



## Students' Perceptions of the Use of Duolingo English Practice Test for Evaluating Speaking Proficiency: A Qualitative Approach

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### Abstract

The rapid adoption of technology-mediated assessments raises questions about how students experience and interpret their effectiveness. This study investigates perceptions of the Duolingo English Test (DET) Practice as a tool for evaluating speaking proficiency among English Education students at a private Islamic college in Kendari City, Indonesia. Using a qualitative design, five purposively selected participants from semesters 4, 6, and 8 took part in semi-structured interviews, analyzed thematically through Braun and Clarke's framework. Findings reveal five interrelated themes: diverse experiences with DET Practice, supportive yet challenging features, contested reflections on speaking ability representation, its influence on self-confidence, and its motivational effects. Students valued DET Practice for flexibility, accessibility, and fostering self-regulation, but noted limitations such as time pressure, minimal feedback, and lack of authentic interaction. The discussion interprets these perceptions through Mobile-Assisted Language Learning and Gestalt principles, highlighting DET Practice as a strategic but complementary tool. The study contributes to understanding how technology-based testing can motivate learners and support confidence while underscoring the need for integration with interactive, face-to-face speaking opportunities in higher education.

**Keywords:** Duolingo English test; speaking proficiency; motivation; mobile-assisted language learning; higher education.

### Introduction

In the midst of the increasingly strong current of globalization, English language skills, especially speaking skills, have become a very important indicator or assessment. This is supported by the statement of Karimah Tauhid (2023) who stated that the ability to speak English has a crucial role, not only in academic environments, but also in work environments and also interculturally. In addition, Saputra et al. (2023) emphasized that effective oral





communication can improve a person's ability to convey ideas clearly, build interpersonal relationships, and participate in various international forums. However, of the four basic language skills, speaking is often considered the most complex skill to master. Ghafar and Raheem (2023) also stated that speaking skills require a combination of linguistic, cognitive, and social skills, so they can also be a challenge for language learners. These difficulties or challenges are what encourage many researchers to look for more innovative alternative tools and methods in an effort to improve and assess speaking skills.

Traditionally, standardized tests such as TOEFL and IELTS have long been used to assess English speaking ability. However, various studies have shown that these tests have a number of significant limitations. Isbell et al. (2023) found that access to these tests is still very limited, especially for students who live in remote areas or have financial constraints. Not only that, the assessments that are often carried out manually by humans have been criticized for their non-neutral nature, so that they have the potential to create bias in the assessment itself and is greatly impact the accuracy of the final results of the participants. To overcome this problem, recently many studies have begun to highlight the potential of digital platforms and artificial intelligence (AI)-based applications as alternatives in assessing language skills. One tool that is starting to be widely known is the Duolingo English Test (DET) Practice, which offers easy access, more affordable costs, and integrated speaking tasks into its assessment system.

Several studies have also highlighted issues related to DET speaking assessments. Isbell et al. (2020) found that while DET offers reliable scores, some students felt that the speaking section did not fully reflect their actual oral ability. In another study, Yao (2021) emphasized that students' perceptions of test fairness influenced their motivation and preparation. Furthermore, Chen (2022) pointed out ongoing concerns regarding the construct of DET in assessing speaking performance, especially in academic contexts. These findings suggest the need to explore how students interpret and evaluate speaking assessments in digital platforms like DET Practice.

However, as the use of DET Practice increases, questions arise about how effective this tool is in measuring overall speaking ability, especially from the perspective of students as direct users. Based on the challenges mentioned above and also its high level of difficulty and its important role in academic and real-world communication, the researcher chose to focus this study on speaking skills compared to other language skills so that students' opinions can be used to develop the Duolingo English Test (DET) Practice.

