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ABSTRACT

The rise of online learning has made language learning apps more accessible, but many users abandon the app due to low motivation. The effectiveness of gamification's reward system in encouraging long-term learning and retention is still not clear given the fact that it has been suggested as a solution to increase motivation and retention. The purpose of the research is to explore how reward systems affect user retention and motivation in language learning apps. A quantitative research method using an online survey was employed in this research and 85 responses were collected. This study analyzed key factors such as demographics, app usage patterns, user motivations, and preferences for reward types. Most participants were young adults, mainly female, with higher education levels. Currently, the most widely used language learning applications include Duolingo, Babbel, and Memrise, with English, Japanese, and Korean being the most frequently learned languages. The research highlights that gamified rewards, such as streaks, badges, and unlocking new features help motivate users. However, lack of time and motivation were found as major reasons for users discontinuing app usage. The study also found that personalization and flexibility are important for user engagement. Recommendations include refining the reward systems, enhancing user engagement through meaningful content, and incorporating more flexible learning options. Overall this research offers insights into designing effective gamification for language learning apps.

Keywords: Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL), Reward Systems, Gamification, Motivation, User Retention, Self-Directed Learning.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.0 INTRODUCTION.....	5
1.1 Background of Research.....	5
1.2 Problem Statement.....	6
1.3 Research Questions.....	7
1.4 Research Objectives.....	7
1.5 Research Conceptual Framework.....	8
2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW.....	9
2.1 Mobile Assisted Language Learning.....	9
2.2 The Role of Motivation in Self-Directed Language Learning.....	10
2.3 Gamification and Reward System in Language Learning Apps.....	10
2.4 Effectiveness of Reward Systems in Enhancing Retention.....	11
2.5 Summary.....	12
3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.....	13
3.1 Research Design.....	13
3.2 Participant and Sampling.....	14
3.2.1 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria.....	14
3.3 Sample size.....	15
3.4 Recruitment Method.....	15
3.5 Apparatus and Tools.....	15
3.6 Survey Design and Measure.....	16
3.7 Data Analysis Methods.....	23
4.0 FINDINGS.....	24
4.1 Section 1: Demographic.....	24
4.2 Section 2: Language Proficiency & Technology Familiarity.....	29
4.3 Section 3: Language Learning App Related Questions.....	33
5.0 DISCUSSION.....	43
5.1 Motivations for Language Learning.....	44
5.2 Effectiveness of Gamified Rewards.....	44
5.3 Dropout Reasons and Re-engagement Potential (RQ3).....	45
5.4 Influence of Demographics and App Usage.....	46
5.5 User Perceptions of Gamified Rewards.....	46
6.0 CONCLUSION.....	47
6.1 Limitation of Study.....	47
6.2 Summary.....	47
7.0 RECOMMENDATION AND FUTURE RESEARCH.....	48
8.0 REFERENCES.....	50
9.0 APPENDICES.....	53
Appendix A.....	53

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Research

The rapid growth of online education in recent years led to a highly crowded market for mobile language learning applications. New learners choose to use mobile language learning apps to study a second language as they are easily accessible, without concerns such as distance, timing, or budget constraints (Xu & Richardson, 2024). However, a self-learning journey requires a lot of motivation and determination. Many people give up after a few days of using the app before they achieve their learning goals. This low user retention rate shows an obvious weakness in these learning systems and limits their ability to truly support users in achieving language proficiency.

One solution to the problem of user retention is gamification, specifically rewards systems used within the app. In language learning applications, a rewards system usually consists of a variety of features—for example, streaks, badges, leaderboards, points, and other gamified components (Zhao & Guo, 2019). These features aim to increase user motivation by creating a feeling of accomplishment, competition, and advancement. To achieve greater user motivation, retention, and engagement, many popular language learning applications, for example, Duolingo, Falou, Memrise, and Busuu, have adopted some type of rewards systems in their system. Obtaining rewards in this in the learning journey could improve user satisfaction and make the language application more dynamic and engaging, which would promote continuous commitment and regular practice habits.

