

STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF USING THE EWA APPLICATION FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

Digital learning has become increasingly central to English language teaching, and Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) applications such as EWA are now widely used by students as a supplementary learning tool. However, empirical understanding of how learners actually perceive and experience EWA remains limited. This study aimed to explore eleventh-grade students' perceptions of using the EWA application as a digital learning tool for English and to identify the difficulties they experienced while using it. A qualitative case study design was employed. Data were collected from 20 students through an open-ended questionnaire, followed by semi-structured interviews with five selected participants and supported by document analysis of learning artifacts. The data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis. The findings show that students' perceptions of EWA cluster into three themes: Good Experience, Ease of Use, and Supportive Features, reflecting an application perceived as enjoyable, motivating, easy to navigate, and pedagogically useful, particularly for vocabulary, listening, and pronunciation. Nevertheless, students also reported difficulties grouped into four categories: Challenging content, Behavioral self-regulation issues, Technical issues, and Limitations arising from the freemium system. These difficulties did not diminish students' overall positive perception of EWA. The study concludes that EWA functions best as an engaging, flexible supplementary resource that complements, rather than replaces, formal classroom instruction. Further research involving larger and more diverse participant groups is recommended to strengthen the generalizability of these findings.

Keywords: students' perceptions, EWA application, English language learning.

ABSTRAK

Perkembangan Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) telah memberikan alternatif bagi siswa dalam mempelajari bahasa Inggris melalui aplikasi digital. Salah satu aplikasi yang digunakan dalam pembelajaran bahasa Inggris adalah EWA yang menyediakan berbagai fitur interaktif untuk mendukung proses belajar. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi persepsi siswa terhadap penggunaan aplikasi EWA dalam pembelajaran bahasa Inggris serta mengidentifikasi kesulitan yang mereka alami selama menggunakan aplikasi tersebut. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi

kasus. Data dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner terbuka yang diisi oleh 20 siswa dan wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan lima peserta yang dipilih berdasarkan hasil kuesioner. Data dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa siswa memiliki persepsi positif terhadap penggunaan aplikasi EWA. Aplikasi ini dianggap menyenangkan, mudah digunakan, serta membantu proses pembelajaran bahasa Inggris melalui berbagai fitur interaktif yang tersedia. Selain itu, EWA juga meningkatkan motivasi dan keterlibatan siswa dalam belajar. Meskipun demikian, beberapa hambatan masih ditemukan, seperti kendala dalam mempertahankan konsistensi belajar, gangguan teknis selama penggunaan aplikasi, serta keterbatasan fitur yang dapat memengaruhi pengalaman belajar siswa. Secara keseluruhan, EWA dipandang sebagai media yang mendukung pembelajaran bahasa Inggris dan memberikan pengalaman belajar yang lebih menarik bagi siswa. Penelitian ini terbatas pada jumlah partisipan yang sangat kecil dan hanya dilakukan pada satu konteks penelitian. Oleh karena itu, penelitian selanjutnya disarankan melibatkan partisipan yang lebih beragam untuk memperoleh pemahaman yang lebih komprehensif mengenai penggunaan aplikasi pembelajaran bahasa berbasis mobile.

Kata Kunci: persepsi siswa, aplikasi EWA, belajar Bahasa Inggris.

A. Introduction

Digital learning has become a key component of contemporary English language education, shifting instruction away from the constraints of face-to-face classrooms toward flexible, technology-mediated environments in which students can access materials, practice language skills, and engage in learning activities independent of time and place (Maisani et al., 2022). In teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL), digital learning is particularly valuable because it exposes learners to authentic language input and provides continuous opportunities for practice that conventional classrooms often

cannot offer. Recent research suggests that digital learning has moved from being a supplementary tool to an essential component of language education, especially in supporting autonomous and personalized learning (Ali et al., 2024; Dancsa et al., 2023). However, access to technology alone does not guarantee effective learning outcomes; the success of digital learning depends heavily on how learning activities are designed and how well digital tools align with learners' needs and habits (Shafa et al., 2023; Dancsa et al., 2023).

