



Volume 1 Issue 2 Year 2025 Pages 83-101
e-ISSN 3090-9406 | DOI: 10.70152
<https://journal.akademimerdeka.com/ojs/index.php/duites>

Comparing Learners' Perceptions of Learning English via Duolingo and BBC Learning English Platforms

Ratna Widya Iswara^{1*}, Silvia Catalan Ambag²

¹ Politeknik Negeri Jakarta, Indonesia

² Lyceum of the Philippines University, Philippines

*Corresponding author's email: ratna.widya.iswara@tik.pnj.ac.id

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.70152/duties.v1i2.240>

Abstract: This study explores EFL learners' perceptions of two widely used digital language learning platforms: Duolingo and BBC Learning English. Drawing on the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), the research investigates how learners evaluate the platforms in terms of effectiveness, engagement, and usability, as well as their perceived strengths and limitations in developing specific English language skills. Using a qualitative descriptive design, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with ten EFL learners who had experience using both platforms. Thematic analysis revealed that Duolingo was favored for vocabulary and grammar practice due to its gamified and user-friendly design, while BBC Learning English was perceived as more effective for listening comprehension and exposure to authentic language. Learners reported using both platforms strategically, depending on their individual learning goals. The findings highlight the complementary nature of these tools and the importance of aligning digital resources with learners' preferences and skill development needs. This study contributes to the growing body of research on educational technology in language learning and offers practical implications for educators and developers.

Keywords: BBC Learning English, Duolingo, EFL learners, language learning technology, Technology Acceptance Model

INTRODUCTION

In the digital age, language learners increasingly turn to online platforms to supplement or replace traditional classroom instruction. Mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) tools such as Duolingo and web-based resources like BBC Learning English have become widely accessible and popular among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners around the globe (Kannan & Meenakshi, 2022; Kessler et al., 2025). These platforms offer learners autonomy, flexibility, and multimedia-rich content that caters to diverse learning needs and preferences (Dong et al., 2022; Karakaya & Bozkurt, 2022). As technology continues to transform language education, understanding how learners perceive the value and effectiveness of such platforms becomes essential for educators and curriculum designers.

Duolingo, known for its gamified, app-based interface, emphasizes repetition, reward

systems, and user engagement through bite-sized lessons. It is praised for its accessibility and motivating features, especially among beginners (Sudina & Plonsky, 2024). In contrast, BBC Learning English offers a more traditional, content-driven approach, featuring authentic materials, news-based lessons, and structured grammar explanations (Grapin et al., 2023). While both platforms aim to enhance English language acquisition, they differ significantly in instructional design, learning strategies, and skill focus.

Although prior research has explored the integration of educational technology into EFL learning (Pratiwi & Waluyo, 2023; Seyyedrezaei et al., 2024), few studies have directly compared learners' perceptions of these two widely used platforms. Understanding how learners experience and evaluate each tool can provide insights into their respective strengths and weaknesses, especially in terms of usability, engagement, and language skill development. This study fills this gap by investigating EFL learners' perceptions of learning English using Duolingo and BBC Learning English, offering a comparative analysis grounded in user experience. To guide this investigation, the following research questions were formulated:

1. What are the learners' perceptions of the effectiveness, engagement, and usability of Duolingo and BBC Learning English in supporting their English language learning?
2. How do learners compare the advantages and limitations of Duolingo and BBC Learning English in terms of developing specific English skills (e.g., vocabulary, listening, grammar)?

By comparing learners' perceptions of Duolingo and BBC Learning English, this study contributes valuable insights into how different types of digital learning platforms support English language acquisition. The findings are expected to inform language educators, curriculum developers, and EdTech designers about the specific features learners find beneficial or challenging in each platform. Moreover, the study highlights the importance of aligning digital tools with learners' preferences, goals, and skill development needs, ultimately supporting more effective and personalized language learning experiences in both formal and informal educational contexts. The findings of this study are expected to offer practical insights for educators seeking to recommend or integrate digital tools into language instruction, for learners aiming to make informed choices about their self-directed learning strategies, and for platform developers interested in aligning their design with user preferences and language acquisition goals. By highlighting learners' comparative perceptions, the study contributes to the optimization of digital language learning experiences across multiple contexts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Duolingo and BBC Learning English in English Language Education

In recent years, digital platforms have played an increasingly central role in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, offering learners alternative and often more flexible

ways to engage with language learning materials (Wardat & Akour, 2024; Yenphech et al., 2025). Two widely used platforms in this space are Duolingo and BBC Learning English. Both are freely accessible and have attracted millions of users worldwide, particularly among learners seeking supplementary resources outside formal classroom environments. Their popularity stems from their convenience, user-friendly interfaces, and compatibility with various learning styles, including self-paced and informal learning (Sudina & Plonsky, 2024). While Duolingo tends to attract users through mobile apps and short gamified tasks, BBC Learning English appeals to those who prefer content-rich lessons that mimic real-world English usage. These two platforms represent different pedagogical orientations yet serve a common purpose—enhancing learners' English proficiency through technology-mediated experiences.

