



## PERCEPTION ON THE USAGE OF DUOLINGO FOR ENGLISH VOCABULARY LEARNING AMONG STUDENTS AT HVCT VOCATIONAL COLLEGE, VIETNAM

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### Abstract:

This study explores the perceptions of non-English major students at the HVCT Vocational College regarding the use of Duolingo for English vocabulary learning, with an emphasis on its role as a supplementary educational tool. A mixed-methods approach, employing both quantitative and qualitative analyses, was utilized to gather insights from 117 questionnaire respondents and 20 interview participants. Grounded in the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), this research examines students' engagement with Duolingo, analyzing its perceived accessibility, ease of use, and interactive features. Results indicate that students generally hold positive views of Duolingo, particularly valuing its adaptive feedback and gamified elements for maintaining motivation and aiding vocabulary retention. However, students also expressed concerns over the limited practical application of learned vocabulary in real-life contexts. This study also contributes to understanding mobile-assisted language learning's (MALL) impact on Vietnamese vocational education and suggests considerations for optimizing MALL tool integration within educational frameworks.

**Keywords:** Duolingo, Technology Acceptance Model, non-English major students' perceptions, Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL)

### 1. Introduction

With the advancement of mobile technology, Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) applications have emerged as essential resources, offering interactive and flexible methods to support language acquisition. Among these applications, Duolingo has achieved global popularity due to its user-friendly design, engaging features, and

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gamified approach, positioning it as a promising tool for self-guided vocabulary development.

Research on the effectiveness of MALL platforms like Duolingo within the Vietnamese education system, especially for students outside English major programs, remains scarce. This group often encounters limited opportunities to practice language outside structured coursework, underscoring the need to explore how mobile applications like Duolingo can complement their learning. Prior studies in Vietnam, including those by Le Pham Phu Vinh (2020) and Nguyen Thi To Hoa (2022), have highlighted MALL's potential to boost motivation and engagement through interactive formats. However, there is still a lack of research specific to non-English major students in vocational education settings, where unique challenges and perspectives regarding mobile-assisted language learning may arise.

This research aims to address this gap by examining the perspectives of non-English major students on using Duolingo for English vocabulary learning at HVCT Vocational College. By analyzing students' perceptions of Duolingo in terms of vocabulary acquisition, this study intends to offer insights that can support the incorporation of mobile learning tools into educational systems. Guided by the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), this research investigates students' acceptance and use of Duolingo, ultimately providing data-driven recommendations for enhancing mobile-assisted learning tools for Vietnamese learners.

## 2. Previous Studies

In exploring the global and localized impacts of Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) tools like Duolingo, previous research has consistently highlighted positive learner perceptions and notable educational benefits.

Internationally, a foundational study by Vesselinov and Grego (2012) assessed Duolingo's effectiveness compared to traditional classroom instruction, finding that learners who used Duolingo achieved language proficiency levels comparable to those in formal educational settings. Their study encompassed a broad participant base, from high school students to adults, and demonstrated that consistent, daily use of the app correlated with significant proficiency gains. The researchers emphasized Duolingo's flexibility, allowing learners to progress at their own pace, which is particularly advantageous for adults balancing language learning with busy lifestyles. Additionally, the study underscored the app's gamification features—such as points and leaderboards—as instrumental in maintaining learner engagement and motivation, positioning Duolingo as a viable alternative or supplement to traditional instruction. Tiara *et al.* (2021) further investigated Duolingo's role in vocabulary learning, emphasizing its effectiveness in enhancing student enthusiasm, comfort, and motivation. Their study, based on surveys and interviews with both students and educators, highlighted that Duolingo's gamified elements help make vocabulary acquisition engaging and less monotonous. Educators also found Duolingo useful as a

supplementary instructional tool. Moreover, students who previously struggled with vocabulary retention demonstrated notable improvements after consistent use of Duolingo, reinforcing its applicability across diverse learning contexts. Purwanto (2023) also explored Duolingo's impact on vocabulary acquisition through a qualitative study involving tests, questionnaires, and interviews with eighth-grade students. Students appreciated Duolingo's user-friendly interface and the interactive exercises, which seamlessly integrate with classroom activities. Purwanto's findings also indicated self-reported gains in students' confidence and practical vocabulary usage, suggesting that Duolingo not only supports vocabulary retention but also fosters active language use. The study's qualitative insights affirmed the app's potential for further refinement, highlighting its dual role in facilitating knowledge acquisition and promoting practical language skills.

