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English learning applications: A shortcut or an effective solution?

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Abstract
This study aims to explore users' perceptions and experiences of English learning applications. Data were collected through an online survey involving 33 respondents aged 18–24. The results showed that Duolingo was the most frequently used application (84.8%), followed by Memrise (9.1%) and Babbel (6.1%). Most respondents had used English learning applications for less than six months (75.8%), with the majority using them one to four times per week. In terms of perceived effectiveness, vocabulary showed the strongest self-reported progress, with 81% of respondents reporting significant (30%) and very significant (51%) improvement. In contrast, most respondents reported neutral perceptions of improvements in listening, speaking, and grammar skills. Although 93.9% of respondents considered the applications practical and convenient, 51% stated that their overall effectiveness depended on individual learning purposes. Gamification features such as points, levels, and badges were also considered motivating by 90.9% of respondents. However, respondents indicated that applications were more suitable for beginner-level learning and were not sufficient to develop overall fluency independently. Suggestions for improvement included more diverse learning content, interactive speaking features, personalized learning levels, and automated feedback. Overall, the findings suggest that English learning applications serve as accessible and supportive supplementary tools, particularly for vocabulary development and beginner-level learning, but should not be considered a complete replacement for formal language instruction. From an Islamic educational perspective, these findings highlight the importance of self-directed learning (*talab al-'ilm*) and disciplined, ethically guided use of digital media in the pursuit of knowledge.

Keywords:
English learning application; Language acquisition; Learner perception; Mobile-assisted language learning; Motivation

A. INTRODUCTION

The The rapid expansion of digital technology in education has bypassed temporal and spatial constraints, making English language learning accessible anytime and anywhere (Garzón et al., 2023; Klímová, 2019). Applications like Busuu, Duolingo, and HelloTalk offer accessible, tailored, and practical learning solutions (Putri et al., 2024; Rosilah & Ulfa, 2025). By incorporating AI-driven exercises, gamification, and native-speaker interactions, these tools accommodate diverse learning styles and paces at a lower cost than traditional offline instruction (Amir & Rustam, 2025; Kacetl & Klímová, 2019).

While these applications advance Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL), they present distinct limitations, such as restricted feedback in free tiers, repetitive content, and reliance on stable internet connectivity (Benlaghrissi & Ouahidi, 2024; Jedi-Sari-Biglar & Liman-Kaban, 2023). Although extensive research has evaluated technology adoption and basic skill acquisition via the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and micro-learning frameworks, it remains unclear whether these tools serve as temporary fixes or foster long-term fluency.

From an Islamic educational perspective, digital language learning aligns with talab al-'ilm (the pursuit of knowledge), encouraging independent learning and efficient time management. Furthermore, Islamic education emphasizes *istiqamah* (consistency), prioritizing sustained, disciplined effort over sporadic engagement. Mastering English is also instrumentally vital for da'wah and global Islamic literacy, facilitating the communication of Islamic values to a broader audience. However, limited empirical research examines whether self-directed applications cultivate *istiqamah* defined as sustained, disciplined, and autonomous learning or merely encourage short-term engagement among Muslim learners. Exploring learner perceptions through this self-directed, value-based lens constitutes the primary novelty of this study, as prior MALL research rarely examines autonomy and consistency as value-based constructs rather than purely technological ones.

Accordingly, this study investigates how learners perceive and use language learning applications, evaluating their perceived ease, usefulness, and long-term efficacy versus short-term utility.

B. METHODS

This study used a descriptive survey design combining quantitative Likert-scale items with open-ended qualitative feedback to examine learners' perceptions of English learning applications. A non-probability convenience sampling technique was employed: Google Forms were used to collect data, while status updates and WhatsApp groups were used to distribute the forms to current or past application users across Indonesia. Inclusion criteria required respondents to be aged 18–24 and to have used at least one English learning application. A total of 33 respondents voluntarily and anonymously participated over a period of two months in early 2026, after providing informed consent prior to completing the Google Form.