Duolingo is a mobile-first application that has revolutionized language learning through gamification and adaptive technology. It offers bite-sized lessons that guide learners through vocabulary, grammar, sentence construction, and pronunciation, primarily in the form of quizzes and interactive exercises (Li et al., 2024). One of its most praised features is gamification, which incorporates points, streaks, levels, and rewards to maintain learner motivation. The app also utilizes adaptive learning algorithms that adjust the difficulty based on user performance, providing a personalized learning experience (Christodoulou & Angeli, 2022). Additionally, its use of spaced repetition helps reinforce retention of vocabulary and grammar patterns over time. Duolingo is designed to be accessible on smartphones and tablets, encouraging daily engagement with manageable time investments. Despite being often criticized for oversimplifying language learning, it remains a powerful tool for beginners and casual learners due to its intuitive interface and engaging design.

On the other hand, BBC Learning English offers a more traditional and content-rich approach, ideal for learners seeking exposure to authentic English (Gou, 2023). It features a wide array of resources, including news stories, documentaries, grammar tutorials, pronunciation guides, and structured lessons. The platform emphasizes real-world language use (Salama, 2022), providing learners with up-to-date expressions, idioms, and discourse patterns through video and audio-based materials. Lessons are often thematically organized and tailored to different proficiency levels, making it easier for learners to target specific skills (Salama, 2024). Compared to Duolingo, BBC Learning English is more academically inclined and suitable for intermediate to advanced learners who wish to refine their listening, speaking, or comprehension skills using authentic British English contexts.

Pedagogically, both platforms offer distinct yet valuable contributions to EFL learning. Duolingo supports skill development in vocabulary, grammar, and basic sentence structure through its repetitive, game-like tasks, making it suitable for beginners and those learning independently (Bicknell et al., 2023; Essafi et al., 2024). It promotes learner autonomy and helps users develop consistent study habits. In contrast, BBC Learning English is particularly effective in strengthening listening skills, understanding natural speech, and expanding vocabulary in context. Its resources also facilitate critical thinking

and cultural awareness, making it highly beneficial for classroom integration or advanced self-study (Salama, 2024). Both platforms cater to informal learning settings, empowering learners to take control of their own educational trajectories outside traditional instruction.

A growing body of research has examined the effectiveness of these platforms. For instance, Jiang et al. (2024) found that Duolingo users made significant gains in reading and listening after consistent use, suggesting its potential as a supplementary tool for language acquisition. Similarly, studies on BBC Learning English indicate that learners who regularly engage with its multimedia content report improved listening comprehension and increased motivation to use English authentically (Shamsi & Bozorgian, 2024). While both platforms have been widely praised, few comparative studies have explored how learners perceive and evaluate them side by side—highlighting a critical area for further research.

Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) as Theoretical Framework

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) provides a foundational framework for understanding users' acceptance of technology. The model identifies four key variables (Granić, 2022): perceived usefulness (PU), or the extent to which a user believes that a technology enhances their performance; perceived ease of use (PEOU), or the belief that the technology is free of effort; attitude toward use, which reflects the user's overall evaluation of the technology; and behavioral intention to use, which predicts actual usage behavior. These variables interact to explain how and why users adopt digital tools. In the context of EFL learning, TAM is particularly relevant for analyzing learners' experiences with platforms such as Duolingo and BBC Learning English (Pan et al., 2024; Sulistiyo et al., 2022). While Duolingo's gamified features may be perceived as easy to use and useful for vocabulary practice, BBC Learning English may be viewed as more beneficial for developing listening skills through authentic content. By applying TAM, this study systematically examines how learners assess the effectiveness, usability, and engagement of both platforms, uncovering the factors that influence their preferences and continued use.

