

Examining the Objectives and Process of EFL University Students When Conducting Self-Directed Learning with Duolingo: A Narrative Inquiry

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Abstract

Students must engage in independent study as one of the strategies that promotes student-centered learning since it affects how they learn. Some students rarely engage in independent learning, such as SDL, since they lack motivation, particularly when it comes to learning English. The purpose of this study is to look into how four college students use Duolingo for self-directed learning (SDL) and evaluate the objectives and procedure. A narrative inquiry was employed in this study to elucidate participant experiences. Additionally, data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and daily journals kept by the students. The journal was the first tool employed, and the initial data was collected seven times. To confirm or supplement the information from the journals, all participants were questioned after the journals had all been gathered. Thematic analysis was used to examine the data. The study demonstrated that all participants could control the process of self-directed learning, define their own objectives and goals, and provide feedback on their SDL. Furthermore, because Duolingo has features that support all SDL procedures, adopting it as a tool or media for SDL helps participants feel more excited to participate in SDL.

Keywords: Duolingo, independent learning, narrative inquiry, mobile assisted language learning, self-directed learning

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INTRODUCTION

Teachers can use a variety of strategies within the field of education to help students become independent learners. Self-directed learning (SDL) is one of them. Knowles (1975) defined self-directed

learning as the process by which people take charge of determining their own learning needs, setting goals, locating the people and resources they need to learn, selecting and putting into practice learning strategies, and assessing their own progress—all on their own, with or without the help of others. Students in Indonesia rarely engage in independent learning since they are accustomed to depending on their teachers and are therefore less likely to take the initiative to learn on their own. According to Hidayati and Diana (2019), students are not expected to use mobile apps for independent learning because they are used to depending only on their lecturers for information.

In response, the Freedom to Learn (Merdeka Belajar) program is introduced in the current curriculum, known as the Merdeka Curriculum (Kurikulum Merdeka), giving students the freedom to select and delve into subjects that suit their interests and aptitudes (Coordinating Ministry for Human Development and Cultural Affairs, 2022). SDL is a learning approach that is in line with the most recent curriculum in SDL when one considers what is required by the Freedom to Learn program and the Merdeka Curriculum; students' study autonomously based on their needs, interests, and talents.

To support students' self-directed learning, technological tools are required. Hao (2016) claims that as university teachers and students are still figuring out how to integrate technology with traditional in-class education, it is worthwhile to attempt encouraging such appropriate learning apps and helping students develop the habit of studying independently. According to Bartholomew (2016), mobile devices can improve students' academic performance or self-directed learning. Furthermore, Demir (2018) discovered that mobile applications significantly improve students' performance and motivation while also having a favorable impact on their academic attainment.

Numerous scholarly investigations have examined the use of Duolingo as an English language learning tool. In their investigation of the usage of Duolingo to assist students in learning English, Hidayati et al. (2019) discovered that students were actively utilizing the app, indicating a good response. According to Hakimantiek et al. (2022), there is another engaging and still appropriate approach to teaching English, especially in the area of English reading, by using the Duolingo online language learning platform to help students surpass the necessary English reading target that should be based on the CEFR assessment standard. Cesarini et al.'s (2021) research sought to understand how students used Duolingo to learn vocabulary as well as how they felt about using it and how it improved their vocabulary competency. Higher exam results demonstrated a significant improvement in pupils' vocabulary understanding when taught via the Duolingo app, according to the findings. It emphasizes how Duolingo may help students improve their vocabulary in an efficient manner. Furthermore, Novitasari (2022) sought to understand how students felt about studying

English-related topics using the Duolingo app. The results show that students have a favorable opinion of utilizing Duolingo for online learning.

Previous studies have primarily focused on elementary, middle, and high school students; however, more study at the college student level in the context of EFL is still needed. As a result, this study looks into how university students, particularly those studying English education, manage their self-directed learning while using Duolingo and how they reflect on this process of learning English on their own.

METHOD

Since the goal of the study was to investigate experiences, narrative inquiry was the research design that was employed. Four English Education students from a public institution participated in this study. A number of factors, including self-directed learning experiences, access to the Duolingo app, and an interest in learning English, were taken into consideration when choosing study participants.

Students' daily notebooks and semi-structured interviews were the methods utilized in this study to collect data from the participants. Participants were requested to write in their daily journals as students and were asked to answer questions in a semi-structured interview on their experiences using Duolingo to support their SDL. Knowles' SDL dimensions served as the foundation for the question content (1975). Additionally, journaling was utilized to track the participants' experiences and advancements while utilizing Duolingo for self-directed learning, which was the main objective of the research. The first method used to gather the data was journaling, and once all of the journals were gathered, semi-structured interviews were conducted. In order to make the journal writing process more comfortable, the participants were instructed to write in their native tongue. However, the journal's content about the Duolingo application had to be consistent (Hager & Brockop, 2009; Hayman et al., 2012).

