CHAPTER l

INTRODUCTION

This chapter depicts the background of the study, the research questions, the scope, the purpose, and the significance of the study.

1.1   Background of the Study

In recent years, significant advancements in digital technology have opened new opportunities to enhance the learning process in universities (Godwin-Jones, 2017; Grigoryan, 2020; Lai, 2016; Nazari &Xodabande, 2020; Wrigglesworth &Harvor, 2018). Technology provides valuable modern educational tools for understanding English as a foreign language. The development of technology has paralleled the growth of the English language and has transformed the way people interact and learn. Sung, Chang, and Yang (2015) state that technology has been widely used in education, both as a learning medium and a teaching method, enabling educators to create opportunities to support students' self-directed learning efforts and help them understand English.

Currently, the majority of instructors and students tend to choose digital technology as their primary means to achieve language proficiency (Healey, 2018). Technology plays a crucial role and offers numerous opportunities for students in the learning process, both in interaction and feedback reception within the language learning context. This is because students are not confined to traditional classroom learning environments but can also engage in self-directed

learning (Ahn & Lee, 2015). As articulated by Morreale (2013), the present generation heavily relies on technology for accessing information through the internet and mobile devices.

Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) has been a significant subject of study since the early 21st century. MALL enables unrestricted access through mobile devices, although its pedagogical approach is still limited to behavioral applications, teacher-centered methods, and tutorials (Burston, 2014; Cherian & Williams, 2008; Kukulska-Hulme & Shield, 2008). However, in the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), MALL is recognized for creating an authentic, social, context-sensitive, and personalized language learning environment (Lin & Lin, 2019). Synthesis studies also support the effectiveness of MALL in improving students' vocabulary mastery (Zhang, Song, & Burston, 2011).

MALL has aided learners in enriching their language skills, particularly in the context of vocabulary acquisition, a crucial aspect of English language learning (Huang, 2015). However, the efficiency of mobile language learning tools can vary based on user perceptions, and learners may have different views on their effectiveness (Beres, 2011). Consequently, Ducate and Lomicka (2013) suggest that Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) has a positive impact on language skill development for students. As a result, mobile devices have been implemented in various colleges and universities alongside cutting-edge technology.

In this context, smartphones have become essential and sophisticated tools, currently used by the majority of the population in many developed countries. Mobile applications that can be installed on smartphones provide a vast educational resource market, including language learning. These applications have the potential to facilitate learning, practice, and language skill enhancement. Specifically, the use of mobile applications in vocabulary learning has gained significant attention from researchers in the last decade (Godwin-Jones, 2011; Heil, Wu, Lee, & Schmidt, 2016; Stanley, 2013).

Understanding vocabulary as a fundamental element of language is crucial for individuals wishing to master a language, especially English. Typically, in a school environment, vocabulary is taught through conventional methods that are often less engaging and do not encourage students to become self-directed learners (Devi, 2022). Traditional, rigid, and structured teaching approaches have become less attractive, while multimedia technology that utilizes natural sound effects and visual animations helps us access information more easily. This technology features rich informational characteristics that transcend time and space limitations.

The use of technology provides a real and positive impact on students' interest and motivation. In this regard, it is essential to revolutionize the learning process, making it more comfortable, such as through digital platforms or mobile-assisted language learning. This aligns with previous research examining the impact of mobile technology on language learning and teaching, demonstrating that the significant use of mobile devices significantly contributes to overall language development (AbuSa'aleek, 2014; Chwo, Marek, & Wu, 2018; Godwin-

Jones, 2011; Golonka, Bowles, Frank, Richardson, &Freynik, 2014; Stockwell, 2013; Sung, Chang, & Yang, 2015; Wong & Looi, 2011; Xodabande, 2017).

In this context, one can make use of the Duolingo application as one of the mobile applications widely used in Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL). The Duolingo application has become one of the most popular applications used in mobile assisted language learning (MALL). Duolingo developed by Luis Von Ahn and Severin Hacker in November 2011. This application can be downloaded for free through the Google Play Store for Android users and the App Store for iOS users (Nushi & Eqbali, 2017). Duolingo functions as a language learning tool designed with a user-friendly interface, making users feel as though they are not learning formally but engaging in a playful manner.