Previous Studies, Research Gap, and Novelty

In recent years, a growing number of studies have explored the use of digital platforms in English language learning, particularly with the rise of mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) and web-based resources. Several researchers have examined Duolingo's effectiveness in developing vocabulary, grammar, and learner engagement. For example, Pichugin et al. (2023) reported that Duolingo users made measurable gains in language proficiency comparable to traditional classroom instruction. Similarly, Lo et al. (2025) and Olimat (2024) found that learners perceived Duolingo as useful for basic language practice, though it was often viewed as insufficient for developing advanced communicative competence. On the other hand, studies on BBC Learning English have focused more on its integration into formal education settings and its role in enhancing listening and comprehension skills. Bartalesi-Graf et al. (2024), for instance, found that

learners appreciated the platform's authentic content and reported improved motivation when exposed to real-world English via videos and audio materials.

Despite these contributions, most existing studies focus on one platform in isolation, limiting our understanding of how learners evaluate and compare different tools for language development. While research has been conducted on learners' satisfaction or perceived usefulness of either Duolingo or BBC Learning English, comparative studies that investigate learners' experiences with both platforms are scarce. Moreover, studies rarely consider learners' holistic perceptions, including aspects such as engagement, usability, and the development of specific English skills across platforms with distinct pedagogical designs. This lack of comparative analysis leaves an important gap in the literature, particularly in the context of learner-driven language learning where platform choice plays a critical role in shaping outcomes. Furthermore, many of these studies had methodological limitations, such as relying solely on quantitative surveys, which restricted the depth of insight into learners' actual usage patterns and experiences. Others lacked a clear theoretical framework, making it difficult to interpret learners' perceptions beyond surface-level satisfaction. These limitations further highlight the need for a qualitative, theory-informed investigation that captures the complexity of learner engagement with multiple platforms.

This study aims to address that gap by directly comparing learners' perceptions of Duolingo and BBC Learning English. It investigates how users experience, evaluate, and benefit from these tools in terms of engagement, usability, and skill development, drawing on the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) as a theoretical lens. The novelty of this research lies in its dual focus: (1) offering a side-by-side analysis of two popular but pedagogically distinct language learning platforms, and (2) using TAM to systematically interpret learners' attitudes and intentions. By doing so, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of how digital tools are perceived by learners in informal learning contexts and provides practical insights for educators, platform developers, and language learners seeking effective, self-directed learning strategies.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to explore and compare learners' perceptions of Duolingo and BBC Learning English (Villamin et al., 2024). The research aimed to gather in-depth insights into learners' experiences, focusing on their views of the platforms' effectiveness, engagement, usability, and support for English skill development. A qualitative approach was deemed appropriate as it allowed the researcher to capture rich, contextualized data that reflect participants' subjective experiences and evaluations.

Participants

The participants of this study were 10 EFL learners who had experience using both Duolingo and BBC Learning English for a minimum of two months. They were selected

using purposive sampling (Stratton, 2024), based on their active engagement with the platforms and willingness to reflect on their experiences. The participants varied in age (ranging from 18 to 30 years old), language proficiency levels (from lower-intermediate to upper-intermediate), and educational backgrounds. All participants were studying English either in a formal academic setting (e.g., university courses) or as part of independent learning efforts.

Instruments

To collect data, the study used semi-structured interviews as the primary instrument. The interview guide was developed based on the core constructs of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), focusing on perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, user engagement, and behavioral intention (Granić, 2022). Additional questions were included to prompt reflection on how each platform supported specific language skills, such as vocabulary, grammar, listening, and speaking. The semi-structured format allowed for flexibility, enabling participants to elaborate on their experiences while ensuring consistency across interviews.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was conducted over two weeks. Each participant took part in an individual online interview via Zoom or Google Meet, depending on their preference. Interviews lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes and were conducted in English, with occasional use of the participants' first language (Bahasa Indonesia) to clarify complex points if needed. With participants' consent, all interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis. Ethical considerations, such as informed consent, voluntary participation, and data confidentiality, were strictly observed throughout the research process. Data saturation was monitored during the interview process. After analyzing the eighth interview, no substantially new themes emerged, and the final two interviews confirmed the consistency of existing patterns. This indicated that data saturation had been achieved, supporting the adequacy of the sample size for this qualitative study.