The data was examined once it was collected. The researcher employed thematic analysis that is descriptive. According to Braun and Clarke (2015), descriptive thematic analysis is a type of analysis that focuses on finding and describing the pattern and meaning within the data. Thematic analysis involves three steps: data reduction, data display, and data drawing and conclusions. (Hubberman & Miles, 1994).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

When it comes to determining their learning needs and creating goals, the researcher discovered that every participant differed and agreed with each other. It is then shown that only two participants claim that the technique they use to construct their goals is dependent upon recognized learning needs. Based on the initial

identified or defined learning needs, they develop their learning objectives. This is consistent with the findings of Knowles (1975), where pupils were able to identify their learning needs by self-assessment and determine the content areas (goals). Additionally, Marzano (2010) asserted that prior to establishing learning objectives, it is critical to ascertain the learner's needs. This may be achieved by evaluating the learner's current knowledge and abilities, identifying their strengths and shortcomings, and pinpointing areas in which they require additional practice.

Consequently, even though the other two participants only describe how they identified what they needed and don't go into further depth on how to create them, it doesn't mean that they don't have goals. They obliquely seek to address the learning requirements found in the Duolingo pre-test. It implies that despite their differences, all participants are able to identify their own learning requirements and create learning objectives.

Additionally, every step of the learning control process—which includes locating resources, selecting strategies, and evaluating learning—is actively carried out by each participant. Furthermore, there are commonalities even though each person completes each stage in a unique manner.

All participants use Duolingo's capabilities to their advantage when searching for material resources. There are three features: the audio translation feature, the tips and notes feature, and the Duolingo community feature. In addition, Duolingo provides forums where users can converse and exchange experiences related to their use of the program. These tools help users find and identify resources that are pertinent to the course they are taking. According to Munday (2016), people can talk to each other about subjects that interest them. Peer-to-peer learning, or learning from actual individuals (outside the forum), is comparable to this approach.

Three learning techniques were identified as being used by participants when using Duolingo for SDL when selecting and putting into practice learning tactics. There are three types of learning: visual, consistent, and error-based learning. The participant's desire to maintain his English is what motivated him to learn consistently, which enables him to reach his main goal. This suggests that he is consciously controlling his learning by adhering to a schedule. In agreement with Knowles (1975), who claimed that one of the best methods for learning new abilities is the drill strategy. Drill and practice is a disciplined, repetitive way of training and perfecting a skill or procedure (Lim et al., 2012). Additionally, he used visual learning by studying screenshots that have information that may be reviewed, like formulas or other materials. According to Rahmawati and Gumiandari (2021), people with a visual learning style find it easier to comprehend information when it is presented to them directly or to retain it better when it is done so in the form of eye-

catching visuals or vibrant colors. Stated differently, the participant employed a single method that combined the two activities—screenshotting relevant materials like formulas.

Two individuals putting the learning through mistakes method into practice. Repeating questions that are incomprehensible and studying them until they are understood is the method. That approach is comparable to a problem-solving endeavor as one of the suitable means of acquiring comprehension (Knowles, 1975). Furthermore, spaced repetition enhances a number of learning processes, including recall, problem-solving, and generalization to novel situations, as mentioned by Kang (2016). This demonstrates that participants in this process are using a variety of learning strategies rather than concentrating on a single strategy. As a result, any participant can effectively oversee their own education on their own. This is demonstrated by their ability to pinpoint every tool, tactic, and assessment technique that works for them.

According to the reflections collected, self-directed learning combined with technology—like Duolingo, one of the mobile-assisted language learning applications—makes all users happy, motivated, and enthusiastic. This is due to Duolingo’s tools that assist users in completing each SDL step. Additionally, they claim that Duolingo works well when combined with self-directed learning.

Based on the information gleaned from daily diaries and interviews, it is evident from the discussion above that all participants can use Duolingo to effectively complete all SDL phases. This suggests that when students use SDL, the effects are positive because they have control over and can keep an eye on the SDL they are doing. According to Morrow et al. (1993), self-directed learning can help students create their own norms and leadership styles if it is correctly designed and executed. Additionally, studies by Abdullah (2001) have demonstrated that kids desire greater independence, and SDL is one way to satisfy this natural need to help students have meaningful learning experiences that will last until adulthood. Furthermore, Huda and Sulistyaningrum (2022) discovered that SDL develops pupils’ affective behaviors. They have positive attitudes and a strong affection for SDL since it teaches students to be accountable for and put effort into their own English language learning. Furthermore, as per the overall self-reflection of every individual involved, they experience a sense of motivation and assistance due to the integration of Duolingo’s diverse features with the SDL process. It follows that all participants meet the requirements for all three SDL dimensions: motivation, self-monitoring (responsibility), and self-management (control) (Garrison, 1997).

CONCLUSION

One participant wished to learn English generally by thinking on his main desire when diagnosing his learning needs. Conversely, two individuals determined their level by taking the Duolingo initial or pre-test.

Only one participant created a goal based on his own learning needs during the goal-making process. All participants made use of several elements, including a forum, comments and tips, and an audio translation option, in order to obtain material resources. Additionally, two individuals looked for human resources by drawing on the viewpoints, experiences, and knowledge of their friends. Consistent learning is the initial method employed when putting learning strategies into practice. One participant committed to or was able to maintain ten minutes a day of English practice. In order to save formulas or helpful material relevant to his education, he also used screenshots. Asking the same questions to two different people is the second tactic. During the learning assessment phase, each participant tracked their data using peers and user statistics to do their evaluation. This indicates that Duolingo encourages users to assess their own learning by offering a user's statistic as a point of reference. Due to Duolingo's features, which are versatile and useful in different levels of learning, all participants felt delighted and motivated after completing all phases of self-directed learning.

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