1.2 Problem Statement

Currently, there are insufficient insights on how reward mechanisms specifically affect user retention in mobile language learning apps, even though gamified reward systems have been frequently used in these applications. Recent research has provided mixed perceptions about the effectiveness of rewards and rewards systems. The findings across many of the studies remains unclear because some of them implemented poor data collection methods and were not analysing with the considerations of key background factors, such as native language of users and technology experience (Shortt et al., 2021). The purpose of this study is to address the research problem of limited knowledge of the effectiveness of reward systems. It is essential to understand experiences around reward-based learning and if these rewards enhance learners' motivation and produce sustained engagement with the language learning app. If more insights into users' perceptions and choices in regards to reward-based systems were gained, designers can improve the reward system to meet the needs and expectations of language learners, develop further recommendations to enhance outcomes of language learning and improve overall experience.

1.3 Research Questions

- RQ1** How do users perceive gamification rewards in enhancing motivations for continuing learning?
- RQ2** How does the reward system in language learning apps influence user's motivation and engagement?
- RQ3** How effective are gamified rewards in encouraging users to return to the app after periods of inactivity?

1.4 Research Objectives

- RO1** To understand user perceptions on gamification reward in enhancing motivations for continuous learning.
- RO2** To study the influence of gamification reward system on user retention in language learning apps.
- RO3** To identify user preferences for gamified rewards and analyse their impact on user retention or desire to return to the app after periods of inactivity.

1.5 Research Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework depicting the influence of reward systems on user retention and motivation in language learning apps is shown in Figure 1. It outlines the relationship between gamified reward systems in self-directed language learning apps and how they impact user motivation and retention. The independent variable is a gamified reward system, which is made up of features, such as points, badges, and leaderboards. The presence of a gamified reward system impacts user engagement, or the users' level of participation and interest. Engagement is expected to affect user motivation, which influences user retention—all dependent variables. The conceptual framework will be useful in this study to identify how reward systems increase engagement, which will subsequently lead to effective motivations and long term user retention—all while acknowledging varying user profiles and behaviors.

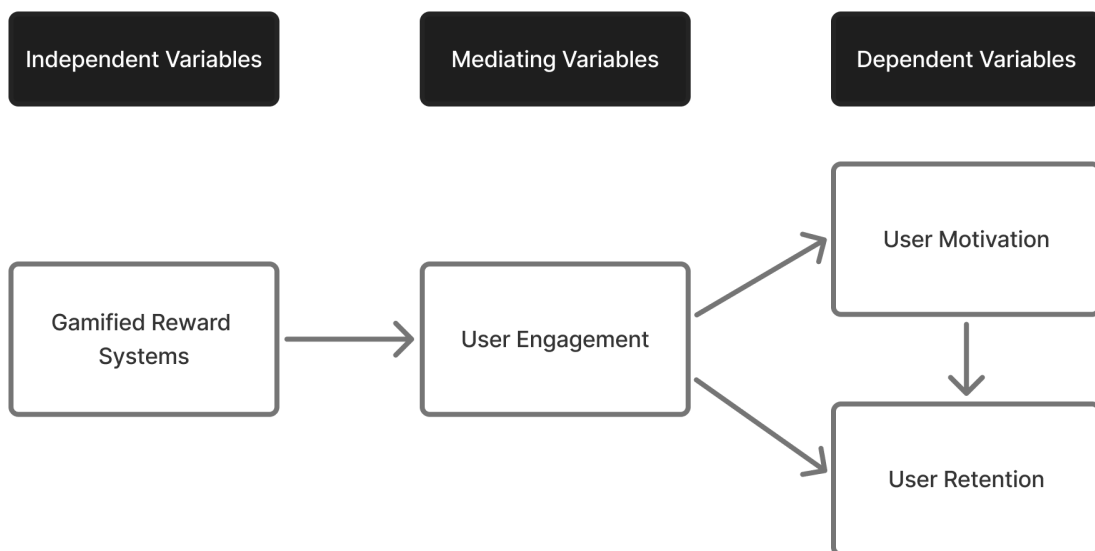


Figure 1: Research conceptual framework of reward systems on user motivation and retention for language learning apps

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

This Literature Review section reviews recent research on mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) applications, focusing on the purpose and influence of reward systems, user motivation, and retention. The following sections will discuss gamification in self-directed language learning, gamification and reward systems in MALL, and the value of reward systems for increasing retention. The purpose of the Literature Review is to synthesise these findings in order to gain a better understanding of how gamification can be utilised to engage users and improve the effectiveness of language learning apps.