One form of digital learning tool that has attracted particular attention is mobile technology, giving rise to

Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL). The widespread ownership and portability of smartphones make MALL especially relevant in the Indonesian context, where approximately 68.1% of the population, or around 187.7 million people, use smartphones, and 68.65% own mobile phones (Badan Pusat Statistik [BPS], 2024). Roughly 40–50% of students aged five years and above already use mobile phones to access the internet for educational purposes, such as completing assignments and searching for learning materials (BPS, 2024). Within English language learning specifically, smartphones are frequently used to support vocabulary practice, multimedia exposure, and interactive learning activities (Maisani et al., 2022; Shafa et al., 2023), positioning MALL as a natural extension of students' everyday digital habits (Dancsa et al., 2023). Nevertheless, the pedagogical integration of MALL into Indonesian classrooms remains uneven; many schools use mobile learning only as a supplementary activity rather than as a primary instructional medium (Shafa et al., 2023), which means that the effectiveness of any given

mobile application still depends substantially on how well it is designed and how well it fits learners' engagement patterns (Dancsa et al., 2023; Ali et al., 2024).

Among the mobile applications available to Indonesian students, alongside platforms such as Duolingo, Cake, and ELSA Speak, is EWA, an application that supports English learning through interactive vocabulary instruction, text reading, listening exercises, and contextual language exposure. Prior studies have reported encouraging pedagogical outcomes associated with EWA: Kadir, Mamu, and Pilongo (2024) found that EWA supports more interactive vocabulary instruction and strengthens student participation, while Sari, Salam, and Novita (2025) reported that EWA use contributes to improved reading skills among EFL learners. These findings demonstrate EWA's potential as a flexible, engaging mobile-based learning tool. However, effectiveness studies alone do not capture how learners themselves experience and evaluate a digital tool, and learners' perceptions are known to shape their motivation to use a tool and their likelihood of continuing to use it over

time (Singh, 2019). Investigating perceptions is therefore essential not only to gauge the effectiveness of a digital tool but also to understand its acceptance and long-term sustainability in real educational settings.

Despite EWA's apparent popularity, empirical research that critically examines how students perceive and experience the application, particularly its benefits as well as the difficulties it presents, remains limited, and comparative or perception-focused studies on EWA are still relatively scarce compared with research on more established applications. This gap is compounded by the fact that traditional, manually delivered English instruction is still often perceived by students as monotonous, underscoring the practical relevance of understanding whether and how digital tools such as EWA can offer a more engaging alternative. Even a highly effective learning tool will not be used consistently if learners do not perceive it as useful, easy to use, or enjoyable; perception, in this sense, is not incidental to a tool's success but constitutive of it.

This study was therefore designed to investigate two related questions: (1) What are eleventh-grade students' perceptions of using the EWA application as a digital learning tool for English? and (2) What difficulties do students experience when using EWA in their English learning process? By examining students' perceptions of usability, usefulness, and enjoyment alongside the obstacles they encounter, this study is expected to provide practical insight for application developers seeking to refine EWA's features, for teachers deciding whether and how to integrate EWA into classroom or independent learning activities, for students seeking to use digital tools more purposefully, and for future researchers investigating mobile-assisted language learning in similar EFL contexts.

B. Research Method

This study employed a qualitative research design using a case study approach, which is appropriate when the aim of the research is to explore and understand participants' perceptions, experiences, and the meanings they

construct around a particular phenomenon (Creswell, 2014). The case study approach was selected because the research focuses on an in-depth exploration of a bounded system, namely students' perceptions of using the EWA application within a specific educational context, allowing the researcher to investigate a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life setting (Yin, 2018). The study was conducted in a natural setting in which students used EWA as part of their ordinary learning routines without any manipulation of variables, consistent with the emphasis in qualitative case study research on obtaining authentic, contextually grounded data (Flick, 2018).

The participants were 20 eleventh-grade students in Palabuhanratu, all of whom completed an open-ended questionnaire; five of these students were subsequently selected for semi-structured interviews based on the patterns identified in their questionnaire responses. Eleventh-grade students were selected because they were considered to have sufficient prior experience in English learning to provide reflective perceptions, were generally familiar

with mobile applications, and, unlike twelfth-grade students preparing for final examinations, had relatively greater flexibility to participate in research activities. Data collection was conducted from April to June 2026.

