

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

Vocabulary is an important aspect for everyone who wants to learn a language. One of them is learning English, before mastering English as a whole, they must learn vocabulary as a language foundation to express thoughts, feelings, provide information, share ideas, understand others and build social relationships through communication (Schmitt & Schmitt, 2020). Learning vocabulary allows individuals to articulate their thoughts and depth of communications. In addition, in the aspects of providing information and sharing ideas, a strong vocabulary is crucial for conveying information accurately. Without adequate vocabulary, individuals may struggle to explain complex concepts or provide detailed descriptions, which can lead to misunderstandings (Alqahtani, 2015). Vocabulary facilitates the sharing of ideas by providing the necessary words to express abstract concepts. This is particularly important in academic and professional settings where the ability to articulate ideas clearly (Cameron, 2001).

According to Apoko et al. (2023) in learning English one needs to have qualified vocabulary knowledge. It is stated by Jaelani & Sutari (2020) that a person cannot interact with his environment if he does not possess a larger vocabulary, and without vocabulary will be a barrier for them to express themselves in writing and speaking, and also make them lose motivation when listening and reading. According to Ajisoko (2020), vocabulary cannot be separated from other aspects of English

language learning. As stated by Schmitt & Schmitt (2020), before learning additional language abilities like speaking, listening, reading, and writing, students must first understand the fundamentals of vocabulary. Before EFL students wish to practice and enhance language abilities, receptive skills and productive skills, vocabulary is the most crucial thing to learn and comprehend.

Nowadays, good English skills are needed for many purposes, especially for students. Students need to have a good command of English, whether it is for their studies, graduation requirements, job qualifications, or to get scholarships abroad. In achieving these goals, many students learn English independently using technology. According to Apoko et al. (2023), learning English as a foreign language (EFL) is getting easier and more useful by using technology in this digital era, which can be accessed anytime and anywhere. In achieving the goal of mastering a foreign language, students learn independently to improve their vocabulary acquisition. In recent years, many apps that assist learning have been developed to improve learners' English language skills.

There is one smartphone app that is thought to assist EFL students in improving their vocabulary in particular and their English in general. Duolingo is the name of the app. Duolingo app is an online language learning platform that can be accessed worldwide. This application support support independent learning, with can be accessed anytime and anywhere through mobile devices or computers. It allows users to learn according to their own schedule without being bound by a specific time or place. The well-known language-learning app Duolingo exemplifies the integration of technology in language learning. The program focuses mostly on translation,

dictation, and pronunciation. Gamification techniques are used to engage and motivate students (Munday, 2016). The app uses the voice of a native English speaker in its operation, which means it can provide an advantage to English learners and to practice English language skills especially in mastering English vocabulary. The app also uses a combination of text, audio and visual exercises to help learners develop their language skills (Tiara et al., 2021). The app also incorporates gamification elements, such as leveling up, earning virtual money and competing with friends, to increase motivation and engagement. The app is believed to develop foreign languages, and it is offered without any subscription.

Duolingo provides a learning method based on gamification (Tiara et al., 2021; Munday, 2016). Users can earn achievements and are counted with consecutive quizzes from day to day. Duolingo's learning system adapts to the user's level, from beginner to upper intermediate. Based on Duolingo app, the topics are also diverse, such as conversation, education, give advice, office, politics, communications, health, science, and many other topics that are relevant to daily life and academics. The subjects give some grammar and cultural notions with short explanation, but the courses focus on teaching new vocabulary and practice.

The researcher saw that there were a lot of students who used the Duolingo application in learning English languages. In the context of this study, researcher has a desire to explore and unearth the perceptions of English Education students at Jambi University who learn English using the Duolingo application independently outside of class learning hours. According to (Krashen, 2014) it would be interesting to see

the effects and efficiency of courses that are easily accessible and can be learnt at their own pace.

Previous studies (Apoko et al., 2023; Jaelani et al., 2020) found that Duolingo effectively enhances students' interest and motivation in learning English vocabulary, especially in classroom settings. Astarilla (2018) also reported that university students have a positive perception of Duolingo due to its various benefits for language learning. Additionally, Aulia et al. (2020) revealed that using Duolingo significantly impacts students' vocabulary mastery, as demonstrated in a junior high school experimental study.

