FOSTER JELT
Journal of English Language Teaching

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Vol. 7, No. 4, October 2026
***e*-ISSN: 2723-4126**
***p*-ISSN: 2776-8880**

EXPLORING THE USE OF DUOLINGO FOR PRONUNCIATION AND SPEAKING DEVELOPMENT AMONG EFL LEARNERS IN MULTILINGUAL CLASSROOMS IN PAPUA

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the influence of Duolingo technology on the speaking and pronunciation abilities of fifth-semester Islamic Education (PAI) students at IAIN Sorong, Southwest Papua. Although numerous studies have examined the use of Duolingo applications, particularly in conducive learning environments, research in remote locations like Papua, where educational resources are scarce, remains underexplored. To fill this gap, this study utilized a qualitative descriptive methodology to gather data by administering open-ended questionnaires online to thirteen carefully chosen students who had used Duolingo for speaking practice. The data were subjected to thematic analysis to identify key themes related to pronunciation awareness, speaking confidence, motivation, learner autonomy, and learning difficulties. The results demonstrate that employing Duolingo boosts students' confidence, refines their pronunciation abilities, aids in vocabulary retention, and enables them to assume responsibility for their learning through its gamified features. However, further disadvantages were noted, such as mistakes in voice recognition, subpar audio quality, adverts in the free version, challenges with unstable internet connections, and the lack of real-time communication features. The study demonstrates that Duolingo functions efficiently as a supplementary tool for improving fundamental pronunciation and speaking skills; nonetheless, it cannot replace in-person interaction inside a classroom setting. Mobile tools for language acquisition, complemented by teacher support, are advised to improve students' speaking proficiency in multilingual higher education environments.

Keywords: Duolingo, EFL learners, Language Learning, Pronunciation, Speaking skills

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, technology has become an essential element in foreign language training. Applications like Duolingo provide learners a flexible, independent, and stimulating approach to studying (Chik, 2019; Kessler et al., 2023). Pronunciation and speaking are crucial skills for efficient communication; nonetheless, they pose significant challenges for EFL learners, especially in multilingual classrooms (Golkova & Hubackova, 2014; Rizki et al., 2025; Rahman, 2017). This transpires due to EFL learners' familiarity with other dialects and languages, which may affect their speech (Kirkpatrick, 2012). Traditional educational methods generally offer restricted chances for individualized feedback; conversely,

FOSTER JELT
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Vol. 7, No. 4, October 2026
***e*-ISSN: 2723-4126**
***p*-ISSN: 2776-8880**

technological advancements can deliver prompt and tailored solutions (Dressman & Sadler, 2020; Rahman & Waris, 2025). This study evaluates the effectiveness of Duolingo technology in improving learners' pronunciation and speaking abilities, compared to traditional teaching techniques (Khomariyah & Ekowijayanto, 2025). In addressing these challenges, mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) tools have gained popularity due to their flexibility, accessibility, and capacity to offer personalized learning experiences (Rizki et al., 2025). Duolingo has emerged as one of the most prevalent applications for language acquisition. It employs engaging game-like elements, prompt feedback, and speaking exercises to assist individuals in practicing independent verbal communication. Its capacity for interaction enables learners to repeatedly hear and rehearse accurate sounds and sentences, while also providing tools to rectify errors and enhance their speaking proficiency (Chik, 2019).