Three instruments were used to collect data. First, an open-ended questionnaire, designed in line with the qualitative survey approach described by Braun, Clarke, and Gray (2017), invited students to describe their experiences with EWA in their own words across six areas: usefulness, ease of use, enjoyment, technical challenges, individual (behavioral) challenges, and pedagogical challenges. Second, semi-structured interviews consisting of ten guiding questions were conducted with the five selected participants to explore emerging patterns from the questionnaire in greater depth. Third, document analysis was used to examine students' learning artifacts, such as screenshots of completed exercises and progress records, to provide contextual corroboration of students' reported experiences.

Data collection proceeded through five stages: distributing the

questionnaire to all 20 participants; reviewing questionnaire responses to identify initial patterns and select interview participants; conducting semi-structured interviews with the five selected students; collecting supporting documents related to students' use of EWA; and systematically organizing all data, including interview transcripts, questionnaire responses, and categorized documents, in preparation for analysis.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the six-phase framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006): (1) familiarization with the data through repeated reading of questionnaires, transcripts, and documents; (2) generating initial codes relevant to perceived usefulness, ease of use, enjoyment, and challenges; (3) searching for themes by grouping related codes into broader categories; (4) reviewing themes for consistency with the coded data and the dataset as a whole; (5) defining and naming themes; and (6) producing the report, in which findings were illustrated with representative excerpts from the questionnaires, interviews, and documents. This process was carried

out iteratively to ensure the depth, validity, and accuracy of the findings, with the questionnaire data serving as a supporting source that contextualized and reinforced the more in-depth findings obtained through the interviews.

C. Findings and Discussion

This section presents the findings of the study, organized around the two research questions, followed by a discussion that interprets these findings through relevant theoretical frameworks and prior empirical research.

1. Demographic Profile of Participants

Before presenting the thematic findings, it is useful to describe the demographic characteristics of the 20 participants, summarized in Table 1.

Table 1 Demographic Profile of Participants (n = 20)

Characteristic	n	%
Gender (n = 20)		
Female	16	80
Male	4	20
Age (n = 20)		
17 years old	17	85

18 years old	3	15
Mobile Device Used (n = 20)		
Android	16	80
iPhone	4	20
Place of Residence (n = 20)		
Pangsor / Pangsor Lio	3	15
Cangehgar / Changegar	3	15
Kebontarum	2	10
Other areas (1 respondent each)	12	60

As shown in Table 1, the majority of participants were female (n = 16; 80%), with the remaining four participants (20%) male. Participants were 17–18 years old, with most (n = 17; 85%) aged 17. Most participants used Android smartphones (n = 16; 80%), while four (20%) used iPhones. Participants resided in a wide range of areas around Palabuhanratu, with Pangsor/Pangsor Lio and Cangehgar/Changegar the most common locations (n = 3 each; 15%), followed by Kebontarum (n = 2; 10%) and twelve other areas represented by one respondent each (60%),

reflecting a geographically diverse sample.

2. Students' Perceptions of Using EWA as a Digital Learning Tool

Thematic analysis of the questionnaire and interview data produced three main themes describing students' perceptions of EWA: Good Experience, Ease of Use, and Supportive Features. Each theme was formed by combining two related initial codes that consistently co-occurred across the two data sources.

a. Good Experience

The Good Experience theme combined the codes Enjoyable and Motivated, both of which capture the affective quality of students' engagement with EWA. In the questionnaire, when students described in three words how EWA helped them learn English, mudah (easy) appeared 15 times, seru (fun) 10 times, and membantu (helpful) 9 times; when asked how they felt while learning with EWA, 16 of 20 respondents used positive descriptors such as senang (happy) or menyenangkan (enjoyable), while only two mentioned boredom, and even then only in relation to specific

content rather than the application as a whole.