Data Analysis

The collected interview transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2021) six-phase approach. The researcher first familiarized themselves with the data by reading the transcripts multiple times. Initial codes were generated manually through line-by-line reading and annotation using Microsoft Word, focusing on recurring ideas related to the research questions and TAM components. These codes were then grouped into broader themes through an inductive approach, allowing patterns to emerge organically from the data. Themes such as "ease of navigation," "learning motivation," "vocabulary development," and "authentic content" captured participants' perceptions of the two platforms. To enhance the credibility of the analysis, a second coder independently reviewed a subset of the transcripts, and any discrepancies in coding were discussed until consensus was reached, thereby improving inter-coder reliability. An audit trail of coding decisions was maintained throughout to ensure transparency and support replicability.

FINDINGS

Learners' Perceptions of Effectiveness, Engagement, and Usability

The first research question aimed to explore learners' perceptions of the effectiveness, engagement, and usability of *Duolingo* and *BBC Learning English* in supporting their English language learning. Based on the interview data, the findings were organized using the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) framework, which includes the variables of perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, attitude toward use, and behavioral intention. These variables served as a lens to compare learners' experiences with each platform. The table below summarizes key differences and similarities in learners' perceptions of the two platforms across these four TAM components.

Table 1
Summary of Learners' Perceptions Based on TAM Variables

TAM Variable	Duolingo	BBC Learning English
Perceived Usefulness	Effective for vocabulary, grammar, and daily review	Effective for listening, pronunciation, and authentic language exposure
Perceived Ease of Use	Easy to navigate, mobile-friendly, interactive, and gamified	Organized structure, content-rich, but sometimes overwhelming to navigate
Attitude Toward Use	Fun, motivating, game-like, though occasionally repetitive	Relevant, real-world content; less interactive, but perceived as serious learning
Behavioral Intention	Preferred for daily short practice and self-review	Preferred for improving comprehension and real-world communication skills

As shown in the table, learners viewed both platforms positively, but each served different purposes and appealed to different learning needs. Duolingo was valued for its simplicity and motivational elements, while BBC Learning English was appreciated for its authentic content and skill-specific depth. These insights form the basis of the thematic findings presented in the following sections, where each TAM variable is discussed in greater detail using direct participant experiences and illustrative quotes.

Perceived Usefulness: Practicality and Skill Support

Most participants viewed both platforms as useful tools for language improvement, though they served different functions in the learning process. Duolingo was consistently described as effective for building foundational language skills, particularly vocabulary acquisition and basic grammar practice. Its bite-sized, gamified tasks encouraged regular engagement and allowed learners to develop consistent study routines, which many found both motivating and manageable. The platform's repetition-based design and instant feedback mechanisms also contributed to a sense of progress. One participant remarked,

“I use Duolingo almost every day, it’s good for reviewing words and short sentences.”

This reflects how Duolingo’s mobile-friendly and low-effort interface appealed to learners seeking structured, daily practice without requiring long periods of study. In contrast, BBC Learning English was perceived as a more comprehensive and authentic resource, particularly beneficial for improving listening comprehension, pronunciation, and real-world language use. Participants emphasized the value of being exposed to natural spoken English, such as in news reports, interviews, and thematic lessons. This exposure helped them become more familiar with intonation patterns, colloquial expressions, and diverse accents. As one learner explained,

“BBC Learning English helps me with how people actually speak, especially in the news or interviews.”

Such comments suggest that learners viewed BBC Learning English as more aligned with advanced receptive skills and communicative competence, especially for those aiming to engage with English in more authentic, real-life contexts. While both platforms were seen as useful, their effectiveness depended on learners’ specific goals and proficiency levels. Duolingo supported habitual learning and language reinforcement, while BBC Learning English catered to learners seeking contextual richness and exposure to natural language use, demonstrating the complementary nature of both tools in EFL learning.

Perceived Ease of Use: Interface and Accessibility

Participants generally found Duolingo easier to use, citing its intuitive interface, gamified structure, and mobile-friendly design as key factors contributing to its accessibility. Many learners appreciated the app’s seamless navigation and user-centered layout, which allowed them to engage in learning activities with minimal cognitive load. Several emphasized the convenience of being able to access Duolingo “anytime, anywhere,” whether during commutes, breaks, or before bed—making it an ideal choice for consistent, short practice. Motivational features such as streaks, levels, badges, and instant feedback further enhanced the platform’s appeal and encouraged habitual use. “*Duolingo is simple—I don’t need to think much, just follow the steps,*” shared one participant, indicating that the app’s guided structure supported a low-effort learning experience that still felt rewarding.