These challenges have led to the birth of new technology-based alternatives such as the Duolingo English Test (DET) Practice. This test is known to be more affordable, online-based, and uses an adaptive system and artificial intelligence to assess participants' language skills, including speaking skills (Kurniawan & Buriyanti, 2024). DET Practice is one solution that is considered more practical and inclusive. However, behind this convenience, questions arise: to what extent do the DET Practice assessment results truly reflect a person's speaking ability? Do participants feel that this assessment is fair, useful, and reliable for them?



Various current studies have discussed the use of the Duolingo application in the learning process both in and out of class. Kemalasari, Hadina, and Yoni (2021), for example, found that students felt very helped and motivated to use Duolingo in learning English. Fitria (2023) further explained that most students—approximately ninety percent—who use the Duolingo application in their English language learning believe that it helps them improve their speaking skills. However, when it comes to assessing speaking ability, only a limited number of studies have specifically focused on how learners evaluate the Duolingo English Test (DET) Practice.

This is the research gap that this study aims to answer. The development of AI-based assessments such as DET Practice does offer convenience, but also poses new challenges. The level of user trust, as well as uneven technology among students, are things that need to be studied further (Kurniawan & Buriyanti, 2024). In addition, it is also important to see how students assess the speaking tasks in DET Practice, especially those from non-native English speaking backgrounds with different technological conditions.

To provide a theoretical foundation, this study is guided by the Gestalt theory of perception. Gestalt emphasizes that individuals perceive phenomena as a whole rather than as separate parts (Koffka, 1935). In the context of language assessment, this theory helps to explain how students interpret their overall experiences with the Duolingo English Test (DET) Practice, including the speaking tasks, by organizing various aspects such as ease, challenges, and motivation into a unified perception.

Furthermore, the Gestalt theory is characterized by several key principles that are relevant to this study. *Pragnanz* (simplicity) refers to the tendency of individuals to perceive forms in the simplest way possible. *Figure and Ground* highlights how people distinguish the main object (figure) from its background (ground). *Similarity* explains that objects with similar characteristics are perceived as belonging to the same group, while *Proximity* suggests that elements close to each other are perceived as a unity. *Closure* describes the human tendency to fill in missing information to perceive an object as complete, and *Continuity* emphasizes the perception of continuous patterns rather than disconnected parts.

Applied to this research, these principles explain how students may perceive DET Practice as an integrated experience rather than fragmented elements. Their perceptions of ease, difficulty, or usefulness are not viewed in isolation, but as part of a meaningful whole shaped by Gestalt's perceptual organization.

Therefore, this study aims to examine in depth how students perceive the Duolingo English Test (DET) Practice as a tool for evaluating speaking skills, while also opening up a discussion space about the extent to which technology-based assessments can replace the role of traditional assessments in language learning in this digital era (Isbell et al., 2024; Kurniawan & Buriyanti, 2024).

## Method

The methodology for this investigation is discussed in this chapter. It consists of the following components: research design, setting & context, participants, research instruments, and data analysis techniques. The research instruments serve as tools to assess the research questions and gather relevant data for analysis.

### A. Research Design

This study employs a qualitative approach to explore the perceptions of students from the English Education Department at a private Islamic college in Kendari City regarding the use of the Duolingo English Test (DET) Practice in evaluating their speaking skills. Qualitative research aims to understand the complexity of human experiences and the meanings individuals assign to their lives, aligning with this study's objective to gain an in-depth understanding of students' perspectives (Bhandari, 2020). Additionally, the richness of qualitative data often lies in the voices of participants, illuminating the nuances of their experiences (Bhandari, 2020).

### B. Settings & Context

This research is conducted on students in even semesters, namely in semesters 4, 6, and 8, in an English Language Education Study Program at a private Islamic college in Kendari City.