In the Vietnamese educational context, various studies have highlighted positive perceptions of Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) applications such as Duolingo. Nguyen Thi To Hoa (2022) conducted a study focusing on over 400 first-year elementary students at Vietnam National University, Hanoi (VNU-IS), examining their use of smartphone applications for English vocabulary learning. This research identified the key criteria students consider when choosing vocabulary learning apps, such as ease of use, interactivity, and content quality. Nguyen's findings revealed that students value apps that provide accessible, flexible learning options tailored to their needs. Moreover, the study emphasized the importance of technological tools in language learning, noting that these applications effectively complement traditional classroom methods by supporting independent, self-paced study. Similarly, Le Pham Phu Vinh (2020) explored the effectiveness of Duolingo among English-majored students at Ho Chi Minh City University of Food Industry (HUFVI). Through a questionnaire administered to 30 students, this study found that 85% of participants reported positive experiences with Duolingo, citing its convenience, motivational features, and engaging topic-based exercises. Students noted that Duolingo's gamified approach made vocabulary learning enjoyable and accessible, aligning with Nguyen's findings on the appeal of interactive, user-friendly applications. Le's research supports the integration of Duolingo as a supplementary tool in English language programs, demonstrating its capacity to enhance vocabulary retention and foster student motivation in Vietnamese educational settings.

Overall, the international research validates Duolingo's design and pedagogical approach as beneficial for diverse learners, while the Vietnamese studies confirm its potential as a valuable supplementary tool in language programs. Together, these findings suggest that with targeted integration and adaptation, MALL tools like Duolingo can play a transformative role in language education globally and within specific educational frameworks like those in Vietnam.

### 3. Research Methodology

#### 3.1 Research Setting and Participants

This study implemented a mixed-methods approach to explore non-English major students' perspectives on Duolingo as a tool for English vocabulary acquisition at HVCT. 117 students at HVCT participated and were selected via purposive sampling. The sampling focused on students with prior experience using Duolingo as a supplementary tool to their regular English courses. This criterion ensured that participants had direct exposure to the app, providing a reliable basis for assessing their perceptions. Semi-interviews are followed by a group of 20 students selected through convenience sampling, which provides an in-depth understanding of the benefits and limitations they encountered during the process.

#### 3.2 Research Instruments

To comprehensively capture students' perceptions, this study employed both a structured questionnaire and a semi-structured interview protocol:

- **Questionnaire:** The questionnaire used in this study was adapted from established instruments by Inayah (2020) and Purwanto (2023). It gathered demographic information and examined students' perceptions of Duolingo through Likert-scale questions. Responses were rated on a five-point scale from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.”
- **Semi-structured Interviews:** To add qualitative depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted using open-ended questions. This format allowed participants to elaborate on their personal views and preferences in using Duolingo for vocabulary learning.

#### 3.3 Data Collection and Analysis

- **Questionnaire:** The questionnaire was distributed online, allowing for convenient access for all participants. This initial stage provided an overview of students' general opinions on Duolingo's effectiveness as a vocabulary learning tool.
- **Semi-structured Interviews:** Twenty participants were selected for follow-up interviews, each lasting approximately 15 minutes, based on their questionnaire responses. This phase uncovered detailed aspects of students' attitudes toward Duolingo. The interviews were conducted in person, and audio recordings were made with participant consent.
- **Data Analysis:** The quantitative data were analyzed via SPSS 24 to identify patterns in students' perceptions. Qualitative data from the interviews underwent thematic analysis, allowing for the extraction of themes related to overall experiences with Duolingo as a vocabulary learning resource.

#### 4. Findings

The quantitative data from the questionnaire reveal that students generally perceive Duolingo positively as a vocabulary learning tool. The overall mean score was 3.63, indicating a favorable view among students. Key items, such as those measuring ease of learning new vocabulary (mean score 3.74) and the app's immediate feedback features (mean score 3.68), scored particularly high. This reflects that students appreciate Duolingo's structured approach to vocabulary acquisition, which supports both efficient learning and error correction. These results align with the TAM model's emphasis on perceived ease of use and usefulness, suggesting that students find Duolingo accessible and supportive for independent learning.