The research instrument consisted of two parts: 15 closed-ended items (multiple-choice and 5-point Likert scale) capturing usage profile, perceived ease of use, motivation, skill progress, and confidence; and 1 open-ended question gathering suggestions for app development. The instrument underwent a face validity check with peer reviewers prior to distribution to ensure clarity and readability. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages). Qualitative data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's (1994) framework, involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing.

C. RESULT & DISCUSSION

Table 1. Respondent Profile, Usage Patterns, and Accessibility Perception (N = 33)

Question	Category	Frekuensi (n)	Persentase (%)
Which English learning application do you use most often/have you used?	Duolingo	28	84,8%
	Memrise	3	9,1%
	Babbel	2	6,1%
	Others	9	27%
How long have you been using the English learning application?	Less than 3 months	19	57,6%
	3–6 months	6	18,2%
	7–12 months	3	9,1%
	More than 1 year	5	15,2%
How many times a week do you use the English learning application?	1-2 times	15	45,5%

	3-4 times	8	24,2%
	5-6 times	3	9,1%
	Every day	7	21,2%
How easy is it for you to start and use an English learning application without guidance?	Very Difficult	-	0%
	Difficult	1	3%
	Neutral	15	45,5%
	Easy	12	36,4%
	Very Easy	5	15,2%
Do you feel that applications are a “practical” and “convenient” way to learn English?	Yes	31	93,9%
	No	2	6,1%
How much does the application help you overcome learning barriers such as cost, time, or location?	Very Low	-	0%
	Low	2	6,1%
	Neutral	13	39,4%
	High	14	42,4%
	Very High	4	12,1%

Source: Processed Online Survey Data (2026)

According to Table 1, the most popular app was Duolingo (84.8%), followed by Memrise (9.1%) and Babbel (6.1%). The majority of respondents accessed English learning apps 1-2 times a week (45.5%) and had been using them for less than three months (57.6%). Despite their very infrequent use, 93.9% of respondents thought these apps were useful and practical, and 54.5% said they assisted in lowering obstacles relating to cost, time, and location.

According to the results, accessibility promotes initial acceptance but does not always result in long-term use. This is in line with the findings of Tiffany et al. (2024), who discovered that without satisfaction, trust, and involvement, perceived utility and simplicity of use alone might not guarantee continuation. In a similar vein, Daeli (2024) stressed that long-term language growth requires regular practice. Applications seem to serve mostly as supplemental tools that necessitate ongoing user involvement.

Table 2. Perceptions of the Effectiveness of Skill Development and the Continuity of Learning

Question	Very Insignificant	Insignificant	Neutral	Significant	Very Significant
Do you feel your English vocabulary has improved significantly after using the app?	-	9%	9%	30%	51%
Do you feel your English listening skills have improved significantly after using the app?	3%	9%	51%	30%	6%

Do you feel your English speaking skills have improved significantly after using the app?	-	12%	54%	27%	6%
Do you feel your English grammar has improved significantly after using the app?	3%	18%	54%	18%	6%
	Very Unconfident	Not Confident	Neutral	Confident	Very Confident
How confident are you that your English skills from the app are sufficient to be used in real situations (e.g., everyday conversation, schoolwork, or work)?	6%	9%	48%	24%	12%
	Yes	No	Not Sure	Depends on the Purpose	
Do you think apps are better suite helping beginner learners than th seeking a more in-depth understa English?	63%	9%	27%	-	
Overall, do you consider English learning apps to be an effective solution for achieving English fluency?	30%	9%	9%	51%	

Source: Processed Online Survey Data (2026)

Table 2 shows that vocabulary had the biggest reported gain, with 81% of respondents reporting positive progress (30% significant and 51% very significant). However, most respondents were unsure about speaking (54%), listening (51%), and grammar (54%). According to Stockwell (2010), this suggests that applications may be more effective for discrete language components like vocabulary than for skills requiring regular engagement and contextual practice.