2.1 Mobile Assisted Language Learning

Mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) refers to a language learning method that provides convenience for learners through mobile devices such as smartphones, tablets and laptops (Kessler et al., 2025). It includes two major categories: formal classroom learning with teacher-generated content, and informal learning through commercial platforms that provide ready-made content (Karakaya and Bozkurt, 2022). The core features of MALL are flexibility, accessibility, personalization, and the integration of multimedia tools such as audio, video, and interaction. MALL enables learners to plan their studies around their daily schedules, thereby promoting autonomous learning. The increasing use of mobile devices has driven the growth of MALL, converting it from a content delivery model to a more interactive and learner-centred strategy that values autonomy and knowledge co-creation (Karakaya and Bozkurt, 2022). However, this approach also faces challenges such as maintaining learners' enthusiasm, maintaining memory effectiveness, and overcoming the limitations of autonomous learning, all of which may threaten its long-term success (Kessler et al., 2025).

2.2 The Role of Motivation in Self-Directed Language Learning

User motivation is the incentive for people to make decisions and take actions. It could be generated by external (extrinsic) motivation, such as reward or punishment, or internal (intrinsic) motivation, which is forced by one's own to achieve a certain goal (Interaction Design Foundation - IxDF, 2016). According to Self-Determination Theory (SDT), motivation is working effectively when it meets learners' psychological demands on competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Lăpădat & Lăpădat, 2024). Intrinsic motivation can be further categorized into motivations for knowledge acquisition, accomplishment, and stimulation, all of which promote emotional well-being and self-worth. Extrinsic motivation exists along a continuum from externally controlled to more autonomous forms, with greater autonomy being linked to stronger long-term commitment. Al-Hoorie and Hiver (2021) conducted an experiment showing that motivational priming can positively influence language output, time on task, and self-reported motivation (Lăpădat & Lăpădat, 2024).

2.3 Gamification and Reward System in Language Learning Apps

Definition and Principles of Gamification:

Gamification, the use of game-based elements in non-game contexts, has become a prevalent strategy in language learning apps aimed at boosting engagement and motivation. (Common game mechanics include points, badges, leaderboards, and challenges (Sudina et al., 2025; Luo, 2021). For instance, Duolingo integrates gamified components such as streaks and notifications to maintain user involvement. A study by Shortt et al. (2023) using text classification techniques on user feedback highlighted that aligning gamified features with user expectations significantly enhances engagement. However, the success of gamification is context-dependent and may vary among individuals. Overuse or poorly designed gamification elements can lead to fatigue, underscoring the need for thoughtful application (Mogavi et al., 2022, p.2).

The reward systems in language learning applications vary in location, frequency and type. Two experiments carried by Garaialde et al. (2021) reveal that when rewards were set at the beginning of the session, users were more likely to use the application, confirming the value of early reinforcement. Meanwhile, delays or post-task rewards are less effective in maintaining attention.

2.4 Effectiveness of Reward Systems in Enhancing Retention

The research further emphasizes the significance of the reward system in terms of user stickiness and retention rate. According to the research by Garaialde et al. (2021), early rewards are more effective in maintaining attention than delayed rewards. Seppala (2020) tested a language learning prototype with two-week goals and milestone tracking. This prototype is mainly favored by users who want to track progress and value autonomy. Short et al. (2023) emphasized the necessity of dynamic and adaptive reward design. They warned that users feel bored with highly repetitive rewards, a phenomenon that is particularly evident among advanced learners.

The retention rate is also influenced by user-centered design and emotional connection. Over-reliance on grammar exercises that are out of context in courses can lead to frustration, hinder progress, and cause users to reduce long-term use. Conversely, intuitive and engaging user experiences marked by emotional resonance, timely feedback and personalization are more successful in encouraging continuous learning (Majumder, 2025). These all-encompassing experiences are usually associated with high retention rates, which are generally regarded as a key factors of successful mobile applications. Ensuring long-term retention requires consistently delivering value, meeting user needs, and integrating app usage into users' daily habits (Villegas, n.d.).

2.5 Summary

In summary, the literature highlights that while mobile-assisted language learning offers flexibility, personalization, and learner autonomy, it also faces challenges in maintaining motivation and retention. Long-term engagement can be supported by intrinsic motivation, especially when learners' psychological requirements for relatedness, competence, and autonomy are satisfied. A well designed gamification and reward systems which align with user expectations can effectively enhance motivation and retention. However, poorly implemented or repetitive rewards may lead to disengagement. Emotional engagement, personalization, and adaptive feedback are important in fostering long-term user involvement, making them essential components of successful language learning app design.