The interviews enriched this picture. All five interviewees described their first encounter with EWA in strongly positive terms. P1 recalled the experience as enjoyable and free of the boredom typical of prior English learning, P3 specifically credited the app's use of memes for making learning "not too serious," and P4 described feeling curious because the application allowed learning "while playing games." Motivation showed a similar pattern: eleven of 20 respondents described feeling semangat (motivated) when learning with EWA, and five specifically cited the streak and challenge system as encouraging continued use. In interviews, P3 attributed sustained motivation to the variety of activities available (listening, reading, and vocabulary practice), which prevented boredom, while P1 and P2 linked their motivation to the game-like, low-pressure nature of the learning process. Across the five participants, motivation manifested behaviorally: students described voluntarily returning to the app, completing exercises without external prompting, and maintaining learning streaks.

b. Ease of Use

The Ease of Use theme combined the codes Easy to Use and Useful, reflecting students' view that an application is genuinely beneficial only when it is also easily accessible. Seventeen of 20 respondents described EWA as mudah or gampang (easy) to use, several adding praktis (practical), and only six reported any difficulty at all, most of which concerned content rather than navigation. All five interviewees echoed this: P3 noted that the "menu and features are clear enough that I did not need a long time to understand how to use it," and P2 emphasized that EWA could be used "anytime and anywhere," which allowed studying to fit around free time rather than a fixed schedule.

On usefulness, 18 of 20 respondents affirmed that EWA helped them understand English material, most describing it as sangat membantu (very helpful); membantu (helpful) and efektif (effective) were the most frequent descriptive words. In interviews, students consistently identified vocabulary and pronunciation as the areas in which EWA was most beneficial. P1 noted that repeated exposure to English

words within the app made them easier to remember, while P4 highlighted that EWA taught vocabulary “through the context of stories or dialogues,” which supported understanding of how words are used, not merely memorization of their meanings, an observation echoed by P3, who valued that EWA's vocabulary was drawn from films and everyday conversation.

c. Supportive Features

The third theme, Supportive Features, combined codes describing specific tools within EWA that students found most beneficial with a broader evaluative code concerning whether EWA functions as a genuine learning resource. Seven of 20 questionnaire respondents specifically mentioned features such as videos, quizzes, streaks, and audio exercises as sources of enjoyment, and five highlighted the streak and challenge system as particularly motivating.

In the interviews, the listening feature was mentioned by all five participants as especially valuable, both for its audio clarity and for exposing students to native-speaker pronunciation. P5 specifically praised

a slow-playback feature that allowed difficult pronunciation to be replayed more clearly, describing it as a form of on-demand support unavailable in a typical classroom. P2 highlighted the built-in translation feature as allowing vocabulary lookup without leaving the app, and P4 pointed to the combination of games, audio, and structured practice as creating a cohesive and engaging learning environment. Regarding EWA's broader value as a learning tool, students consistently viewed it as a valuable supplement for vocabulary, listening, and reading rather than a substitute for classroom instruction; P1, P2, P4, and P5 affirmed EWA's contribution to these specific skills, and P3 emphasized that EWA's vocabulary content, being drawn from authentic sources, taught words students were likely to actually need in real communication.

Overall, these findings indicate that students hold a positive perception of EWA as a digital English learning tool, grounded in an enjoyable and motivating learning experience, straightforward usability, and features that provide concrete, recognized support for vocabulary,

listening, and pronunciation development.

3. Difficulties Experienced When Using EWA

Alongside their positive perceptions, students also reported difficulties that were grouped into four categories: Challenging content, Behavioral (self-regulation) issues, Technical issues, and Limitations arising from EWA's freemium structure. Table 2 summarizes these barriers as reported across the questionnaire and interview data.