In contrast, BBC Learning English was viewed as more complex in terms of navigation and content organization. While its visually clean layout and diverse multimedia offerings (videos, transcripts, audio clips, and quizzes) were appreciated, some participants reported initial difficulties in identifying where to begin or how to locate materials aligned with their proficiency level. The abundance of content, although a strength, sometimes created a sense of overload, particularly for learners new to the platform. One participant noted,

“There’s so much on the site—it takes time to find something that matches my level.”

However, learners who used the platform more regularly became familiar with its structure and praised the richness and authenticity of its lessons. They reported that once they learned how to navigate the site, they found the materials not only useful but also highly relevant to their real-world communication goals. Duolingo's ease of use lies in its simplicity, gamification, and guided design, making it well-suited for quick and effortless practice. In comparison, BBC Learning English offers depth over simplicity, requiring a greater investment of time and digital literacy to navigate, but ultimately rewarding learners with meaningful and context-rich learning experiences.

Attitude Toward Use: Engagement and Motivation

In terms of overall attitudes, learners expressed generally positive views toward Duolingo, often describing it as fun, motivating, and easy to integrate into daily routines. Its gamification elements—such as streaks, experience points (XP), levels, and rewards, were seen as effective in sustaining user engagement and building learning habits. Many participants reported feeling a sense of accomplishment after completing short lessons, which contributed to their desire to return regularly. One learner shared,

“Every time I finish a lesson and get a badge, I feel proud. It makes me want to continue.”

This highlights how Duolingo successfully fosters positive emotional responses that support continuous use. However, despite its appeal, several learners acknowledged a downside to the repetitive nature of the content. Without contextual richness, the activities could become monotonous, leading to a decline in motivation over time. As one participant remarked,

“I enjoy it at first, but sometimes it feels like a game more than learning—especially when I don't see how it connects to real English.”

In contrast, attitudes toward BBC Learning English were more varied and task-oriented. Learners appreciated the platform's authenticity and usefulness, particularly for developing listening and comprehension skills. Many felt that the lessons were more aligned with real-life language use, which gave them a stronger sense of learning something practical. One participant explained,

“The expressions and accents feel natural—it helps me understand English used in daily life.”

However, learners also noted that the lack of interactive features and the less gamified environment made it harder to stay motivated without a clear goal. Several participants admitted they would only visit the platform when they had a specific topic or skill in mind, rather than for casual or habitual learning. A few also mentioned that, while the content was rich, the platform did not provide the same instant feedback or structured progression that made Duolingo more engaging. Overall, the findings suggest that while Duolingo fosters habitual engagement through motivational design, BBC Learning English is perceived as more academically valuable but less intrinsically engaging.

Learners' attitudes were shaped by the balance between enjoyment and relevance: Duolingo offered enjoyable learning, but sometimes at the expense of depth, whereas BBC Learning English offered meaningful content but required more self-discipline and direction to maintain usage.

Behavioral Intention: Continued Use and Platform Preference

When asked about their future intentions, most participants indicated a clear plan to continue using both Duolingo and BBC Learning English, but with distinct purposes in mind. Duolingo was widely regarded as an effective tool for daily practice, particularly in reinforcing vocabulary and basic grammar through its gamified, low-effort design. Learners appreciated the convenience of completing short lessons during spare moments, which helped them maintain learning consistency. In contrast, BBC Learning English was described as a go-to resource for deeper learning, especially when learners sought to improve their listening comprehension, pronunciation, or understanding of authentic English usage. As one participant summarized,

"I'll keep using Duolingo for daily practice, but when I want to learn how English is really used, I go to BBC."

This strategic separation of use reflected a broader pattern in learners' behavior—allocating different platforms to different skill areas or learning goals, based on perceived usefulness and learning context. Duolingo was seen as best suited for repetition and habit-building, while BBC Learning English was reserved for focused sessions with a clear objective, such as preparing for listening exams or improving fluency in real-world situations. Overall, learners viewed the two platforms as complementary rather than interchangeable, and their behavioral intentions demonstrated an increasingly self-regulated approach to language learning. Rather than relying on a single tool, they curated their digital learning environment by combining platforms that supported different aspects of their proficiency development. This highlights the importance of offering diverse, learner-centered resources in digital language learning, as well as the value of fostering metacognitive awareness so that learners can make informed decisions about which tools to use, when, and why.