**Table 1:** Students' perceptions about Duolingo's role in vocabulary learning

Num.	Students' perceptions of Duolingo in vocabulary learning	Mean	Standard Deviation
Item 1	Duolingo helps me correct mistakes that I often make while learning English vocabulary.	3.68	0.750
Item 2	It excites me that Duolingo allows me to connect and interact with other learners.	3.67	0.799
Item 3	Duolingo's interactive exercises make learning English vocabulary more engaging.	3.63	0.738
Item 4	I have the confidence to use my newly learned vocabulary from Duolingo when communicating with others.	3.48	0.857
Item 5	Learning English vocabulary with Duolingo helps me learn new words faster.	3.74	0.824
Item 6	Duolingo provides me with constantly updated vocabulary learning materials.	3.56	0.781
	<b>Total</b>	<b>3.63</b>	<b>0.792</b>

Items related to students' confidence in using Duolingo independently also showed favorable ratings, with mean scores above 3.5. However, aspects related to vocabulary application in real-life contexts, while still positive, received comparatively lower scores (mean score 3.48), suggesting that students perceive Duolingo as a strong tool for vocabulary memorization but feel less certain about its application in authentic settings. Overall, the quantitative data underscore a positive perception of Duolingo's role in vocabulary learning, with students viewing it as an accessible and effective supplement to their language studies.

Qualitative data from the semi-structured interviews provided additional insights into students' perceptions, emphasizing individual experiences and preferences. Many students noted that Duolingo's interactive and gamified format makes vocabulary learning enjoyable and manageable within their schedules, highlighting the app's appeal to busy learners. Participants frequently mentioned that the user-friendly design and instant feedback were beneficial for tracking progress, with students feeling more motivated and accountable in their learning. However, several students expressed a desire for greater contextual application of vocabulary within Duolingo. They reported

that while the app effectively supports memorization, the lack of real-world context sometimes made it challenging to transfer new vocabulary to use daily. Despite this, most students still perceived Duolingo as an engaging and efficient tool for building foundational vocabulary skills with a strong potential to enhance independent learning. The thematic analysis shows that students' perceptions align with the TAM model, wherein ease of use and the app's practical functionality were key to acceptance and regular use.

In summary, the findings indicate that non-English major students at HVCT Vocational College generally hold positive perceptions of Duolingo as a tool for vocabulary learning. Students value the app's ease of use, accessibility, and structured feedback, contributing to its effectiveness in vocabulary acquisition. Although there is some desire for more contextualized learning, the app is perceived as a valuable and motivational tool that supports independent study, reinforcing its potential integration within educational frameworks.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings indicate that non-English major students at HVCT generally hold positive perceptions of Duolingo as a tool for vocabulary learning, which aligns with broader research on Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) applications. The high ratings for features like rapid vocabulary acquisition and instant feedback suggest that students appreciate Duolingo's structured, interactive approach, which provides immediate corrective feedback and a self-paced learning environment. These features support vocabulary acquisition and align with the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), emphasizing that perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness strongly influence students' acceptance and consistent use of the app. The insights from interviews further reveal that students perceive Duolingo as a motivating and enjoyable platform that accommodates their learning needs. The app's user-friendly design and gamified elements, such as progress tracking and instant feedback, contribute to a sense of achievement and continuous engagement. This finding aligns with Loewen *et al.* (2019) and Wang and Hsu (2020), who identified similar motivational benefits in MALL tools, reinforcing the notion that interactivity and adaptability are central to enhancing learner perceptions and encouraging regular usage. However, students reported challenges in using Duolingo-learned vocabulary in real-life situations, indicating a gap between the app's structured exercises and practical language use. While Duolingo aids memorization through repetition and gamified tasks, students expressed a need for context-rich exercises that simulate real interactions, which are essential for language proficiency. This limitation reflects findings from Finardi *et al.* (2016), who emphasize that vocabulary retention improves when learners practice words in realistic, contextual scenarios. Similarly, Loewen *et al.* (2019) suggest that context-based language activities help bridge the gap between digital practice and authentic usage, enhancing learners' confidence in real-world settings. By integrating situational exercises—such as dialogues

or specific task-based activities – Duolingo could enable students to use new vocabulary outside the app more effectively, supporting a more holistic approach to language learning.

In conclusion, this study explored non-English major students' perceptions of Duolingo for vocabulary learning at HVCT Vocational College. Findings reveal that students generally perceive Duolingo positively as its structured format aligns well with students' expectations, proving effective for vocabulary retention and self-paced study. However, while students benefit from Duolingo's features, enhancing the app with context-driven exercises could further support vocabulary application in real-world contexts. Overall, Duolingo shows significant potential as a supplementary learning tool, and with targeted adjustments, it could become an even more valuable resource in language education frameworks.

### **Conflict of Interest Statement**

The authors confirm that there are no conflicts of interest associated with the publication of this research.

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