Additionally, just 36% of respondents felt confident or extremely confident while using English in everyday circumstances, compared to 48% who were neutral. Even though 81% of respondents reported positive vocabulary progress, this self-reported gain did not immediately result in increased confidence when speaking. This supports the findings of Loewen et al. (2019), who found that whereas mobile applications can improve linguistic components, they may not be sufficient to improve overall fluency.

Furthermore, 63% of respondents found applications more suitable for beginners. Regarding perceived overall effectiveness, 51% indicated that it depended on individual learning aims, whereas 30% perceived them as effective. These results show that English learning applications are perceived

as effective for foundational learning but are better positioned as supplemental resources than as alternatives for formal instruction (Godwin-Jones, 2011; Kukulska-Hulme & Shield, 2008).

Table 3. Motivation and Learning Experiences

Question	Category	Frekuensi (n)	Persentase (%)
Do you feel that English learning applications accelerate your learning process compared to other methods (e.g., tutoring, books, formal classes)?	Strongly Agree	1	3%
	Agree	5	15,2%
	Neutral	17	51,5%
	Disagree	6	18,2%
	Strongly Disagree	4	12,1%
Do you feel that applications motivate you through systems such as points, levels, or badges?	Yes	30	90,9%
	No	3	9,1%

Source: Processed Online Survey Data (2026)

Table 3 shows what people thought about gamified motivation and how fast they learned. In total 90,9% of the people who took part said that game-like features such as points, levels and badges really help them want to learn more. When it came to how fast they learned compared to traditional ways like coaching, reading books or scheduled lessons most people didn't have a strong opinion (51.5%). 30.3% Said they didn't agree and only 18.2% said they did agree. These results show a difference between playing games and feeling like you are learning deeply. Even though game elements really help people get excited and want to take part (90.9%) they don't make learning skills faster. Hamzah et al. (2024) Found that using technologies makes people more involved and interested, however digital tools alone cannot replace the structured teaching that is needed for more advanced learning. The main question people have, about how they learn suggests that students don't see mobile apps as a quick way to replace school but as something to use along with regular learning. From an Islamic educational perspective, this pattern illustrates the distinction between extrinsic motivation generated by gamified rewards and the intrinsic motivation rooted in *niyyah* (sincere intention) and *istiqamah* (consistency), both of which are considered essential for sustainable, long-term learning in Islamic teaching. Gamification may draw learners in, but lasting progress ultimately depends on the learner's own disciplined and consistent effort.

Table 4. Classification of User Suggestions for English Learning Applications

No	Category	Description / Focus of Suggestion	Frequency	Percentage
	Internal User Factors	Self-awareness and motivation of users as determinants of learning effectiveness	8	22.2%
	Completeness of Language Skills	Requests for material covering Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing, Vocabulary, and Grammar.	5	13.9%
	Learning Experience (User Experience)	Varied content (video/podcast), attractive visuals, and a non-boring learning atmosphere.	5	13.9%
	Speaking Partner & Interaction Features	Availability of a coach or conversation partner to practice speaking skills.	5	13.9%

	Accessibility & Price	Hope that premium features can be accessed for free or at a more affordable price.	3	8.3%
	Personalization & Learning Levels	Availability of class/level options (starting from beginner) and material tailored to user needs.	2	5.6%
	Feedback & Automatic Correction	Personalized and adaptive feedback system to correct learning mistakes.	2	5.6%
	Learning Guidance & Management	Progress information, practice schedules, and clear usage instructions.	2	5.6%
	AI Development & Utilization	Use of AI technology for feedback, with restrictions to prevent misuse.	2	5.6%
.	Vocabulary Enrichment	Focus on increasing the quantity of vocabulary to be memorized.	1	2.8%
.	Ethics & Content Safety	Hope that content is free from SARA (ethnic/religious/racial) elements and non-educational material.	1	2.8%
Total			36	**100%**

Note: n = 36 total responses. Out of 33 respondents, 1 did not answer and 3 provided more than one suggestion (composite answers), so the total number of coded responses exceeds the number of respondents. Percentages are calculated based on the total number of coded responses (n = 36).