### C. Participants

The participants in this study consisted of 5 students from the English Education Department at a private Islamic college in Kendari City, with 1 student from semester 4, 2 students from semester 6, and 2 students from semester 8.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, a non-random technique in which individuals are selected based on certain characteristics, such as being an active student of the English Education Department at a private Islamic college in Kendari City, having experience using the Duolingo English Test (DET) Practice, and being willing to participate voluntarily in this study. The purposive sampling technique allows researchers to select subjects who are considered most capable of providing relevant and in-depth information related to the phenomenon being studied. According to Dudovskiy (2024), purposive sampling is used when researchers deliberately select participants based on their relevance and expertise to the research problem. This criterion is closely related to the purpose of the study to ensure the collection of rich and informative data (Scribbr, 2022). By involving students from different semesters, this study aims to provide a variety of perspectives on their experiences in using the Duolingo English Test (DET) Practice as a medium to evaluate their proficiency.

To maintain a balance of gender representation, the participants consisted of 2 male students and 3 female students.

#### D. Instruments of the Study

In this study, the main instrument used is the researcher themselves (human instrument), as explained by Moleong (2019), where the researcher acts as a direct data collector and analyzer. The researcher is conduct in-depth interviews with participants using semi-structured interview guidelines that are compiled based on the research objectives, namely to explore students' perceptions of the use of the Duolingo English Test (DET) Practice as a tool for evaluating speaking proficiency. This reference is designed to explore the experiences, perceptions, and readiness of the students in facing the Duolingo English test (DET) Practice.

Interview is cover several important aspects, namely the first aspect about the experience of using DET Practice from students, then perceptions of difficulty and ease in the test process, and the last aspect of the comparison between the Duolingo test and other similar tests. The questions in the interview include:

Table 1. Thematic interview instrument

No	Question	Question Translation (terjemahan pertanyaan)
1	How is your experience in using the Duolingo English Test (DET) Practice to measure your speaking ability?	Bagaimana pengalaman Anda dalam menggunakan Duolingo English test (DET) Practice untuk mengukur kemampuan berbicara Anda?
2	Which feature in Duolingo English Test (DET) Practice speaking section do you find most helpful or most challenging?	Fitur apa dalam speaking section Duolingo English Test (DET) Practice yang menurut anda paling membantu atau paling menantang?
3	Do you think the Duolingo English Test (DET) Practice reflects your actual speaking ability? explain	Menurut anda apakah Duolingo English Test (DET) Practice mencerminkan kemampuan berbicara Anda yang sebenarnya? jelaskan
4	How effective do you feel Duolingo English Test (DET) Practice is in helping you develop your English speaking skills?	Seberapa efektif anda merasa Duolingo English Test (DET) Practice membantu anda mengembangkan keterampilan berbicara bahasa Inggris?
5	How does using Duolingo English Test (DET) Practice affect your confidence in speaking English?	Bagaimana penggunaan Duolingo English Test (DET) Practice mempengaruhi kepercayaan diri Anda dalam berbicara bahasa Inggris?

6	Do you feel more motivated to practice speaking after using Duolingo English Test (DET) Practice? Why?	Apakah anda merasa lebih termotivasi untuk berlatih berbicara setelah menggunakan Duolingo English Test (DET) Practice? mengapa?
7	Do you think the format and technology used in Duolingo English Test (DET) Practice supports or hinders your speaking skills?	Menurut anda, apakah format dan teknologi yang digunakan dalam Duolingo English Test (DET) Practice mendukung atau menghambat keterampilan berbicara Anda?
8	Do you feel the Duolingo English Test (DET) Practice platforms provide enough time and flexibility for speaking practice?	Apakah anda merasa platform Duolingo English Test (DET) Practice menyediakan cukup waktu dan fleksibilitas untuk praktik berbicara
9	Are you more confident in speaking when using the Duolingo English Test (DET) Practice than when doing oral practice in class?	Apakah anda lebih percaya diri dalam speaking saat menggunakan Duolingo English Test (DET) Practice dibandingkan dengan ketika melakukan praktik lisan di kelas?
10	If you had the opportunity to choose between a live speaking test or a Duolingo English Test (DET) Practice which would you choose and why?	Jika anda memiliki kesempatan memilih antara tes speaking langsung atau melalui Duolingo English Test (DET) Practice mana yang Anda pilih dan mengapa?