In multilingual classrooms, students typically exhibit diverse linguistic competencies and variations in phonetic pronunciation (De Houwer, 2016). Duolingo's intelligent algorithm adapts to accommodate the diverse demands of learners by adjusting based on their performance and providing tailored assistance. However, despite its widespread popularity, there is less empirical evidence demonstrating the efficacy of Duolingo in enhancing pronunciation and speaking abilities (Widi, 2025). This study examines the impact of Duolingo technology on the pronunciation and speaking skills of EFL learners in multilingual classrooms. The study examines learners utilizing Duolingo and contrasts them with those receiving conventional pronunciation instruction to ascertain whether technological practice genuinely enhances speaking proficiency (Delhiana et al., 2025). The findings contribute to the discourse on the application of digital tools in language education and provide valuable insights for educators, researchers, and curriculum designers aimed at enhancing students' speaking capabilities. The utilization of mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) applications has transformed the manner in which students acquire foreign languages, particularly English. Duolingo is a widely-used language acquisition application that employs gamified elements to assist users in expanding their vocabulary, enhancing their pronunciation, and gaining greater autonomy in their learning process (Dhiyaushshafa & Djuharie, 2025; Suwantarathip & Wichadee, 2014; Wintolo et al., 2023). As stated by Khuluq et al. (2024), Duolingo facilitates language acquisition through concise, structured courses that promote consistent engagement and repetitive practice. The interactive elements, such as streaks, leaderboards, and rewards, serve as incentives that encourage learners to engage in consistent practice (Khomariyah & Ekowijayanto, 2025).

Even though Duolingo is widely used, some research has found both things that help and things that make it harder for people to learn English through the app. Research by Hanifah and Lisan (2024) shows that even though gamification can boost motivation at first, students tend to lose interest over time if the tasks are too repetitive or if they don't get tailored feedback. This means that Duolingo's design might not completely cover more complex language needs, like understanding grammar and learning words in real-life situations. Similarly, Dhiyaushshafa & Djuharie (2025) found that while Duolingo helps learners build vocabulary, its limited explanation of grammar rules can make it harder for students who need more structured and teacher-guided instruction. Technological factors

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Vol. 7, No. 4, October 2026
***e*-ISSN: 2723-4126**
***p*-ISSN: 2776-8880**

also play a significant role. A study by Ode et al. (2024) found that weak internet, limited device capabilities, and problems with apps often stop students at universities in developing areas from continuing their learning smoothly. These findings are consistent with Alim et al., (2025) who stated that students' ability to use smartphones and their knowledge of digital tools directly affect how well mobile language learning apps work.

Moreover, learning motivation is widely seen as a key part of achieving success in language learning. According to Apoko et al. (2023), students stay involved and focused when they feel the learning tasks are important, fun, and connected to what they want to achieve. At first, people might get excited about using Duolingo, but if they don't notice clear progress in their ability to communicate, that excitement could fade over time. Environmental and contextual factors can also cause learning challenges. Studies such as that of (Dhiyaushshafa & Djuharie, 2025) It's important to note that things like a packed schedule, taking care of family duties, and a loud or distracting study space can make it harder for students to use mobile learning tools regularly. These outside factors might make it hard for learners to form consistent study habits, even if they are interested in the app and think it's good.

Duolingo is a very popular app for learning languages especially in the context of mobile assisted language learning contexts (Chik, 2019). It uses technology in a fun and game-like way to help people learn. The app provides brief, organized lessons that include vocabulary, listening, reading, and speaking activities. Duolingo uses speech recognition technology so learners can practice how they say words and get immediate feedback on their spoken answers. Gamification features like points, levels, daily streaks, and rewards are created to help keep learners interested and motivated (Li & Bonk, 2023). Duolingo is attractive to students who aren't majoring in English, especially those who aren't very interested or confident in learning English. Several studies show that Duolingo helps learners take control of their own studying by promoting learning on their own. Students can track their own improvement, go over lessons again, and plan their study time by themselves. This self-directed learning process is especially important for university students who have to handle many academic tasks at the same time. Duolingo offers easy-to-use and encouraging ways to learn, but it isn't meant to take the place of lessons in a classroom. The app works best as a extra tool that helps with school learning by practicing basic language skills, especially speaking and how to pronounce words correctly (Dhiyaushshafa & Djuharie, 2025).

However, although Duolingo and other mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) applications provide numerous advantages, prior research has also recognized various limitations in their execution (see Khomariyah & Ekowijayanto, 2025; Li & Bonk, 2023; Widi, 2025). The absence of comprehensive grammar elucidations, restricted chances for genuine speaking engagement, and excessive dependence on technology may impede learners from attaining advanced language proficiency. Moreover, challenges such as imprecise speech recognition technologies and unreliable internet access can diminish the efficacy of pronunciation feedback (Dincer, 2020; Khomariyah & Ekowijayanto, 2025). These problems indicate that technology-driven language acquisition is most efficacious when complemented by suitable pedagogical direction and significant instructor engagement.

