2%) agreed that regular use of Duolingo increased their confidence in expressing ideas orally. However, several students reported that face-to-face communication practice remained necessary for developing greater fluency and spontaneous speaking skills. Overall, the questionnaire results indicate that EFL students perceived the integration of Duolingo positively. The application was considered beneficial in enhancing motivation, engagement, vocabulary acquisition, speaking confidence, and the effectiveness of oral communication activities. These findings suggest that Duolingo can serve as a valuable supplementary tool for supporting English oral communication learning in EFL contexts.

DISCUSSION

Learning Motivation

The findings revealed that students perceived Duolingo as a highly motivating tool in oral communication activities. This finding suggests that students are more willing to participate in English learning when instructional activities are supported by interactive digital technologies. The positive perception may be attributed to the gamification elements embedded in

Duolingo, including experience points, badges, leaderboards, rewards, and daily learning streaks. These features appear to create a sense of achievement that encourages students to continue practicing English regularly. Consequently, students may develop stronger learning persistence and greater enthusiasm toward oral communication activities.

From a theoretical perspective, this finding can be explained by Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2020), which argues that learners become intrinsically motivated when they experience autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Duolingo provides opportunities for students to regulate their own learning pace and monitor their progress independently, thereby increasing their sense of competence and ownership of learning. Similarly, Dörnyei (2021) emphasizes that motivation is a central factor influencing second-language achievement because motivated learners tend to invest more effort and persistence in language-learning activities.

This finding is consistent with Zhou (2024), who found that gamified learning environments significantly increase EFL learners' motivation by transforming learning into an enjoyable

and rewarding process. Likewise, Ouyang et al. (2024) reported that students using Duolingo demonstrated higher levels of learning motivation and willingness to communicate compared to learners who relied solely on traditional instruction. Gragera (2024) further argued that Duolingo enhances learners' persistence because students perceive learning tasks as challenges rather than obligations. Similarly, Fitriani (2024) found that learners appreciated Duolingo's interactive features because they reduced boredom and encouraged continuous engagement in English learning.

The implication of this finding is that lecturers should consider integrating gamified learning applications into oral communication courses. Such integration may help maintain students' motivation and encourage consistent language practice both inside and outside the classroom.

Student Engagement

The findings indicate that students perceived Duolingo as an engaging learning platform that encouraged active participation in oral communication activities. This finding suggests that students become more involved in classroom learning when they are provided with opportunities to interact

directly with digital learning materials. The interactive nature of Duolingo appears to create a learning environment where students actively participate rather than passively receive information.

This finding can be interpreted through constructivist learning theory, which emphasizes that learning occurs most effectively when students actively construct knowledge through meaningful experiences (Schunk, 2020). Duolingo enables learners to interact continuously with language content and receive immediate feedback, thereby increasing engagement in the learning process. Furthermore, learner engagement theory argues that students demonstrate higher academic achievement when they are cognitively, emotionally, and behaviorally involved in learning activities (Bond et al., 2020).

The present finding supports Ouyang et al. (2024), who found that Duolingo significantly improved students' classroom engagement and willingness to communicate in English. Similarly, Loewen et al. (2020) reported that language-learning applications increase learner engagement by providing immediate feedback and personalized learning experiences. Recent research by Hwang and Fu (2024) also demonstrated

that mobile-assisted language learning environments contribute positively to learner engagement because students can access learning materials flexibly according to their individual needs. Furthermore, Fitriani (2024) concluded that students using Duolingo tend to participate more actively in language-learning activities because they perceive the learning process as enjoyable and interactive.

The implication of this finding is that English lecturers may use Duolingo to create more student-centered learning environments that encourage active participation and sustained engagement throughout oral communication courses.

Vocabulary Development

The findings revealed that students perceived Duolingo as beneficial for vocabulary development. This finding suggests that the application provides meaningful opportunities for learners to acquire and practice new vocabulary required for oral communication. Students may have benefited from repeated exposure to vocabulary items presented through contextualized exercises and interactive activities.

This finding is supported by vocabulary acquisition theory, which

emphasizes that repeated encounters with lexical items facilitate vocabulary retention and retrieval (Nation, 2022). Through continuous exposure to words and phrases in different contexts, learners are more likely to store vocabulary in long-term memory and use it effectively during communication. Furthermore, Webb and Nation (2023) argue that meaningful repetition plays a crucial role in developing productive vocabulary knowledge, particularly in EFL contexts.