The interview questions is developed based on relevant literature and pre-tested to ensure clarity and relevance. Semi-structured interviews are characterized by open-ended questions and the use of an interview guide, allowing researchers to explore emerging topics during the interview, resulting in richer and more insightful data (Harrell & Bradley, 2009).

#### E. Data Collection Methods

Data is collected through semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to explore students' perceptions in greater depth, provide flexibility in data collection, and create opportunities to investigate emerging topics during the interview (George, 2022).

To initiate the data collection process, the researcher is first contact the selected participants students of the English Language Education Study Program—via telephone or messaging applications such as WhatsApp to explain the purpose of the study and invite them to participate. After obtaining confirmation, the researcher is arrange the first meeting, during

which participants is be asked to read and sign an informed consent form as a sign of their voluntary participation. In the second meeting, participants is asked to retake the Duolingo English Test (DET) Practice to refresh their memory, particularly regarding the speaking section. At this stage, they will also be given a brief demonstration test that specifically focuses on speaking skills, considering that the DET Practice generates random items covering various skills. In the third meeting, the researcher will conduct semi-structured interviews with each participant.

The interviews will take place in a quiet and comfortable setting, preferably in a room available on campus or another mutually agreed location, to ensure privacy and minimize distractions. Each interview is recorded using a digital voice recorder or a smartphone with good recording quality, with the participants' permission. These recordings are essential for accurate transcription and data analysis. Each interview is expected to last approximately 30 to 45 minutes, providing sufficient time to explore key themes while also respecting the participants' time. The interviews will primarily be conducted in Bahasa Indonesia to allow participants to express their opinions more comfortably and naturally. However, English may be used in certain parts, particularly when discussing their experiences with the Duolingo English Practice Test, depending on the participants' preferences.

In addition, the researcher is take field notes during and after the interviews to capture non-verbal cues, contextual details, and immediate reflections that may not be recorded in audio. To enhance the credibility and reliability of the data, the researcher is employ member checking, which involves summarizing key points during the interview and confirming them with the participants. This approach is intended to strengthen the validity of the research findings.

#### F. Data Analysis

The data obtained from the interviews is analyzed using thematic analysis. This analysis method is suitable for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns of meaning (themes) in qualitative data. Thematic analysis allows researchers to understand the shared experiences of participants by compiling and describing data in detail (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

The analysis process will follow the six steps of thematic analysis described by Braun and Clarke (2006), namely:

##### 1. Familiarization with the Data

The researcher reads and reviews the interview transcripts repeatedly to understand the contents of the data in depth. At this stage, the researcher can also note down the initial ideas that emerge.

##### 2. Generating Initial Codes

The data is analyzed systematically to identify important features. Initial codes are then assigned to relevant pieces of data across the dataset.

### 3. Searching for Themes

The initial codes are grouped based on similarity of meaning to form initial themes that represent patterns in the data.

### 4. Reviewing Themes

The themes that have been formed are reviewed and re-examined to ensure that they are relevant, consistent, and truly reflect the entire data.

### 5. Naming and Defining Themes

Each theme is clearly defined and given a name that reflects its essence. The researcher explains what is meant by each theme and how it relates to the research question.

### 6. Producing the Report

In the final stage, the results of the analysis are described in the form of a coherent narrative, accompanied by direct quotes from the interview data, and reconnected with the research question and relevant theories.

By following these steps, data analysis is carried out systematically and transparently, thereby increasing the credibility and depth of the research findings.

### G. Ethical Considerations

In carrying out this qualitative research, several ethical principles are upheld so that they can protect participants and maintain credibility in the research process. Before data collection begins, consent from the participants themselves must be obtained through informed consent. Participants are also given a clear explanation of the purpose of this research, the procedures that is followed, their right to stop participating at any time without consequences, and how their data is used. As stated by Creswell and Poth (2018), "Qualitative researchers have an obligation to respect participants and the research site" (p. 55). This principle is the basis for maintaining transparency and voluntary participation in this research.