FOSTER JELT
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Vol. 7, No. 4, October 2026
***e*-ISSN: 2723-4126**
***p*-ISSN: 2776-8880**

Moreover, while numerous studies have investigated the efficacy of Duolingo and MALL in enhancing English learning outcomes, the majority of available research has been performed in relatively uniform educational environments and metropolitan areas with well-facilitated technology accessibility. Research on the application of MALL apps in multicultural and multilingual regions, such as Papua, Indonesia, is limited, especially concerning learners from diverse linguistic, ethnic, and socio-cultural backgrounds, and in contexts characterized by inadequate learning resources, including restricted technology and poor internet access (see Rizki et al., 2025). In the Papuan environment, students frequently employ multiple local languages and Indonesian concurrently, potentially impacting their pronunciation development, language acquisition tactics, and engagement with digital learning apps. Variations in digital literacy, availability of reliable internet connections, and access to educational resources may influence students' experiences and advantages derived from Duolingo in their English language acquisition. Therefore, examining the application of Duolingo within the multicultural framework of Papua is essential to enhance the contextual comprehension of how mobile-assisted language learning promotes students' pronunciation and speaking proficiency particularly in diverse educational environments and under-resourced learners (Rahman et al., 2024). This study concentrates on fifth-semester Islamic Education students (PAI) IAIN Sorong, examining both the advantages of utilizing Duolingo for enhancing pronunciation and speaking abilities, as well as the difficulties faced by students when employing the application in a multilingual and multicultural educational context.

METHODS

This study used a qualitative descriptive approach to look into how Duolingo helps fifth-semester Islamic Education (PAI) students improve their pronunciation and speaking abilities in a setting where many languages are spoken. A qualitative method was selected because the research aimed to explore students' views, their learning experiences, and the difficulties they faced while using Duolingo, instead of focusing on measuring their learning results with numbers. The way the researcher described things let them explain the results in a clear story, showing how students understand and feel about using technology in learning languages.

Used a qualitative descriptive approach to look into how Duolingo technology affects the pronunciation and speaking abilities of English as a foreign language learners in settings where people speak multiple languages. A qualitative method was selected because the study aimed to explore how learners feel about the application, what their real-life experiences are, and what they think when using it, rather than trying to measure their learning results with numbers. A descriptive approach was used so the researcher could share the findings in a storytelling way, focusing on how students understood and saw Duolingo's role in their learning. This design also allows for naturalistic inquiry, where the phenomenon is studied as it naturally happens in real-life situations without changing or controlling the learning environment. Additionally, how people speak and pronounce words can be influenced by feelings like confidence, nervousness, interest, and how much control learners have over their own learning. These things are better understood through detailed

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Journal of English Language Teaching

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Vol. 7, No. 4, October 2026
***e*-ISSN: 2723-4126**
***p*-ISSN: 2776-8880**

descriptions and observations rather than through tests that give standard scores. By using this method, the study tried to create detailed and meaningful insights that add to the ongoing conversation about mobile-assisted language learning (MALL), to help with language learning, especially in schools where students are not majoring in English and speak multiple languages (Villamin, 2025).

Participants

The participants in this study were thirteen students in their fifth semester studying Islamic Education (PAI), IAIN Sorong, Southwest Papua, Indonesia. They have used the Duolingo app before as a way to learn languages. Participants were chosen through purposive sampling, a method where people are selected based on specific criteria that are important for the research goals, such as:

- Active or semi-active users of the Duolingo app.
- Have used Duolingo to practice speaking and pronunciation skills.
- Are in a multilingual class during the learning process.