3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

Quantitative Research - Online Survey Questionnaire

This study employed a **quantitative research approach** through the use of an online survey questionnaire to determine the impact of gamified reward system on user motivation and retention in mobile language learning apps. Online survey questionnaires are effective and convenient for collecting data from a large and diverse population in an effective way.

This questionnaire included both closed-ended (Likert scale, multiple choice, and ranking) and open-ended questions to acquire a more complete understanding of user experiences and motives.

To collect quantitative data regarding users' app usage behaviours, motivation levels, and preferred gamification reward types, the majority of the questionnaires are closed-ended. For further insights, open-ended questions about user experiences, learning motivations, and suggestions for improvement are also included. In order to discover how these factors might affect user engagement, the survey also collected detailed demographic data, which includes age, education level, and technological proficiency. It supports drawing conclusions based on evidence and aids in the analysis of relationships between variables.

3.2 Participant and Sampling

The target participants in this study are mobile language learning app users, including present and past users, mostly young adults, particularly those in the 18–34 age range. To find participants, a non-probability convenience sampling technique was employed. This strategy was selected due to its effectiveness and feasibility in reaching the target user population within the available time frame.

3.2.1 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

a. Inclusion Criteria

Individuals who were 13 years of age or older, had used a mobile language learning software, and had at least fundamental technological proficiency were eligible to participate. Participants had a variety of educational backgrounds, from high school to graduate school. To collect a range of viewpoints from members of the population, there are no rigorous limitations on gender, nationality, or work position.

b. Exclusion Criteria

Considering the study focuses primarily on user motivation and retention based on actual app usage, participants who had never used a mobile language learning app were eligible to participate. Individuals under the age of 13 were also excluded as considering ethical compliance and younger users may have vary usage patterns and motivations.

3.3 Sample size

The minimum sample size for this research is 50 respondents and the target sample size is 80 respondents. According to [Hair et al.\(2018\)](#), research using rigid analysis such as exploratory analysis or regression analysis required at least 50 or 50 to 100 samples depending on the context. As the study does not include complex analysis methods as such, these requirements are less critical. Additionally, smaller sample sizes are common and acceptable for pre-testing or exploratory research. ([Suksem, 2024](#)). Thus, the targeted sample size was sufficient to gather useful insights and determine important trends of user motivation and retention in mobile language learning applications within the limited research timeframe and practicality.

3.4 Recruitment Method

Survey links were posted in relevant Facebook groups, Instagram or sent through Whatsapp messages to reach potential target audience. These platforms are chosen because of their wide reach and high rate of engagement among users, particularly among young adults aged 18 to 34. The research will allocate 10 days for data collection, followed by 1 week for data analysis and writing.

3.5 Apparatus and Tools

Google form was used in this research as the primary data collection tool. The general visual statistic results for each question were auto generated by the Google form system, which simplified the initial analysis of data.