To maintain confidentiality and anonymity, pseudonyms are used instead of participants' real names and no personal identifying information is included in the final report. All interview recordings and transcripts are stored securely and can only be accessed by the researcher. This action was taken to ensure that participants feel safe and comfortable in conveying their perceptions honestly.

In addition, this research also follows the principle of non-maleficence, which is not to cause harm, either psychologically or emotionally to participants. Interview questions are structured in such a way as to avoid topics that are sensitive or cause discomfort. The researcher also obtained ethical approval from the university's research ethics committee before starting data collection. Given that qualitative research involves close interaction between researchers and participants, a respectful and non-judgmental attitude was always maintained so that participants' voices could be fairly and accurately represented in the research results.

## Results

This section presents the findings of the study regarding students' perceptions of using the Duolingo English Test (DET) Practice in evaluating their English-speaking proficiency. Based on the analysis of the interview data, five main themes emerged from the participants' responses, namely Students' Experiences in Using DET Practice, Features and Challenges in DET Practice, Reflection of Speaking Ability through DET Practice, The Influence of DET Practice on Self-Confidence, and The Influence of DET Practice on Learning Motivation.

### Students' Experiences in Using DET Practice

Students had diverse experiences when using DET Practice to train their speaking skills. P1 stated, "My experience when using the Duolingo English Practice Test was quite enjoyable, because I found it easy to understand. In the speaking section, I could immediately record my voice, and the system automatically provided feedback. So, I felt like I was being trained directly even though it was actually in the form of a test." Similarly, P5 shared that although he was nervous at first, "At the beginning, when I first tried the test, I was a bit nervous because speaking is still a big challenge since we rarely practice. But after I tried speaking once, it turned out to be quite interesting. Why interesting? Because the Duolingo test is very simple, you only need internet access and a phone, and you don't have to pay to practice or train your speaking."

P2 described his experience as both interesting and challenging, "My experience was very interesting. There were also some challenges. The interesting part is that there are not many language proficiency tests that use a web like Duolingo. So, I found it interesting because it was new to me. The challenging part was that in the test, the sequence of the questions was not always reading-reading, speaking-speaking, or writing-writing. They were shuffled."

P3 explained that when he first tried it, he found it less effective because the instructions were confusing: "So, in the beginning, when I tried to take the DET Practice test, I felt it was less effective, because at that time, when DET Practice was still new, I tried the free test, and the instructions were not clear. The instructions were also very short, and before we could fully understand, the test had already started, which was surprising and confusing. But as technology developed, DET Practice was upgraded, and finally, I felt my experience using DET Practice was quite interesting because the features improved. It gave us time to think about what we wanted to do in the test, especially in speaking, so the instructions became clearer."

P4 also emphasized that using DET Practice was interesting and broadened his knowledge: "To be honest, my experience when using the Duolingo English Practice Test was very interesting. In my opinion, DEPT is very helpful because there were many things I did not know before, but after using DEPT, I discovered them since it presented and provided them."

According to the researcher's analysis, although students had different experiences, overall, DET Practice was considered enjoyable, practical, and provided more flexible opportunities to practice speaking. The challenges faced during the initial use highlighted how DET Practice

functioned as a new medium requiring adaptation, while at the same time offering an authentic and relevant learning experience that met students' needs.

### **Features and Challenges in DET Practice**

Challenging part is when there is a time limit for answering. Sometimes I get nervous or run out of Students also highlighted both the useful features and the challenges in DET Practice. P1 explained, "The most helpful feature for me in the speaking section of Duolingo is when I listen to the question and then record my answer. This feature allows me to practice pronunciation, fluency, and confidence in speaking. But the most time, so I cannot finish my response."