Research Instrument

The main tool used in this qualitative research was a collection of open-ended questions aimed at understanding students' views and experiences regarding their learning of English. The instrument included ten questions that focused on their methods for enhancing English proficiency and the approaches they use to offer feedback. These open-ended questions enabled participants to share their ideas thoroughly and generated detailed descriptive information that was useful for analysis. The instrument was given out through an online form, allowing students to answer thoughtfully and honestly based on their own experiences as fifth-semester English learners (Furidha & Sidoarjo, 2023).

Procedure

The data for this study were gathered using a qualitative method by sending out open-ended questions to fifth-semester students studying Islamic Education. The questionnaire was sent online, so people could answer whenever they wanted and in their own words. Before starting the data collection, the participants were told about the study's purpose and were sure that their answers would be kept private. After getting permission, the questions were given out, and each student handed in their answers on their own. After gathering all the responses, they were put together and ready for detailed analysis. This helped make sure the information truly showed what the participants felt and went through.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data collected from fifth-semester students in the Islamic Education (PAI) program was analyzed using thematic analysis. The researcher read through every response carefully to get a clear idea of the participants' experiences as EFL learners in a multilingual academic setting. The first step in coding was to find important points about how pronunciation improves, how confident students feel when speaking, the difficulties they face in learning, the help technology can provide, and the part teachers play in this

FOSTER JELT
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Vol. 7, No. 4, October 2026
***e*-ISSN: 2723-4126**
***p*-ISSN: 2776-8880**

process. These codes were grouped together into bigger categories to create main themes. The themes were looked at among the participants to see what everyone had in common and what was different, especially since PAI students usually study religious and teaching subjects instead of focusing heavily on learning English. This analysis helped the researcher understand how Duolingo helps with language learning, encourages self-directed study, and connects with the user's background in Islamic education. The last topics show how using technology in learning helps improve their English skills and how much they get involved in class (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The analysis followed several careful steps to make sure the students' views and experiences were shown accurately (Creswell, 2009). First, the researcher conducted data familiarization read through all the responses multiple times to fully understand the participants' experiences with using Duolingo for pronunciation and speaking practice. At this point, first thoughts and possible ways to analyze things were recorded. Second, initial coding the process was done by finding important parts in the data. Statements about improving pronunciation, building speaking confidence, staying motivated, facing technology problems, learning on your own, and using these methods in class were mentioned. Each part of the text got a code that showed what it was mainly about. Third, the researcher grouped related codes into broader categories that reflected the students' shared experiences. These categories were then refined into major themes, such as (1) pronunciation awareness, (2) increased confidence, (3) gamification-driven motivation, (4) technical and contextual barriers, and (5) autonomous learning development. Fourth, the themes were reviewed, refined, and validated by comparing them across participants. Overlapping or unclear themes were reorganized to ensure coherence and alignment with the research questions. This step ensured that the thematic structure accurately represented the perspectives of Islamic Education (PAI) students who engage with Duolingo despite not specializing in English. Finally, the themes were interpreted to explain how Duolingo influences learners' pronunciation and speaking skills within multilingual learning environments. Attention was also given to the contextual background of PAI students, whose limited exposure to English shaped their perceptions and learning challenges.

RESULTS

The findings of this study demonstrate that Duolingo plays a significant role in supporting the development of pronunciation and speaking skills the participants. Although these students are not majoring in English, their responses reveal that technology-based learning tools such as Duolingo can help them strengthen English language competencies that are essential for academic and professional communication. Specifically, there are four aspects of the Duolingo application that can assist students in learning English as follows.

Increased Confidence in Speaking English

One of the most prominent findings of this study is the increase in students' confidence when speaking English. Most participants reported that Duolingo helped them feel more comfortable practicing English pronunciation without fear of making mistakes in front of others. Unlike classroom speaking activities, which often involve peer observation and

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Journal of English Language Teaching

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Vol. 7, No. 4, October 2026
***e*-ISSN: 2723-4126**
***p*-ISSN: 2776-8880**

teacher evaluation, Duolingo allows learners to practice independently in a private setting (Hyland, 2004). This condition reduces anxiety and encourages students to repeat pronunciation exercises multiple times. This Improvement in speaking confidence is reflected in the participants statements. One student stated, *"I feel that my speaking ability has improved, especially in terms of courage to speak and expanding my vocabulary. The pronunciation practice in Duolingo helps me speak more fluently when I try to use English."* Another particpant shared the same feeling: "*Before I started using Duolingo, I was scared of making mistakes when speaking English because of constant practice, I became more confident and started joining in on class activities by speaking my mind*."