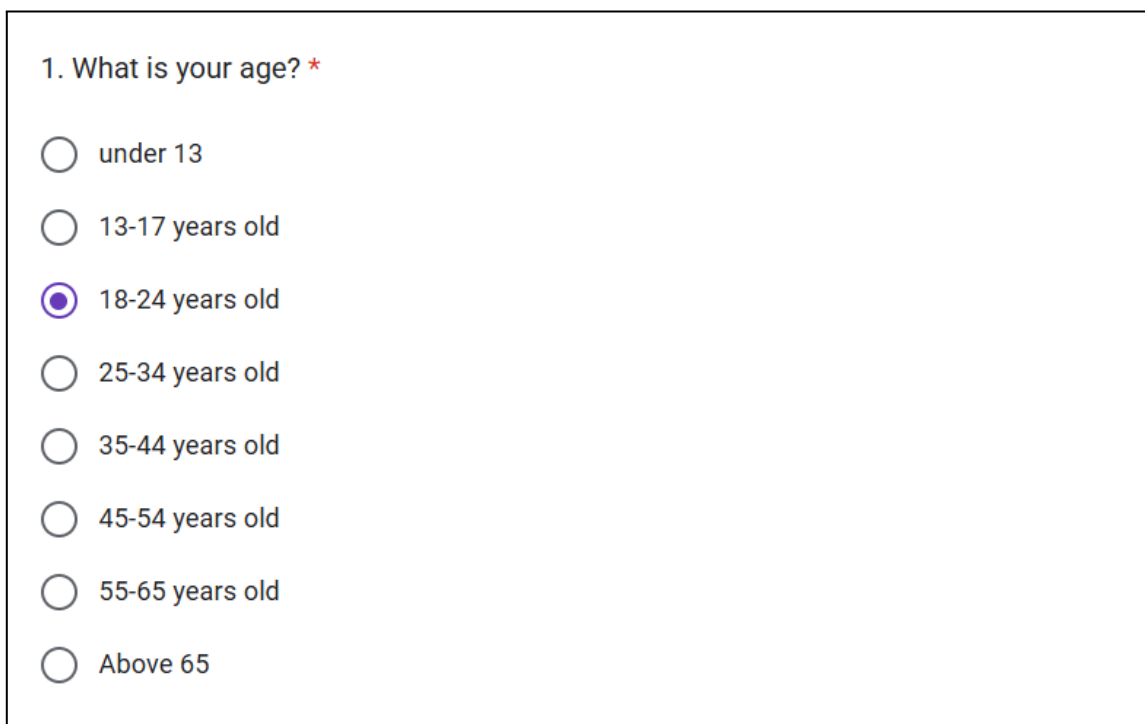
3.6 Survey Design and Measure

The survey is categorised into 3 main sections, which is demographic background, language and technology proficiency, and language learning app related questions. (Please refer to Appendix A: Questionnaire.)

Section 1: Demographic background (Question 1 - 5)

This section collected information on the basic demographic of participants. This information helps identify any potential trends related to user background that might influence user preferences for reward systems. **Multiple choice questions** were used in this section. Questions including:

- Age
- Gender
- Educational Level
- Employment Status
- Nationality



1. What is your age? *

- ☐ under 13
- ☐ 13-17 years old
- ☒ 18-24 years old
- ☐ 25-34 years old
- ☐ 35-44 years old
- ☐ 45-54 years old
- ☐ 55-65 years old
- ☐ Above 65

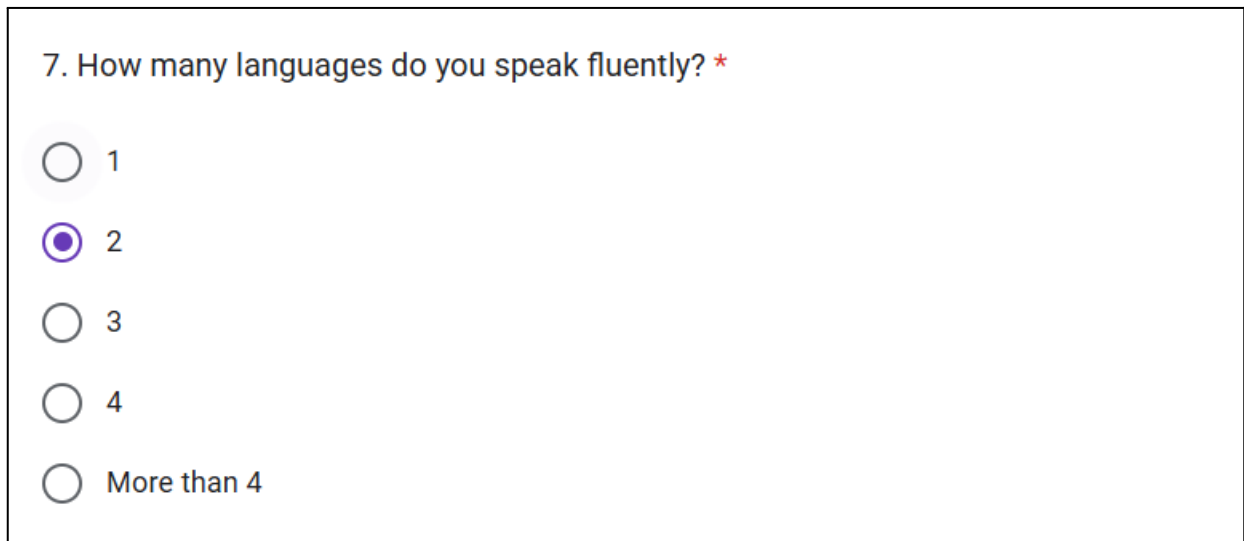
Figure 3.6.1 Age - multiple choice question

Section 2: Language and technology proficiency (Question 6 - 9)

Questions in this section assessed participants' primary language, number of languages spoken, familiarity with mobile apps, and frequency of digital device use. Various types of questions were implemented such as frequency scales, multiple choice, and Likert-scale questions to assess how comfortable users are with mobile apps and their experience with different languages.