P2 considered all features helpful but found the photo description task the most difficult: "In my opinion, all the features are helpful in the speaking section. But the most challenging one is the photo description. Because we are asked to describe the photo we see for the first time with very limited time. So, we have to quickly explain what is in the picture, and in my case, my vocabulary is still too limited."

P3 emphasized the accuracy of the system in detecting speech: "So, in Duolingo, there is AI, right? I think it uses AI to listen to what we say. What I like is that it recognizes my speech quite accurately, so I immediately get feedback. The challenge, however, is that since it's still a system, there are technological limitations. Sometimes my intonation or accent is slightly wrong, and that causes problems."

P4 felt helped by the voice recording feature but also faced difficulties: "First, the most helpful part is in speaking, because I feel very supported by the voice recording feature which makes me more confident. But the most challenging task is describing the picture. I was a little confused about what exactly I had to describe in the picture."

P5 expressed that the picture description task was both beneficial and challenging: "For me, the most helpful feature is the 'explain the picture' part, because when we see a picture, we can think of many things to describe. But the challenge is that there is a time limit, and we also need to recall the vocabulary we already know."

From these accounts, the researcher observed that the features of DET Practice strongly support students in practicing speaking skills through voice recording, speech recognition, and descriptive tasks. However, time constraints, vocabulary challenges, and the system's sensitivity to accents remain obstacles. This indicates that although DET is effective as a training medium, it still has technical limitations that users need to be aware of.

### **Reflection of Speaking Ability through DET Practice**

Students had different perspectives on whether DET Practice truly reflected their speaking ability. P1 stated, "In my opinion, I think it reflects my ability quite well, although not entirely, because DEPT helps me practice pronunciation and fluency. However, the test situations are not the same as speaking directly with other people, so the social pressure is not there."

In contrast, P2 believed otherwise: “For me, no, because if I had more time, I could think about what I wanted to say. I could arrange my words properly, but in Duolingo there is a time limit. So, I have to think quickly, which sometimes makes me go blank.”

P3 considered DET fairly valid: “I think it is quite valid, because at the end there is a score. It describes the score based on the skills. If I do the test seriously, my score becomes higher, so I think it is valid.”

P4 even emphasized that, “Honestly, yes, it really reflects me, because in the test I say whatever comes to my mind. I truly become myself, expressing what I know.”

However, P5 had a different opinion: “In my view, maybe the Duolingo English Practice Test does not fully reflect my actual speaking ability. I think speaking skills are better shown when we speak directly, for example in an online conversation with a native speaker or when practicing speaking with friends.”

According to the researcher’s analysis, students’ responses revealed varied perspectives. Some believed that DET Practice adequately reflected their speaking skills by providing scores and feedback, while others felt that the test did not represent real communication situations. This suggests that DET Practice can serve as an initial indication of speaking proficiency but does not fully capture the complexity of communication that occurs in direct interactions.

### **The Influence of DET Practice on Self-Confidence**

DET Practice also had an influence on students’ self-confidence in speaking English. P1 expressed, “In my opinion, Duolingo quite helps to increase my confidence in speaking English. Because this test gives the opportunity to record my voice and express my answers independently, I feel more accustomed to speaking, even though the atmosphere is different from direct conversation.”

P2, on the other hand, considered its influence minimal: “For me, it doesn’t really have much effect, because in Duolingo I speak by myself—no one sees me, no one hears me. If I were tested directly in front of the class, that would really affect my confidence. But in Duolingo, no. Yes, I feel confident because I am only with my gadget, not with other people.”

P3 actually felt more confident: “When I did the speaking, was I confident or not? I became more confident because no other people were watching me while I was speaking. No one was looking. I felt more confident using DEPT alone than in tests like IELTS or others. Usually, there is an examiner listening to us, or in class there is a lecturer listening to us, and that makes me feel less confident, afraid of being judged.”