Table 2 Barriers Reported by Students in Using the EWA Application

Category	Representative Barriers	Questionnaire (n = 20)	Interview Participants
Challenging	Unfamiliar/difficult vocabulary ; need for repeated review; partial curriculum misalignment	2–7 respondents	P1, P4, P5
Behavioral	Lack of study discipline; distraction by other apps; forgetting studied material	2–8 respondents	P1, P2, P4, P5

Technical Issue	Unstable internet connection ; occasional app bugs; unresponsive buttons/screen freezing	2–3 respondents	P2, P4
Limited	Energy-system restrictions ; locked premium content; absence of speaking/grammar features	5–9 respondents	P3, P4, P5

a. Challenging

Twelve of 20 respondents rated EWA's content as tidak sulit or mudah (not difficult), four rated it as moderate, and two reported genuinely difficult vocabulary. P4 explained needing to repeat material “several times to understand better,” while P1 noted that EWA's content, though “more basic” than school lessons, remained “very helpful and suitable for developing basic English skills,” an assessment reflecting a broader pattern in which ten respondents felt EWA aligned with their school curriculum, seven felt it did not, and three felt it was only partly aligned.

b. Behavioral

Only five of 20 respondents described themselves as consistently disciplined in using EWA; eight described themselves as only sometimes disciplined, and seven as generally undisciplined, with forgetting to study (5 respondents) and social-media distraction (2 respondents) the most common obstacles. P1 attributed this to competing daily activities rather than a lack of motivation, P2 described being drawn away from EWA by other applications on the same device, and P5 candidly attributed difficulty to their own tendency to forget material without repeated review.

c. Technical Issue

Thirteen of 20 respondents reported no technical problems at all, and among those who did, battery drain, connectivity glitches, and unresponsive buttons or screen freezing were each mentioned by only two to three respondents. In interviews, only P2 and P4 reported any technical disruption, with P4 specifically noting that an unstable internet connection prevented audio and video content from loading smoothly, while P1, P3, and P5 reported no technical issues

whatsoever, suggesting that such disruptions depend more on local connectivity conditions than on the application's general reliability.

d. Limited

The most structurally significant barrier concerned EWA's freemium system. Nineteen of 20 respondents used the free version, and although 11 reported no tangible impact from feature restrictions, nine did, with eight specifically citing locked premium content and five citing the energy system, which limits the number of exercises available before a wait or payment is required, as sources of frustration. P5 described the energy system as something that "makes the learning process slightly hindered," while P4 noted that visible-but-locked premium features created a sense that additional material existed but remained inaccessible. P3 additionally identified substantive feature gaps, recommending the addition of speaking practice, grammar testing, and accent assessment, along with deeper vocabulary content beyond common everyday words.

D. Conclusion

This study examined eleventh-grade students' perceptions of using the EWA application as a digital English learning tool and the difficulties they encountered while using it. Regarding the first research question, students generally perceived EWA positively, as reflected in three themes: Good Experience, Ease of Use, and Supportive Features. Students viewed EWA as an enjoyable and motivating application that made English learning feel less monotonous, valued its clear interface and flexible accessibility, and recognized concrete learning benefits for vocabulary, listening, pronunciation, and reading, supported by features such as audio playback, translation tools, video content, games, and a streak-based challenge system.

Regarding the second research question, students also reported difficulties across four categories: content-related challenges such as unfamiliar vocabulary and curriculum misalignment; behavioral challenges such as inconsistent study habits, distraction, and forgetting; technical issues such as unstable internet

connections; and structural limitations stemming from EWA's freemium model, including restricted premium content, the energy system, and the absence of speaking and grammar-focused features. Importantly, these difficulties did not diminish students' overall positive perception of EWA; rather, they clarify the conditions under which EWA's benefits can be most fully realized.

Based on these findings, several recommendations are proposed. Students are encouraged to use EWA regularly and to develop consistent study habits that translate their motivation into sustained practice. Teachers may consider integrating EWA as a supplementary resource that reinforces vocabulary, listening, and pronunciation objectives already present in the curriculum, while guiding students on how to use it strategically alongside classroom instruction. Application developers are encouraged to expand free-tier content, ease the constraints of the energy system, improve performance under unstable network conditions, and add features supporting productive skills such as speaking and grammar. Finally, given that this study was limited to a

relatively small sample within a single educational setting and focused on perceptions rather than measured learning outcomes, future researchers are encouraged to involve larger and more diverse participant groups and to examine EWA's effectiveness using quantitative, mixed-methods, or experimental designs.

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