Language Proficiency:

Multiple choice questions are used to collect data such as participants' primary language and number of languages spoken.



7. How many languages do you speak fluently? *

☐ 1

☒ 2

☐ 3

☐ 4

☐ More than 4

Figure 3.6.2 Number of language spoken - multiple choice question

Technology Proficiency:

These questions were designed to identify general patterns and categorised respondents by how often they interact with technology, which is an important factor that may influence their familiarity and engagement with language learning apps. The participants were first asked to rate their familiarity with mobile technology using a 5-point Likert scale, with 1 representing "very unfamiliar" and 5 representing "very familiar."

8. How familiar are you with using mobile apps in general?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very unfamiliar	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Very familiar

Figure 3.6.3 Familiarity of using mobile technology - Likert scale

This section used the **frequency ordinal scale** to measure participants' smartphone, tablet, and laptop usage behaviours, ranging from "**rarely**", "**weekly**", "**a few times a week**", "**a few times a day**", and "**almost all the time**". These options provide a gradient of possible answers so that respondents can select the one that most accurately represents their behavior.

9. How often do you use these digital devices? *

	Rarely	Weekly	Few times a week	Few times a day	Almost all the time
Smartphone	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Tablet	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Laptop/Computer	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

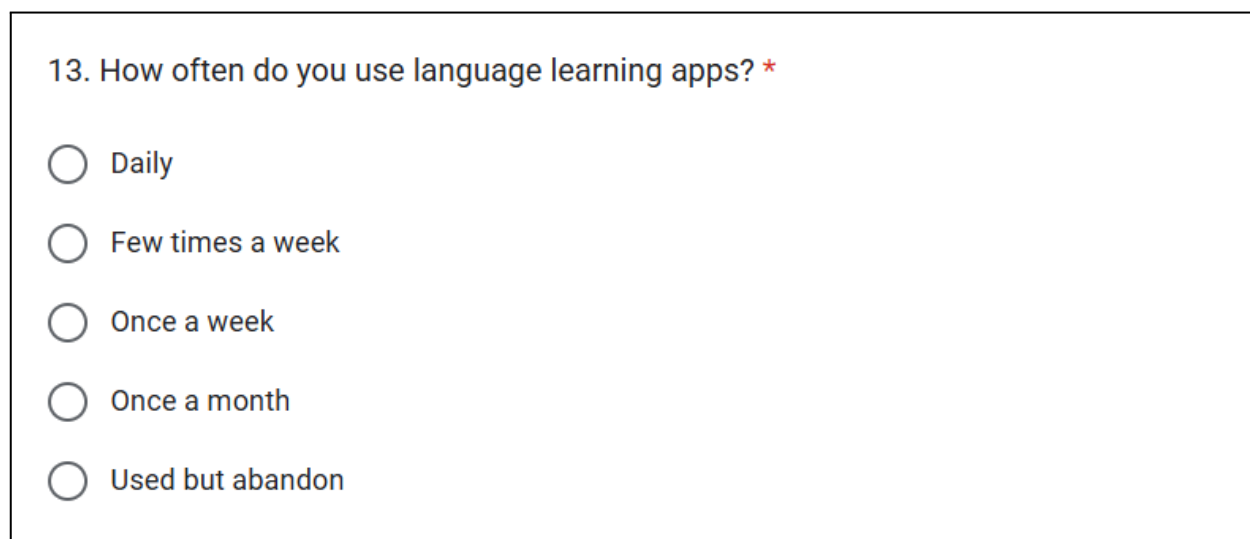
Figure 3.6.4 Frequency of using digital devices - frequency ordinal scale

Section 3: Language learning app related questions (Question 10 - 23)

This section explored users' motivations for learning languages and their experiences with gamified reward systems in mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) apps. To gain a complete understanding of user motivation and engagement, both quantitative and qualitative data were collected using Likert scale, multiple-choice, and open-ended questions. A brief explanation about the gamification reward system was given before the question started to let users get the ideas of what is considered a reward system in the app.