Munday (2016) states that the primary goal of Duolingo is to assist users in learning vocabulary and grammar in a new language. The application offers various activities, including pronunciation exercises, word translation, image-based word recognition, writing based on listening, and more. Gardner and Davis (2013) identified several powerful features of the application, including easy access to learning resources, global virtual interaction, and more. These features enable users to interact with the content, tasks, and games provided by the application and participate in discussions and question-and-answer sessions.

On an international scale, Munday (2016) explored the effectiveness of Duolingo when used in conjunction with traditional teaching methods in Spanish university courses. The results showed that Spanish learners enjoyed using the application and achieved higher proficiency levels than required. In the Asian context, Saad and Rahim (2022) conducted research aimed at exploring the use of

Duolingo in acquiring French vocabulary. The research results revealed that students had a positive view of Duolingo. They found it easy to use, convenient, and entertaining. This research suggests that Duolingo can be used to build and develop French vocabulary beyond classroom walls, which is beneficial for complementing French language classes to help students gain confidence in using the language.

In the Indonesian context, this research has investigated the use of Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) and the Duolingo mobile application in vocabulary learning. For example, in a study conducted by Ajisoko (2020), the findings indicated that students' scores improved, demonstrating the effectiveness of the application. This aligns with Mayangsari, Kamaluddin and Agustina (2022), who expressed that previous research had limited its scope by examining affective and cognitive responses among English language students learning with the Duolingo application outside the classroom. Therefore, they recommended that future research should focus more on language learning using mobile devices to better understand whether there are differences in the impact between English major and non-major students or to compare self-study and classroom-oriented study.

Consequently, research on student reflections on using the Duolingo application is still relatively unexplored in international, Asian, and Indonesian contexts regarding the use of the Duolingo application as a means to enhance English vocabulary for non-English major students. To address this gap, this research aims to investigate non-English major study programs regarding

cognitive and affective responses through reflective questions to explore their vocabulary learning styles based on their reflections and interview answers.

1.2 Research Question

Based on the focus of this study, the researcher formulated the research question "How do students reflect on using the Duolingo app to foster their English vocabulary"?

1.3 Scope of the Study

This study examines reflections through the responses of non-EFL students who have experienced English language learning based on an app. The study does not restrict the use of the Duolingo app for vocabulary learning to certain levels or daily targets, as its focus is not on how many words they learn but rather on the extent of their reflections and how they perceive the conducive atmosphere for vocabulary learning through the app based on their learning experiences.

1.4 Purpose of the Study

This study aims to investigate students' reflection of using Duolingo app to foster their English vocabulary learning.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The findings of this research served as a reference for those who intended to conduct studies analyzing students' reflections on using the Duolingo app for

vocabulary acquisition in learning. Several important contributions were made by this research. Firstly, it helped students convey their reflective responses using the Duolingo app as a learning medium. Ultimately, this research became a reference point for universities utilizing this app as a learning medium that could be integrated into the teaching and learning process, preparing for a better educational program system in the future. This study also introduced a new paradigm regarding the importance of harnessing online learning technology to address specific issues within the educational context. Therefore, this research contributed to the educational landscape that sought to explore mobile applications in language learning, particularly the Duolingo app, which could revolutionize the way language learning took place.

1.6.   Definition of Key terms

In this section, the researcher discussed some words that were used as explanatory terms in this study. These terms included:

Duolingo Application is perceived as an online language learning platform specializing in vocabulary learning. The Duolingo app is one of the applications within Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) provided for students. Non-English major students use this app by downloading it onto their smartphones and then endeavoring to learn vocabulary based on the guidance of the researcher and the features provided by the app.

Fostering English Vocabulary refers to the act of nurturing, promoting, or encouraging the development and improvement of English language skills, often with a focus on areas such as vocabulary, grammar, speaking, listening, reading,

and writing. It implies creating an environment that supports language learning and growth, whether through formal education, language learning platforms, immersion experiences, or other methods.

English Vocabulary learning in the context of this research refers to the process in which students use the Duolingo app to enhance their understanding and mastery of English vocabulary. In this study, students reflect on their experiences when using the Duolingo app to learn vocabulary. This includes their understanding of how the app helps them comprehend and remember English words. These students consider the effectiveness of the app in expanding their vocabulary, and their reflections encompass their experiences, perspectives, or views regarding the use of the app in English vocabulary learning.