



THE EFFECTIVENESS OF DUOLINGO FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING

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Abstract: *The development of digital technologies has significantly transformed the way people learn foreign languages. Mobile applications, such as Duolingo, provide flexible and accessible learning opportunities for users worldwide. This article examines the effectiveness of Duolingo as a language-learning tool, analyzing both its advantages and limitations. The study draws upon empirical research, official reports, and user feedback from online communities. Findings indicate that while Duolingo is particularly effective for beginners in developing vocabulary, reading, and listening skills, it may not fully support advanced speaking proficiency or deeper grammatical understanding. Therefore, integrating Duolingo with other educational strategies, such as classroom instruction, conversational practice, and authentic materials, is recommended to achieve comprehensive language proficiency.*

Key words: *Duolingo, language learning, mobile applications, gamification, CEFR, digital education, learner motivation.*



Introduction: In an increasingly globalized world, the ability to communicate in multiple languages has become a valuable skill for education, professional development, and social interaction. Traditionally, language learning has been conducted in classroom settings, using textbooks, lectures, and structured exercises. However, the rise of digital technologies has introduced new opportunities for independent and mobile language learning.

With the rise of digital technologies, learners now frequently use mobile devices to study languages, a practice referred to as Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) (Jiang et al., 2024). Applications like Duolingo exemplify this approach by combining accessibility, interactivity, and gamified learning features.

Among digital platforms, Duolingo has gained widespread popularity for its interactive and gamified approach to language learning. According to recent reports, Duolingo offers over 100 courses in over forty languages and has millions of active users globally (Blanco, 2024). The platform uses short, interactive lessons, gamification elements such as points and streaks, and automated feedback to motivate learners and maintain engagement.

Despite its popularity, the effectiveness of Duolingo as a comprehensive language-learning tool remains a topic of debate. While many users benefit from its convenience and motivational design, critics argue that the platform may not provide sufficient opportunities for advanced speaking practice or in-depth grammatical understanding (Smith, B. Jiang, X., & Peters, R., 2024). This article aims to evaluate Duolingo's effectiveness by examining its advantages and limitations, drawing upon empirical research, official reports, and user experiences from online communities.

Advantages of Using Duolingo

One major advantage of Duolingo is its accessibility. Unlike traditional courses that require physical attendance or substantial financial investment, Duolingo can be accessed via smartphone, tablet, or computer. The application's free basic version removes economic barriers, allowing learners from various backgrounds to practice a language regularly.



Duolingo also uses a structured, gradual learning approach. Lessons are divided into small units, introducing vocabulary and grammar incrementally. This approach is particularly useful for beginners, who may feel overwhelmed by the complexity of a new language. Furthermore, research indicates that Duolingo's instruction aligns with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), providing internationally recognized benchmarks for proficiency levels (Blanco, 2024; Council of Europe, 2020).

Another advantage is the platform's motivational design. Gamification elements, including points, streaks, and achievement badges, encourage users to maintain consistent learning habits. Educational research demonstrates that gamified learning environments enhance engagement and motivation, promoting long-term study behavior.

The flexibility of Duolingo is also notable. Lessons are short and can be completed at any time, allowing users to practice during brief periods such as commuting, breaks, or before bedtime. This convenience makes it easier for modern learners to integrate language study into their daily routines.

Empirical research supports the effectiveness of Duolingo for beginner-level skills. For instance, (González-Fernández & de, 2025) found that learners using app-based instruction, including Duolingo, made measurable gains in vocabulary, reading, and listening comprehension, comparable to learners in traditional classroom settings. Similarly, Smith, B. Jiang, X., & Peters, R. (2024) reported that learners using Duolingo showed significant improvement in both receptive skills (reading and listening) and productive skills (writing and speaking), highlighting the platform's broad impact on language proficiency. These findings are reinforced by user feedback on online communities, where many learners report that Duolingo helps maintain motivation and regular practice habits (Language Learning, 2024).

Limitations of Duolingo

Despite its advantages, Duolingo has several limitations that affect its suitability as a comprehensive language-learning solution.



A primary limitation is the restricted development of speaking skills. Although Duolingo includes pronunciation exercises, these are often brief and cannot replicate real conversational interaction. Effective language learning requires spontaneous communication with others, which supports fluency and confidence in speaking.

Grammar instruction is another limitation. While Duolingo introduces basic grammatical structures, explanations are often brief and lack detailed context, leading some learners to memorize patterns without fully understanding underlying rules (González-Fernández & de, 2025). Additionally, some exercises use unrealistic or artificial sentences that may not reflect practical language use, potentially confusing learners.

The reliance on translation-based exercises may also hinder the development of natural language processing. Effective language acquisition often requires thinking directly in the target language rather than constant translation from the native language.

User feedback corroborates these limitations. Online discussions highlight that while Duolingo is effective for vocabulary acquisition and motivation, it may not suffice for advanced proficiency or real-life conversation (Language Learning, 2024).

Discussion

The analysis of Duolingo's advantages and limitations suggests that the platform serves as a valuable learning tool in certain contexts but may not be sufficient as a standalone solution for language acquisition.

Research comparing app-based instruction with traditional classroom approaches suggests that digital platforms such as Duolingo can significantly support language development, particularly in vocabulary acquisition, reading comprehension, and learner motivation. (González-Fernández & de, 2025) found that learners using app-based tools often made comparable progress to those in formal classroom settings, especially when apps were integrated with other study practices.



Other studies emphasize that combining Duolingo with supplementary learning strategies enhances its effectiveness. Gamification maintains engagement, while exposure to authentic materials and real conversation helps develop speaking and listening proficiency. Similar conclusions about integrating digital platforms with traditional instruction have been highlighted in studies on Google Classroom and writing skill development (Usmanova, 2025).

Therefore, Duolingo should be considered a complementary tool within a broader language learning strategy. Its effectiveness increases when integrated with classroom instruction, speaking practice, reading authentic texts, and other learning methods (Jiang et al., 2024).

Conclusion

To sum up, Duolingo represents an innovative and accessible approach to language learning in the digital era. The application offers numerous advantages, including accessibility, flexibility, and motivational features that encourage consistent practice. These qualities make it particularly effective for beginners and for individuals who wish to maintain regular language learning habits.

However, the analysis also reveals several limitations, including limited opportunities for speaking practice, simplified grammar explanations, and occasional use of unrealistic sentence examples. These factors indicate that Duolingo alone may not be sufficient for achieving advanced language proficiency.

For this reason, learners should combine the use of Duolingo with other educational strategies such as conversation practice, listening to authentic materials, and formal instruction. When integrated into a broader learning approach, Duolingo can become a valuable component of effective language acquisition.

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