Frequency ordinal scale

Frequency ordinal scale is used when asking the frequency of app usage, which is important for analyzing user engagement. The answer options show increasing or decreasing regularity and thus form an ordinal scale. For example, someone who uses the app "daily" is considered more engaged than someone who uses it "once a month." An additional option, "Used but abandoned," was included to clearly identify dropout rates in the results.



13. How often do you use language learning apps? *

- ☐ Daily
- ☐ Few times a week
- ☐ Once a week
- ☐ Once a month
- ☐ Used but abandon

Figure 3.6.5 Frequency of app usage - frequency ordinal scale

Another question measures how long users have engaged with language learning apps. The responses follow a time order but with uneven intervals (e.g., "less than 1

month" vs. "over 1 year"), making the data ordinal. This helps identify differences in behavior or motivation between new and long-term users.

12. How long have you been using language learning apps? *

- ☐ Less than 1 month
- ☐ 1-3 months
- ☐ 3-6 months
- ☐ 6-12 months
- ☐ Over 1 year

Figure 3.6.6 Period of app usage - frequency ordinal scale

Multiple-Choice Questions

These questions allowed respondents to choose one or more selection from a list, enabling the identification of common motivational drivers and preferred reward types.

Examples of **single-answer** questions:

- What motivates you to learn a new language with the app?
- Have you ever stopped using a language learning app for a period?

14. What motivates you to learn a new language with the app? *

- ☐ Personal Interest
- ☐ Academic Requirement
- ☐ Career Development
- ☐ Practice for future trip
- ☐ Cultural interest (eg: k-pop culture/anime culture)
- ☐ Other: _____

Figure 3.6.7 Motivation of Language Learning - Multiple Choice Question (Single answer)

Examples of **multiple-answer** questions:

- Which language learning apps have you used?
- What language did you learn using the app?
- What factors contributed to you stopping using the app?
- What could be the motivation for you to return to the app after a period of inactivity?
- What is the type of reward system that is effective to boost your motivation?

15. Which type of reward system is effective in boosting your motivation? (select * all that apply)

- ☐ Badge
- ☐ Leaderboard
- ☐ Daily Login reward
- ☐ Points
- ☐ Unlock new level or features
- ☐ Virtual goods (avatars, decorations)
- ☐ Real-world rewards (discounts, coupons)
- ☐ Streaks (consecutive days of learning)
- ☐ Other: _____

Figure 3.6.8 Preferred Type of Reward System - Multiple Choice Question (Multiple Answer)

Likert Scale Question

The perceived effectiveness of rewards systems is measured using a 5-point Likert scale, which provides detailed information on user perceptions. It provides a structured way to capture varying levels of agreement or perception, ranging from 1=Not Effective to 5=Very Effective.

21. On a scale of 1 to 5, how effective are gamified rewards in encouraging you to return to the app after periods of inactivity? (1 = Not Effective, 5 = Very Effective) *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not effective at all	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Very effective

Figure 3.6.9 Effectiveness of Reward System on boosting Return Rate - Likert Scale

Open-Ended Questions

Open-ended questions allow participants to share their opinions to get deeper insights into user perspectives, capturing personal experiences, and collecting personal options. In this survey, they were used to understand why users engage with or stop using apps, how rewards affect motivation, and to gather suggestions for app improvements. These responses add valuable context to the quantitative data.

- Can you describe a specific experience where a reward in the app significantly increased your motivation to continue learning?
- What improvement/additional feature for a language learning app would make you more likely to return to the app regularly?
- Do you have any suggestions or opinions to add on?

22. What improvement/additional feature for a language learning app would make you more likely to return to the app regularly? *

Your answer _____

Figure 3.6.10 Suggestion for Improvement - Open-Ended Questions

3.7 Data Analysis Methods

Descriptive Statistics analysis

Collected survey data were primarily analyzed using **descriptive statistics** to summarize demographic information, app usage patterns, and preferences related to gamified reward systems. Frequency distributions, percentage. The visual charts were auto generated by Google Form system and customized using Google Sheets to enhance clarity and presentation. Further explanation and analysis on the respondent's answer will be conducted to give more in-depth insights.