Comparative Advantages and Limitations in English Skill Development

The second research question examined how learners compare the advantages and limitations of *Duolingo* and *BBC Learning English* in developing specific English skills, namely vocabulary, grammar, and listening. Participants reflected on their experiences using both platforms and offered detailed comparisons based on their learning goals, skill progress, and platform features. The table below provides a summarized comparison of how learners perceived each platform's strengths and weaknesses across these core language skills.

Table 2
Learners' Perceptions of Duolingo and BBC Learning English for Specific English Skills

Skill Area	Duolingo	BBC Learning English
Vocabulary	Strong for frequent repetition and recall; quick learning through exercises	Rich contextual exposure through videos and articles; less repetition
Grammar	Introduces basic structures; good for beginners	Offers detailed explanations with examples; supports deeper understanding
Listening	Limited; robotic pronunciation; controlled and artificial audio	Strong; authentic materials, native speakers, and real-life conversation models
Pronunciation	Offers model pronunciation with limited accuracy	Offers natural speech patterns and accent exposure
Speaking	Minimal speaking practice; lacks real interaction	Indirectly supports speaking through listening and shadowing activities

As shown in the table, learners identified distinct pedagogical strengths and limitations for each platform depending on the skill being targeted. Duolingo was more appreciated for foundational skill practice, while BBC Learning English was preferred for skills requiring authentic language exposure and deeper contextual understanding. The following sections present key themes that emerged from the interview data, illustrating how learners experienced each platform's contribution to skill development.

Vocabulary Development: Repetition vs. Contextualization

Most participants agreed that Duolingo was particularly effective for vocabulary acquisition and retention, especially through its use of repetition and visual reinforcement. Learners appreciated how words were recycled frequently across different exercises, which helped them internalize new vocabulary over time. The app's use of pictures, translation prompts, and matching activities made the learning process more engaging and memorable. As one participant noted,

"Duolingo repeats words again and again. It helps me remember, especially new ones."

This repetition, combined with the platform's immediate feedback and low-stakes practice, made Duolingo especially suitable for memorizing high-frequency vocabulary and basic expressions, particularly at the beginner and lower-intermediate levels. In contrast, BBC Learning English was viewed as more useful for expanding vocabulary in authentic and meaningful contexts. Participants reported that they often encountered new words naturally while watching videos, listening to dialogues, or reading lesson

transcripts. This contextual exposure helped them understand not just the meaning of a word, but also its pronunciation, collocations, and appropriate usage in different situations. Learners valued this real-world input, with one stating,

“I learn new words from the videos because I can see how they’re used in everyday conversations.”

However, some participants pointed out that while the platform introduced rich vocabulary, it lacked structured revision or spaced repetition features, making it more difficult to retain unfamiliar words over time unless learners revisited the materials intentionally. Overall, the contrast in vocabulary learning between the two platforms reflects their pedagogical designs: Duolingo excels in systematic vocabulary drilling and retention, while BBC Learning English supports deeper lexical understanding through natural input, though it places more responsibility on the learner to review and reinforce new language independently.

Grammar Understanding: Basic Practice vs. In-Depth Explanation

Learners generally found Duolingo useful for practicing basic grammatical structures in a simple, intuitive, and inductive way. The platform’s use of fill-in-the-blank, sentence reordering, and matching activities enabled learners to infer grammar rules through repeated exposure, without the need for explicit instruction. Many participants described this method as helpful for reinforcing sentence patterns and common structures, particularly in the early stages of learning. However, the grammar practice was also seen as surface-level and limited in scope. *“It helps me learn grammar naturally, but it doesn’t explain much,”* one participant observed, highlighting a common concern that Duolingo offers practice but lacks in-depth explanations, especially when learners encounter unfamiliar or confusing rules. Without detailed guidance, learners often had to rely on guesswork or external resources to fully grasp the underlying grammar.

In contrast, BBC Learning English was praised for its clear and structured approach to grammar instruction. Participants appreciated the platform’s explicit lessons, typically delivered through videos, articles, and guided exercises, which explained grammatical rules in a step-by-step and context-rich manner. These lessons often included real-life examples, visual explanations, and follow-up quizzes that allowed learners to see grammar in use and apply it in meaningful contexts. *“When I don’t understand a rule, I can watch BBC’s explanation—it’s clear and with examples,”* one learner shared, indicating that the platform functioned as a reliable reference for resolving confusion or reinforcing formal instruction. For many, this clarity and depth made BBC Learning English especially valuable when dealing with more advanced or nuanced grammar topics.