Several students stated that before using Duolingo, they were hesitant to speak English due to limited vocabulary and fear of incorrect pronunciation. However, regular exposure to spoken English through the application gradually increased their confidence. The availability of immediate feedback also helped learners recognize their mistakes and improve their pronunciation accuracy. As a result, students felt more prepared to speak English in classroom discussions and oral tasks.

Improved Pronunciation Awareness

Another significant finding relates to students' pronunciation awareness. Participants reported that Duolingo helped them become more aware of correct pronunciation, stress patterns, and basic intonation. Through listening to audio models and repeating words or sentences, learners developed better sensitivity to English sounds that differ from their native language. Participants emphasized the role of Duolingo in improving pronunciation. One student explained, "*Duolingo is very helpful in correcting and improving the pronunciation of foreign vocabulary, especially English."*

Students explained that they often compared their pronunciation with the audio provided by the application. This process helped them notice differences between their own pronunciation and the target model (see Lai & Zheng, 2018). Although the improvement was mostly at a basic level, students acknowledged that Duolingo played an important role in introducing them to accurate pronunciation patterns. This awareness motivated them to pay more attention to pronunciation when encountering new vocabulary. For example, one participant explained "*because of the listening and speaking activities, I learned how to properly pronounce the words I kept practicing over and over until my way of speaking sounded similar to the sample at the apps."*

Motivation through Gamification Features

The findings also indicate that Duolingo's gamification features significantly influenced students' motivation to learn English (Fathali & Okada, 2016). Features such as daily streaks, points, levels, and rewards encouraged students to practice consistently. Many participants described Duolingo as enjoyable and engaging, which made English learning feel less stressful and more like a daily habit. The motivational effect of gamification features was also evident. One participant reported, *"Duolingo makes me more disciplined in studying*

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Journal of English Language Teaching

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Vol. 7, No. 4, October 2026
***e*-ISSN: 2723-4126**
***p*-ISSN: 2776-8880**

independently. There are daily targets, reminders, and levels that motivate me to continue learning."

Students reported that maintaining streaks motivated them to open the application every day, even if only for a short practice session. One participant stated that *"the 'streak' feature makes me want to use the app every day even when I don't have much time, I always finish at least one lesson".* This consistency contributed to continuous exposure to English, which is essential for language development. The competitive elements, such as leaderboards, also increased motivation for some learners, although others preferred individual progress tracking rather than competition.

Development of Learner Autonomy

Another theme that emerged from the data is the development of learner autonomy. Students indicated that Duolingo encouraged them to take responsibility for their own learning. They could choose when to practice, repeat lessons according to their needs, and monitor their progress independently. This autonomous learning experience was particularly beneficial for Islamic Education students, who often have busy academic schedules and multiple course demands (Hyland, 2004; Lai et al., 2016; Rahman, 2018). Duolingo's flexible structure allowed students to integrate English practice into their daily routines. As a result, learners became more aware of their strengths and weaknesses and developed greater independence in managing their learning process.

Furthermore, the findings reveal that Duolingo is perceived as a useful learning tool for non-English-major students. Participants emphasized that the application uses simple language, clear instructions, and gradual progression, making it accessible for learners with limited English proficiency. For PAI students, who do not specialize in English, Duolingo served as a supportive tool that introduced basic speaking and pronunciation skills without overwhelming them. Students also highlighted that Duolingo helped them review vocabulary learned in class and reinforced basic sentence patterns. This supplementary function made Duolingo suitable for supporting formal instruction rather than replacing classroom learning. Learner independence also became a key theme. Students said that Duolingo made them take charge of their own learning. They could pick their own time to practice, repeat lessons as much as they needed, and track their own progress without help. Duolingo flexible design let students fit English practice into their everyday schedules. This perception is reflected in one participant statement, *"if used individually, student can control their own learning and create a learning model that suits them"*