A similar view was shared by P4: “As I mentioned earlier, since the feature can only be accessed and seen by ourselves, it increases confidence because we can assess our own progress—the first time we use it, the second time, and it even creates interest to keep using it.”

P5 also emphasized, “In the Duolingo test, I feel quite confident in my speaking compared to speaking directly. When speaking face-to-face, we sometimes feel nervous, afraid of making grammar mistakes or mispronunciations.”

From these accounts, the researcher found that most students felt more confident when using DET Practice due to the private test environment and the absence of social pressure. However, a small number of students noted that their confidence did not significantly change since the test was conducted without an audience. This suggests that DET is more effective in boosting technical confidence but less effective in preparing students to face real communication that requires courage in front of others.

### **The Influence of DET Practice on Learning Motivation**

DET Practice also proved to influence students’ learning motivation in improving their speaking ability. P1 explained, “I feel more motivated because I can see my progress over time. Features such as the score encourage me to keep trying and improving my ability. When the score is low, it motivates me to work on my skills.”

P2 shared a similar view: “Yes, I am very motivated, considering that my speaking is still weak. Especially my vocabulary is still very limited. So, I am very motivated to study more so that my speaking will become better.”

P3 regarded flexibility as a motivating factor: “I think my motivation increased, because this test can be accessed anytime. So, whenever I want to do it, I can, and that motivates me.”

P4 added, “Yes, I am very motivated to practice speaking more. For example, if I realize that I am lacking certain words, I have to learn them so that later I can use them again when speaking. And there are also new vocabulary items I need to find out.”

P5 also emphasized, “Yes, for speaking practice, it definitely adds to our motivation to keep practicing. Because after the speaking test, I can still see my weaknesses. After seeing the score, even though it is only one-way speaking, there are still many areas I need to develop.”

According to the researcher’s analysis, all students agreed that DET Practice had a positive impact on their learning motivation. The system’s scoring, their awareness of vocabulary limitations, and the flexibility of access were the main driving factors. This indicates that DET functions not only as an evaluation tool but also as a motivational medium that encourages students to keep practicing and improving their speaking skills.

### **Summary of The results**

The results of the study revealed that students’ perceptions of using the Duolingo English Test (DET) Practice were shaped by several interrelated factors: their experiences in using the platform, the features and challenges they encountered, their reflections on how far the test

represented their speaking ability, and its influence on their self-confidence and learning motivation. While all students acknowledged that DET Practice provided opportunities to practice speaking flexibly and accessibly, their views varied regarding its validity and authenticity. Some highlighted its benefits in building confidence and sustaining motivation, while others pointed out its limitations in representing real communication. These findings contribute to the understanding of technology-based language assessment by showing that DET Practice serves not only as an evaluation tool but also as a medium that fosters students' motivation and confidence, although its effectiveness remains influenced by technical challenges such as time constraints, vocabulary limitations, and the absence of authentic social interaction.

## **Discussion**

### **DET Practice as a Strategic Tool for Enhancing EFL Students' Speaking Skills**

This study critically expands the understanding of students' perceptions of the Duolingo English Test (DET) Practice as a Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) tool. The main focus lies in how flexibility, learning motivation, and psychological factors interact in students' experiences with the one-way speaking test. Findings indicate that students perceived DET Practice as a practical, flexible, and accessible platform since it can be completed anytime and anywhere without location restrictions. This aligns with Alisoy and Sadig (2025), who emphasized that MALL provides personal, efficient, and flexible learning, as well as Lei et al. (2022), who highlighted that mobile-based learning fosters students' self-regulation capacity. From a Gestalt perspective, this reflects the principle of Pragnanz, where learners experience DET Practice as a simple, straightforward, and structured system that allows them to concentrate on core speaking tasks without unnecessary distractions.