Overall, while Duolingo was seen as effective for intuitive, repetitive practice of grammar basics, BBC Learning English provided the conceptual clarity and detailed instruction learners needed to understand and apply more complex rules. The contrast reflects the platforms’ differing pedagogical approaches—inductive learning through interaction

versus explicit teaching through multimedia explanations—both of which support grammar acquisition, but in complementary ways.

Listening Skills: Synthetic vs. Authentic Input

A clear contrast emerged regarding the development of listening skills, with learners expressing distinctly different experiences across the two platforms. Duolingo was widely seen as limited in supporting listening comprehension, primarily due to the mechanical and repetitive nature of its audio content. The spoken input was described as overly robotic, slow, and lacking natural variation in tone, accent, or pacing. As one participant put it,

“I don’t feel like I’m listening to real English when I use Duolingo.”

Although the app includes listening components in its sentence drills and pronunciation tasks, many learners felt that these exercises did not reflect authentic communication or prepare them for real-life listening scenarios. Some participants also noted that Duolingo’s audio focused more on recognizing words than on processing meaning in context, further limiting its value for developing deeper listening skills. In contrast, BBC Learning English was consistently praised for offering rich, authentic listening content. Learners valued its extensive use of native speakers, interviews, documentary clips, and news broadcasts, which exposed them to real-world pronunciation, natural pacing, and varied accents—key components of effective listening comprehension. One participant explained,

“BBC gives me the feeling of listening to people in real life, not just learning words.”

Such content helped learners become more attuned to the rhythms and sounds of English as it is actually spoken, thereby improving their ability to follow conversations, interpret meaning, and distinguish between subtle nuances in tone or emphasis. Additionally, features such as subtitled videos, transcripts, and follow-up comprehension questions were highlighted as useful tools that allowed learners to listen actively and reinforce what they heard. Learners perceived Duolingo as offering basic and controlled listening input, suitable perhaps for beginners but insufficient for advancing listening fluency. In contrast, BBC Learning English was seen as a realistic and practical tool for developing higher-level listening skills through exposure to diverse, meaningful, and situational audio materials. This distinction underscores the importance of authenticity and variety in listening practice, particularly for learners aiming to engage with English beyond the classroom.

Pronunciation and Speaking Practice: Passive vs. Active Support

While Duolingo provided some exposure to model pronunciation through its text-to-speech features, learners felt that it lacked opportunities for interactive speaking practice or detailed feedback. Although the app includes a speaking component where users are prompted to repeat words or short sentences, the speech recognition technology was perceived as limited in its accuracy and responsiveness. As one learner noted,

“It lets me say a word or sentence, but no one checks if I’m right.”

This sentiment reflects a broader concern that while Duolingo encourages vocal repetition, it does not offer corrective feedback, natural conversational input, or guidance on stress, intonation, or fluency, which are essential for improving speaking proficiency. In contrast, BBC Learning English, though not designed for active speaking practice, was regarded by many learners as a valuable indirect resource for improving pronunciation and spoken fluency. Through consistent exposure to natural speech in real-life contexts, such as news segments, interviews, and dialogues, learners reported becoming more familiar with pronunciation patterns, rhythm, and native-like intonation. Several participants mentioned using shadowing techniques, where they would repeat phrases after native speakers to mimic pronunciation and develop fluency. One learner shared,

“I watch videos and try to say the sentences at the same time. It helps with speaking and confidence.”

This suggests that while BBC Learning English does not provide speaking tasks, it fosters pronunciation awareness and oral language development through listening-based imitation. Overall, learners viewed Duolingo as a practical tool for beginner-level skill development, particularly in vocabulary and grammar, due to its gamified, repetitive structure and ease of use. In contrast, BBC Learning English was preferred for intermediate to advanced skills, especially listening and pronunciation, thanks to its authentic, content-rich input. The findings suggest that learners are strategic in their platform use, selecting tools based on their specific goals and proficiency needs. This highlights the importance of matching digital tools with targeted language objectives, and suggests that a blended use of platforms, each with different pedagogical strengths, can support more comprehensive and effective language learning experiences. However, it is worth noting that both platforms offer minimal support for writing skills. Learners aiming to improve their writing proficiency may need to rely on additional tools or instructional support beyond what these platforms currently provide.