Although Duolingo is acknowledged to be beneficial for EFL language learners, the data reveals certain hindrances encountered during its use as follow. Firstly, technical issues were frequently reported by participants. Several students experienced unstable internet connections, especially those who lived in rural areas, which made the app difficult to access consistently. Some participants also mentioned that Duolingo occasionally failed to load lessons or froze during activities, causing frustration and interrupting learning continuity. Students who used older smartphones reported slow application performance, limited storage capacity, and fast battery drain. These conditions made it hard for them to complete daily tasks or maintain learning streaks. In addition, some students had to share devices with

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Journal of English Language Teaching

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Vol. 7, No. 4, October 2026
***e*-ISSN: 2723-4126**
***p*-ISSN: 2776-8880**

siblings, reducing their available time to use the app. Secondly, motivation-related barriers were identified as a significant issue. While many students enjoyed the gamified learning approach, others felt that the repetitive tasks became monotonous over time. Some students explained that they struggled to maintain consistency, especially when schoolwork and extracurricular activities increased. One student stated, *"At first I was excited, but after a few weeks the lessons felt too repetitive, so I lost motivation to continue."* Thirdly, linguistic challenges were reported, particularly when students encountered unfamiliar vocabulary or sentences without sufficient explanations. They felt that Duolingo's brief lesson format made it difficult to fully understand grammar points. Several students expressed a preference for additional teacher guidance or longer explanations to support their understanding of more complex material. Finally, contextual and environmental factors also played a role. Students with busy household environments or limited study time found it difficult to engage with the app regularly. Some participants noted that they tended to skip lessons when they felt tired after study at the university, especially when Duolingo required them to complete multiple tasks to maintain their progress.

Despite these challenges, many students still acknowledged that Duolingo provided accessible and enjoyable practice opportunities. However, the identified hindering factors clearly influenced their consistency and overall learning experience. The results suggest that both technical and non-technical barriers should be addressed to optimize the use of Duolingo in supporting English language learning.

DISCUSSION

This study's findings indicate that Duolingo can enhance pronunciation and speaking skills in EFL learners, particularly among fifth-semester Islamic Education (PAI) students at IAIN Sorong, Southwest Papua. The participants perceived that the application enhanced their confidence in English speaking, increased their awareness of accurate pronunciation, and bolstered their motivation for frequent practice. Duolingo, through its interactive and gamified elements, motivated students to engage in autonomous learning and practice English beyond the classroom. These findings align with prior research indicating that mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) applications facilitate more flexible, engaging, and learner-centered language acquisition experiences (Chik, 2019; Li & Bonk, 2023).

This study provides a comprehensive overview of Duolingo's functionality within the multicultural and multilingual context of Papua (Rizki et al., 2025). Many students incorporate local languages with Indonesian in their daily lives, and this linguistic context affects their English learning and pronunciation(Maulina et al., 2025). The data indicate that pronunciation acquisition is influenced not solely by technology, but also by factors including linguistic diversity, cultural context, digital literacy, and availability of instructional materials (Soyoof et al., 2023). This conversation underscores both the advantages of use Duolingo for language acquisition and the genuine obstacles encountered by students when employing digital learning tools in multilingual higher education environments.

Furthermore, the study found that students' speaking confidence increased and

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Journal of English Language Teaching

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Vol. 7, No. 4, October 2026
***e*-ISSN: 2723-4126**
***p*-ISSN: 2776-8880**

mobile settings lessen foreign language anxiety by providing low-risk practice places without negative evaluation (Reinders & Benson, 2017). According to Hwang, Shadiev, and Huang (2017), mobile devices create psychologically safe spaces that encourage oral rehearsal before public performance. Digital rehearsal environments may increase communication desire but not spontaneous interactional ability, according to Sykes (2014). The results indicate that Duolingo significantly enhances students' confidence in utilizing English, especially in speaking and listening skills (see Chik, 2019). This confidence should not be construed as direct evidence of quantifiable language skill enhancement; instead, it signifies students' aspiration to interact with English in a digital, anxiety-free setting (Kessler et al., 2023).