Despite its flexibility, students also encountered challenges while using DET Practice. Since the test is one-way, students cannot listen back to their answers or receive detailed feedback for each skill. The scoring system only provides an overall score without specifying strengths and weaknesses across different sub-skills. Additional difficulties include limited vocabulary, short response time, and confusion when first using the platform. These findings are consistent with Amelia et al. (2019) and Puspita Sari et al. (2020), who noted that limited vocabulary, grammatical errors, and nervousness are major barriers in EFL speaking. In Gestalt terms, students are required to focus on their responses as the figure, while the lack of feedback and time limitations become the ground that shapes how they perceive and organize their speaking performance.

Psychological factors also influenced students' perceptions of DET Practice. Although the test is one-way, the presence of a final score served as a motivational driver for students to improve in their subsequent attempts. Shofia et al. (2021) highlighted that psychological barriers, such as fear of mistakes and low confidence, often hinder speaking performance. From the Gestalt perspective of Similarity and Proximity, students tend to group and organize vocabulary and

expressions that are close in meaning or context, which gradually enhances their speech coherence and fluency during practice.

DET Practice further functions as a catalyst for self-regulation, even though it does not provide detailed feedback or recordings of responses. With the overall score, students are able to reflect on their performance, become aware of their vocabulary limitations, and design independent learning strategies. This suggests that the one-way test still pushes students to think critically about their performance and develop metacognitive awareness that is crucial for long-term speaking improvement. The principle of Closure explains how students attempt to complete their responses meaningfully, even in the absence of feedback, while Continuity is reflected in their effort to sustain logical flow and coherence in speaking despite the time constraints.

In addition to fostering self-regulation, the flexibility and accessibility of DET Practice help students reduce psychological pressure and nervousness. The self-paced format allows them to try different speaking strategies without the risk of immediate social judgment. In this way, the platform provides a “safe space” for EFL students to intensively practice, build confidence, and gradually transfer this confidence to real-life speaking contexts. This aligns with Gestalt’s Figure–Ground principle, as students prioritize their practice experience (figure) over social anxiety (ground), making the activity more focused and less intimidating.

Nevertheless, the limitations of DET Practice suggest that it should be used as a complementary tool rather than a substitute for face-to-face speaking practice. A one-way test cannot fully replicate spontaneity, social interaction, and the nuances of authentic communication. Therefore, integrating digital learning strategies with supplementary activities, such as group discussions or classroom-based speaking practice, could create a more comprehensive and holistic learning experience. By applying Gestalt’s Continuity, educators can design blended learning pathways where DET Practice smoothly connects with interactive speaking opportunities in the classroom.

Ultimately, this study confirms that DET Practice serves as a strategic tool that not only evaluates students’ speaking ability but also supports the development of confidence, motivation, and self-regulated learning. By understanding how technological features, learning experiences, and psychological factors interact through Gestalt principles, educators can design more holistic learning strategies. This allows DET Practice to be optimized as a complementary tool for independent speaking practice while encouraging students to continually enhance their English proficiency in a sustainable manner.

## **Conclusion**

This study explored students’ perceptions of the use of the Duolingo English Practice Test (DET Practice) in evaluating speaking proficiency. The findings revealed that students generally perceived the DET Practice as a useful and accessible tool to practice and improve their speaking skills. They highlighted several advantages, such as convenience, practicality, user-friendly features, and the opportunity to gain immediate feedback. The participants also



reported that the test encouraged them to practice consistently and provided a sense of real-test simulation, which helped reduce their anxiety in speaking performance.

However, the study also identified some limitations. Several participants expressed concerns regarding the accuracy of the evaluation system, the lack of direct human interaction, and technical challenges such as unstable internet connection or audio clarity. These challenges suggested that while DET Practice can support speaking practice, it may not fully capture students' speaking competence in the same way as face-to-face evaluations.

In conclusion, the DET Practice offers a valuable supplementary tool for speaking evaluation and practice. It fosters motivation, self-confidence, and readiness for English proficiency tests. Nevertheless, it should be integrated with other authentic speaking activities and teacher feedback to provide a more comprehensive evaluation of speaking proficiency.

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