Although previous studies, such as those by Apoko et al. (2023), Jaelani et al. (2020), Astarilla (2018), and Aulia et al. (2020), have highlighted the students' perception of Duolingo in improving vocabulary mastery and grammar proficiency in English language learning, they primarily used mixed methods, experimental and quantitative approaches, focusing on the use of the Duolingo application in classroom settings with instructions provided within a specific time frame. In contrast, research perception on the independent use of Duolingo as a vocabulary learning tool by English language students at the intermediate level, using a purely qualitative method with in-depth interviews, is currently under research. This study considers a specific context, namely English Education students at Jambi University. For this reason, in this exploration, the researcher plans to explore the perceptions of English Education at Universitas Jambi students in learning vocabulary and more in-depth on its aspects such as form, meaning, and use vocabulary at the intermediate level which involves utilizing the Duolingo tool for self-learning English vocabulary.

Research on this topic is crucial in order to give English language learners insight and comprehension about the usefulness and effectiveness of the Duolingo program for language improvement, particularly when it comes to gaining vocabulary through individual study. Is this application truly beneficial for independent learning, even though this application is growing in popularity. This is especially important to consider from the viewpoint of English language education students of Universitas Jambi who have utilized this application.

In this regard, although many studies have been conducted on this research theme, the aim of this study is to fill the gap identified in previous research, particularly by using a purely qualitative method with in-depth interviews and focusing on exploring how English students perceive Duolingo as a tool for learning vocabulary at the B2 level, without instruction and outside the classroom. Thus, the goal of this study is to gain deeper insight into the perceptions of Universitas Jambi English education students towards the Duolingo application as a tool for learning English vocabulary at the intermediate level.

1.2 Research Questions

Established on the background above, the question of this research is "How do EFL students' perceive Duolingo application as a tool for learning English vocabulary?"

1.3 Research Purpose

The aim of this research is to explore EFL students' perceptions towards Duolingo application as a tool for learning English vocabulary.

1.4 Limitation of Research

In this study, the researcher limited the research subject to the English Education students who use Duolingo app by independent learning to learn English. This research focuses on their perceptions of using Duolingo as a tool for mastering English vocabulary. It will also explain the effectiveness and usefulness of using Duolingo application on vocabulary usage in daily life and in class for English education students including its form, meaning and use. The researcher also restricts the language component studied, specifically English vocabulary, which refers to the Universitas Jambi English language education curriculum that the goal of the language level studied is at B2 (upper intermediate) level. Researchers in this study chose participants in the 2021 and 2022 batches because their English learning experience was already quite decent and almost close to the B2 level that must be achieved when graduating. Also in order to be more varied and rich in data from slightly different batches.

1.5 Research Significance

1. Researcher

This study will help to advance the scientific literature in the subject of Education and Technology for Language Learning, and the findings will serve as a helpful reference for future research.

2. For Student

This research will give benefits for students who desire to learn English through independent learning, as well as practical help for students in

leveraging the Duolingo application to enhance their English language abilities, specifically for master vocabulary.

1.6 Definition of Key Term

1. EFL Students

According to Gebhard (2006), EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students are individuals who do not speak English as their first language and may learn English for a range of purposes, including academic pursuits, travel, business, or personal interest. EFL students are individual who are learning English in a country where English is not the primary language of communications.

2. Perception

According to Pickens (2005), perception is the process by which organisms interpret and organize sensation to produce a meaningful experience of the world. Perception refers to an individual thought about something he has learned to measure how he or she behaves towards the use of something, whether he or she agrees or not about that method or about something he or she has learned. It means that students have their own opinion about something that they got from experiences the learning process and how they react toward it.

3. English Vocabulary

According to Cambridge Dictionary, English Vocabulary is a set of words, typically in a language or known to an individual, crucial for communication and expression of thoughts, ideas, emotions, and information. English vocabulary is a comprehensive collection of words and phrases that are used to communicate in the English language. it includes components of vocabulary, such as form, meaning, and use.

4. Perceived Usefulness

According to Davis (1989), perceived usefulness (PU) is the degree to which an individual believes that using a system can enhance their performance at work. PU, as used in this study, is the degree to which students think that using the Duolingo app would help them acquire more vocabulary in English or perform better. To put it another way, students' propensity to use Duolingo is based on how helpful they think the software is for learning new words.

5. Perceived effectiveness

Lowerison et al. (2006) developed the concept of perceived effectiveness in the use of technology. They argue that simply presenting information or learning to students does not guarantee that learning will occur. In the context of this study, the perceived effectiveness of using Duolingo for English vocabulary learning depends on the contribution of the features, exercise and tools available in the application. This means that the success of

Duolingo in supporting vocabulary learning is not only determined by the presentation of the material, but also by how well the features help students understand and remember new vocabulary.