Participants uniformly characterized Duolingo as a resource that facilitates repetitive practice, instantaneous corrective feedback, and autonomous learning, all of which mitigate the apprehension associated with errors that frequently defines verbal interaction in multilingual EFL courses. The findings support the notion that confidence is not merely a result of linguistic proficiency but is also influenced by students' views of psychological safety and autonomy in language acquisition (Benson, 2011; Kocatepe, 2017; Rahman et al., 2024). Simultaneously, these characteristics indicate that the confidence created through Duolingo is more reliant on circumstance.

Several individuals indicated a greater comfort level using the app compared to engaging in direct classroom exchanges, implying that confidence does not inherently translate to unplanned face-to-face contact. This underscores a significant weakness of game-based language learning applications: although they can eliminate affective obstacles and promote consistent engagement, they fail to address the social, interactional, and pragmatic demands of authentic communication (Fathali & Okada, 2016; see also Palfreyman, 2011). Consequently, Duolingo ought to be regarded as an ancillary resource that enhances students' emotional preparedness and self-assurance in speaking, rather than a replacement for in-class communication exercises. These aspects underscore the necessity for educators to use digital applications alongside interactive speaking activities that facilitate students' transfer of confidence gained from individual digital practice to genuine interpersonal communication.

Moreover, repetition of listening and speaking exercises promoted pronunciation awareness. Research shows that mobile-assisted pronunciation tools improve phonological awareness and segmental accuracy (Liakin, Cardoso, & Liakina, 2017). Repetition and quick feedback aid perceptual learning and self-monitoring (Lee, Jang, & Plonsky, 2015). Automatic speech recognition (ASR) has limitations. Computer Assisted Language Learning research demonstrates that ASR feedback for suprasegmental variables like stress and intonation is less reliable (McCrocklin, 2016). Participants noted technological challenges, including faulty microphone identification, highlighting CALL research concerns about automated pronunciation evaluation reliability. Mastering pronunciation requires intelligibility, comprehensibility, rhythm, and discourse-level prosody (Saito & Lyster, 2012). Structured drills on Duolingo raise awareness but don't provide diagnostic, tailored feedback for further improvement. Without instructor intervention, students may cement small phonological faults. Therefore, Duolingo seems

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Journal of English Language Teaching

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Vol. 7, No. 4, October 2026
***e*-ISSN: 2723-4126**
***p*-ISSN: 2776-8880**

to raise awareness rather than ensure phonological proficiency.

In addition, gamification features like streaks, awards, and levelling boosted motivation. Gamification promotes goal setting and habit building, which boosts short-term engagement in Interactive Learning Environments (Hamari, Koivisto, & Sarsa, 2014). The British Journal of Educational Technology found that reward-based digital systems improve task perseverance (Hew, Huang, Chu, & Chiu, 2016). However, motivational sustainability remains an issue. Long-term involvement requires autonomy, competence, and relatedness, according to Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

Duolingo promotes autonomy and skill but lacks real-world engagement, limiting relatedness. Gamification may lose effectiveness when novelty fades (Hanus & Fox, 2015). This supports participants' findings that repetitious activities decrease long-term involvement. Gamification is an engagement tool, not a guarantee of intrinsic motivation. Teachers are essential in linking app-based tasks to communication goals. Furthermore. The analysis suggest Duolingo encourages independent learning (Chik, 2019). Mobile systems provide self-regulated learning by letting students set tempo, repetition, and scheduling (Lai & Gu, 2011). Flexibility helps college students manage many academic obligations. Metacognition is needed for digital autonomy. Benson (2013) stresses that autonomy is strategic decision-making, not just access. Without systematic reflection and teacher leadership, students may repeat without improving. Thus, Duolingo promotes behavioral autonomy but not cognitive autonomy without educational scaffolding. However, technical issues including unstable internet connections and imprecise feedback reveal MALL implementation's structural flaws.