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to explore EFL learners’ perceptions of using two widely adopted online language learning platforms—Duolingo and BBC Learning English—by comparing their effectiveness, engagement, and usability, as well as their contributions to the development of specific English language skills. Grounded in the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), the findings provide insights into how learners experience these platforms differently and how those experiences shape their platform preferences and learning strategies. Consistent with Qazi et al. (2023), this study through TAM framework found that perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use played a central role in shaping learners’ attitudes toward both platforms.

Duolingo’s gamified interface, mobile accessibility, and adaptive repetition made it highly usable and appealing for regular, independent practice, especially for vocabulary and grammar reinforcement (Kessler et al., 2025). Its intuitive design and short, goal-

driven tasks aligned with learners' desire for low-effort, high-frequency learning routines, which strengthened their behavioral intention to use the app regularly. Conversely, BBC Learning English was seen as less intuitive to navigate but more useful for learners aiming to improve higher-order skills such as listening comprehension, pronunciation, and cultural awareness (Salama, 2024). Learners appreciated its authenticity and academic tone, which added perceived value to their language learning experience, particularly for real-world English communication. These differences highlight how learners' preferences are mediated by their goals and expectations of what each platform is designed to achieve.

The second research question revealed that learners viewed Duolingo and BBC Learning English as complementary rather than competing tools. Duolingo was favored for building foundational skills such as vocabulary acquisition and grammar recognition through repetition and immediate feedback. However, its lack of authentic interaction and limited speaking and listening input were seen as constraints. These findings support previous research (Lo et al., 2025; Sudina & Plonsky, 2024) which notes that while Duolingo promotes motivation and habit formation, it often falls short in developing communicative competence. In contrast, BBC Learning English was recognized for enhancing listening and comprehension skills, thanks to its exposure to native accents, real-world discourse, and thematically rich content. Learners noted that the platform helped them not only improve receptive skills but also develop awareness of English use in real-life scenarios, an element that is largely missing in Duolingo. This echoes Costa and Mair (2022) and Shamsi and Bozorgian (2024), who also found that learners benefited from multimedia-rich, context-driven resources when working on listening and pronunciation.

One of the most significant findings is how learners strategically integrate both platforms into their language learning routines. Rather than choosing one over the other, participants reported alternating between Duolingo and BBC Learning English depending on their immediate learning objectives—e.g., using Duolingo for short vocabulary drills during commuting, and BBC Learning English for structured listening practice at home. This behavior reflects a more self-regulated approach to learning, in which learners tailor their engagement with technology to meet specific skill gaps (Mejeh et al., 2024). This aligns with the idea that digital platforms should not be evaluated solely on their standalone effectiveness, but also on how they fit into diverse, learner-driven ecosystems of language learning. It also underscores the importance of digital literacy—learners must be able to evaluate and combine tools that suit different language competencies and learning styles.

The study offers several practical implications. First, language educators can guide learners on how to use both platforms effectively depending on their skill focus and learning preferences. Duolingo can be recommended for early-stage learners or as a supplementary tool for vocabulary retention, while BBC Learning English may be better integrated into tasks that require authentic listening or cultural analysis. Second, EdTech developers could benefit from these insights by enhancing the interactivity and contextual depth of platforms like Duolingo or by improving the usability and personalization of

content-heavy platforms like BBC Learning English. Bridging the gap between engagement and authenticity could support more balanced learning experiences.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated EFL learners' perceptions of Duolingo and BBC Learning English, focusing on the platforms' usability, engagement, and their contributions to English skill development. Guided by the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), the findings showed that learners viewed the two platforms as serving distinct yet complementary purposes. Duolingo was perceived as effective for vocabulary building and basic grammar practice due to its gamified design and ease of use, while BBC Learning English was appreciated for its authentic content and support in developing listening and comprehension skills.

Importantly, learners did not treat the platforms as substitutes but as tools to be used strategically based on their specific learning needs. This underscores the importance of learner agency in digital language learning and suggests that flexible, self-regulated use of multiple platforms can enhance outcomes. The findings also provide practical insights for educators and EdTech developers aiming to align platform features with diverse learner expectations and goals.

Despite its contributions, this study has limitations. The sample size was relatively small and consisted of learners with intermediate proficiency, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research should include larger and more diverse populations, potentially using mixed-methods designs to complement perceptions with usage analytics or language performance data. Comparative studies of other platforms, or longitudinal research examining changes in learners' perceptions over time, could also provide deeper insights into how digital tools support sustained language development.

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