Source: Processed Online Survey Data (2026)

In addition to quantitative data, this study gathered open-ended responses regarding suggestions for improving the English learning application. Of the total 33 respondents, one provided no answer, while three offered multiple suggestions (composite responses). All responses were categorized into several key themes as presented Table 4 and are discussed further below:

1. Internal Factors

   Factors external to the application, such as user self-awareness and personal motivation, emerged in the category receiving the highest number of responses (eight participants). Some respondents explicitly stated that learning success depends on personal intent and consistency. They even likened using the application to student-teacher relationship, which requires the learner to maintain focus. These findings confirm that successful language learning- regardless of the application's features-remains the result of an interaction between the quality of the tool and the user's own agency.
2. Comprehensive language skills and learning experience

   Five respondents emphasized that the material should cover all four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing)- as well as vocabulary and grammar-rather than focusing on just one aspect. Another five respondents highlighted the learning experience (user experience), suggesting more varied content, such as podcast or videos, alongside engaging visuals.
3. Speaking partner and interaction features

   Five respondents emphasized the importance of having a speaking partner or coach feature to improve live speaking skills. This indicates that two-way oral interaction is still perceived as a major shortcoming in self-practices applications, which typically excel more teaching vocabulary and grammar than speaking.
4. Accessibility and price

   Although digital applications are generally cheaper than conventional courses, three respondents expected premium features to be accessible for free or at a lower cost. This indicates that economic factors remain important
5. Personalization, feedback, and learning management

   Two respondents suggested a system that assigns levels or classes based on user ability, more personalized feedback and automated correction mechanism, as well as clearer usage guidelines and

progress monitoring. These three components indicate a need for flexible and organized learning tailored to each user.

6. AI Development and Utilization

   Two respondents stated that artificial intelligence (AI) technology could be used to provide more adaptive feedback. However, they noted that AI must be used cautiously to prevent misuse; for instance, users could employ external AI models like ChatGPT or Gemini to automatically answer practice exercises. These findings indicate that users are aware of the potential conflict between technological convenience and the integrity of the learning process.

7. Vocabulary enrichment

   One respondent emphasized the importance of increasing the volume of vocabulary to be memorized, indicating that some users still believe vocabulary mastery is the key to English language proficiency.

8. Content ethics and safety

   One respondent expressed the hope that the application would not contain content related to sensitive issues (such as ethnicity, religion, race, or social groups) or non-educational material, as the app is intended to be a learning tool rather than a community platform for specific social agendas. This concern aligns with the Islamic principle of adab (ethical conduct) in the use of digital media, which emphasizes that technology used for learning should be free from harmful or divisive content and should support, rather than undermine, the learner's moral and intellectual development

   Overall, these findings support the quantitative data by showing that when using english learning programs, consumers need both technical components (features, content, and cost) and ethical and psychological considerations.

D. CONCLUSION

This study indicates that English learning apps are user-friendly tools for basic vocabulary and beginner practice. However, they are perceived as less effective for speaking, real-life communication, and overall language comprehension. Despite positive feedback on usefulness, low usage frequency suggests that ease of use does not guarantee consistent learning habits. Thus, apps should supplement rather than replace traditional instruction. Future app development needs comprehensive practice, enhanced speaking features, adaptive learning, and better feedback, with further research required across diverse demographics. Pedagogically, Islamic education institutions can leverage these apps to foster *istiqamah* (consistency) and *talab al-'ilm* (seeking knowledge), provided the content adheres to adab (ethical standards). Incorporating reflective or value-based prompts (*niyyah*) can further align technological convenience with sustained learning habits.

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