The findings align with Fitriana and Noviarini (2025), who reported that Duolingo significantly improved learners' vocabulary mastery through repeated practice and contextualized learning activities. Similarly, Loewen et al. (2020) found that language-learning applications contribute positively to vocabulary acquisition because learners encounter vocabulary items multiple times across different tasks. A systematic review conducted by Hwang and Fu (2024) further demonstrated that mobile-assisted language learning applications are particularly effective in supporting vocabulary development due to their accessibility and flexibility. Moreover, Ouyang et al. (2024) found that learners perceived vocabulary acquisition as one of

the major benefits of using Duolingo in EFL learning environments.

The implication of this finding is that Duolingo can be used as a supplementary vocabulary-learning resource to strengthen students' lexical knowledge and support their oral communication performance.

Speaking Confidence

The findings showed that students perceived improvements in speaking confidence after using Duolingo in oral communication activities. This finding suggests that the application provides a supportive learning environment where students can practice English without fear of immediate negative evaluation. Through repeated exposure to language input and pronunciation exercises, students may develop greater confidence in using English for communication.

The finding can be interpreted through willingness-to-communicate theory, which suggests that learners are more likely to speak when they possess adequate linguistic knowledge and confidence in their communicative abilities (MacIntyre et al., 2020). Duolingo appears to support confidence development by allowing students to practice repeatedly until they feel prepared to use English in real

communicative situations. In addition, language anxiety theory argues that supportive learning environments can reduce communication anxiety and encourage greater participation in speaking activities (Dewaele & Li, 2021).

This finding is consistent with Putra et al. (2025), who found that AI-supported language-learning applications significantly enhanced learners' speaking confidence through repeated practice and individualized feedback. Similarly, Phanwiryarat et al. (2025) reported that students perceived Duolingo as an effective tool for improving confidence in English-speaking courses. Ouyang et al. (2024) also found that learners who regularly used Duolingo demonstrated greater willingness to communicate and higher levels of confidence during speaking activities. However, Gragera (2024) emphasized that mobile applications alone cannot fully develop communicative competence because authentic interaction remains essential for language development.

The implication of this finding is that Duolingo should be integrated with communicative classroom activities such as discussions, presentations, debates, and role-plays. Combining technology-assisted learning with authentic

interaction may provide optimal conditions for developing students'

speaking confidence and communicative competence.

CONCLUSIONS

This study reveals that the use of the Duolingo application in speaking activities offers a highly positive and meaningful learning experience for students. Duolingo functions not only as a learning tool but also as a supportive companion that fosters a more human-centered learning environment. Many students expressed that they felt more comfortable and motivated due to the app's interactive and flexible approach, which allows them to practice without pressure or fear of making mistakes. For them, learning became more personal and engaging, as it encouraged autonomy and built their confidence in speaking English. The atmosphere created was not only academically effective but also emotionally supportive, empowering students to grow through encouragement and recognition of their individual efforts.

Beyond cognitive development, Duolingo also contributes to students' emotional and social growth. Several participants noted that being able to set their own pace gave them a stronger sense of responsibility and active engagement in

their learning journey. As a result, they not only improved their speaking skills but also developed into more confident, independent, and open-minded individuals. Duolingo, therefore, plays a meaningful role not only in enhancing language competence but also in shaping learners who are ready to face the challenges of intercultural communication in a globalized world.

Findings also indicate that AI-based features and gamification are the two most favored components among students. The AI feature provides instant, accurate feedback on pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary, enabling students to identify and correct their mistakes quickly. Meanwhile, gamification brings in elements of challenge, points, and rewards that make the learning process more enjoyable and healthily competitive. Students repeatedly mentioned that the combination of these two features offers the greatest benefits for improving speaking skills, as it keeps them motivated while ensuring consistent progress in their language abilities.

Based on these findings, the researcher recommends that English Education students at Universitas Pasir Pengaraian, beyond those in the second semester, also consider utilizing the Duolingo application, particularly for speaking skill development. By using this application, they can practice independently, receive instant feedback,

and enjoy an interactive learning experience. It is expected that Duolingo can serve as an effective supplementary strategy to enhance English speaking competence for all students, better preparing them to meet both academic demands and real-world communication challenges.

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