Technology affordances must be critically assessed in institutional contexts, according to Godwin-Jones (2018). Overuse of automated technologies may affect feedback accuracy and learner confidence. Most importantly, speaking skills go beyond pronunciation. Effective communication requires discourse management, interactional tactics, and meaning negotiation (Sykes, 2014). Structured drills cannot mimic communication. Research consistently supports blended learning strategies that include digital rehearsal with classroom engagement (Hew et al., 2016). Finally, English is a complementing academic skill in multilingual Indonesian higher education. Diverse learners benefit from Duolingo's differentiated pacing. Sociocultural theory emphasises social language development (Benson, 2013). Integrating English speaking exercises connected to religious discourse, presentations, or interfaith communication would improve contextual relevance for Islamic Education students.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how fifth-semester Islamic Education students utilize Duolingo to improve their speaking and pronunciation in multilingual learning contexts. The qualitative analysis of students' responses shows that Duolingo helps English language learners improve pronunciation accuracy, vocabulary, and confidence to speak without judgment. The app's accessibility, gamification, and usability create consistent learning habits and a sense of achievement that keeps students engaged. The studies also

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Journal of English Language Teaching

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Vol. 7, No. 4, October 2026
***e*-ISSN: 2723-4126**
***p*-ISSN: 2776-8880**

show considerable barriers to Duolingo's full potential. Many students reported inconsistent internet connections, microphone identification issues, and unnatural-sounding audio samples. Excessive notifications, frequent ads, and premium requirements that limit advanced capabilities distract and slow learning. These concerns represent larger issues in mobile-assisted language acquisition, especially for smartphone users without steady technological support or good digital literacy (Eshghinejad, 2016; Maulina et al., 2025; Rahman & Amin, 2017).

Another crucial finding is that Duolingo improves language acquisition but cannot replace real-time speaking or classroom practice. Students said the software prepares them, but fluency development requires human connection, corrective feedback, and spontaneous communication (see Alim et al., 2025; Kessler et al., 2023). This view supports the idea that digital and face-to-face learning improves pronunciation and speaking skills. Islamic Education students, who rarely major in English, find Duolingo a relaxing, self-paced learning environment. Daily goals and gamified rewards aid students who lack confidence or formal language training by supporting autonomy and structure. Personal motivation, discipline, and constant practice are still needed, as several students said sporadic app use limits growth. The research shows that Duolingo improves English pronunciation and speaking when used consistently and with classroom instruction. The software promotes language anxiety reduction, learner autonomy, and frequent practice. However, its limitations underscore the need for better technical features, accurate language models, and interactive learning methodologies. Future research should examine deeper skill components, long-term learning trajectories, and mobile learning platform performance across academic programs.

This study stresses contextual and environmental aspects that impact Duolingo learning for students. Many students said academic burden, unpredictable study routines, and external distractions make it hard to use the app. These problems show that mobile-assisted language learning's success depends on the application's quality, the learner's environment, and institutional support. Providing organized schedules, campus-wide digital learning assistance, and collaborative learning communities can boost student engagement with mobile learning tools. Understanding these broader implications can help educators and organizations maximize the benefits of Duolingo and other English language development apps in multinational classrooms. However, this study is not without limitations. This study surveyed only 13 non-major English students and relied solely on qualitative data. Consequently, to achieve a more full understanding, it is recommended that future research integrate qualitative data with quantitative data, particularly to assess the influence of the Duolingo app on enhancing students' skills and engaging a broader range of participants from diverse backgrounds.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The researchers would like to express their appreciation to each and every participant who contributed their individual experiences and insightful perspectives. In order to ensure that the entire research process was carried out in a smooth manner and to provide rich data for this study, your contribution was absolutely necessary. This study would not have been

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Vol. 7, No. 4, October 2026
***e*-ISSN: 2723-4126**
***p*-ISSN: 2776-8880**

able to be carried out if it were not for your contribution.

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Journal of English Language Teaching

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