4.0 FINDINGS

4.1 Section 1: Demographic

1. Age distribution

There are a total of 85 respondents. Figure 4. 1 shows that most of the respondents are young adults between 18-24 years old, which is 53 respondents (62.4%), followed by 26 adults (30.6%) from age 25 to 34 years old. Other respondents include 4 individuals (4.7%) aged 35-44, 1 respondent (1.2%) are 13-17 years old and 1 respondent (1.2%) in the 55-65 age group. The average age of the participants is 26 years old. 90% of the respondents falling between 18-34 years old, this survey will mainly represent the preference and behaviour of younger adults, while the older age group's preference are less presented.

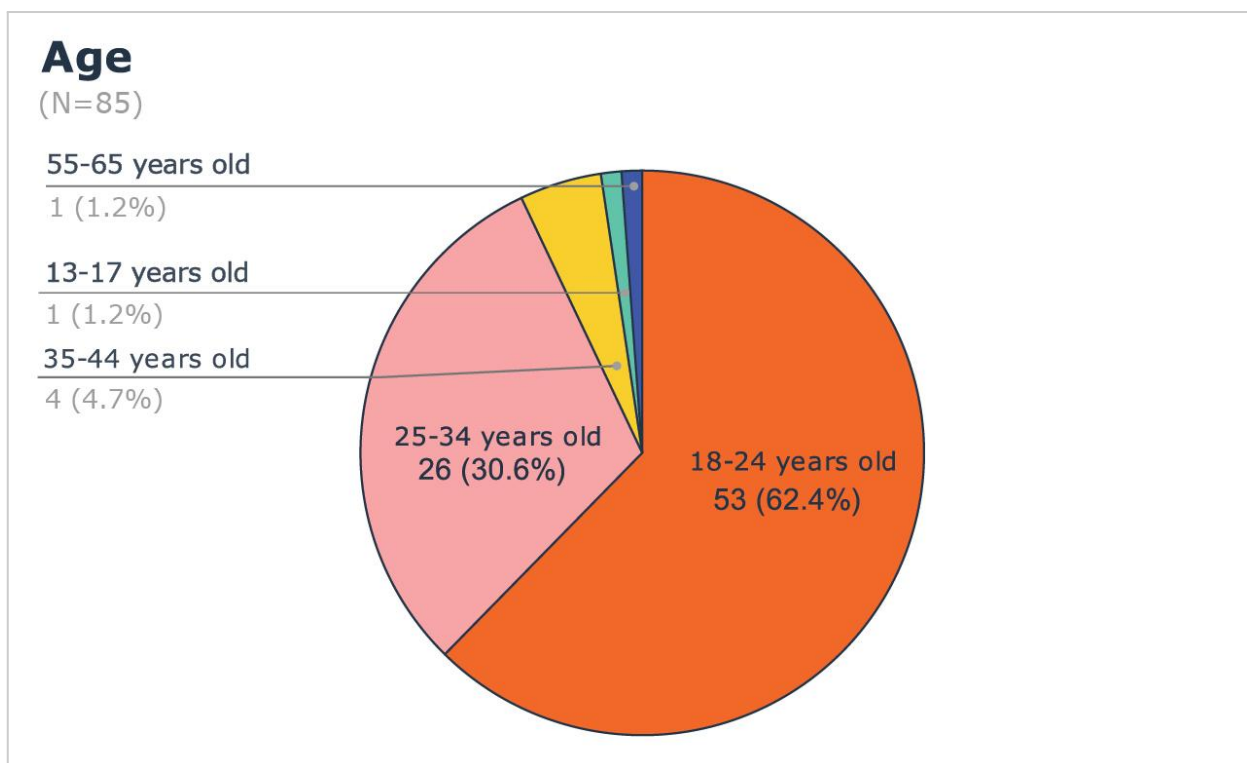


Figure 4.1: Age distribution.

2. Gender Distribution

Figure 4.2 shows the gender distribution of participants. Among 85 respondents, 54 individuals (63.5%) are female, followed by 28 male respondents (32.9%), and 2 respondents (2.4%) identified as non-binary. Additionally, 1 respondent (1.2%) chose not to disclose their gender.

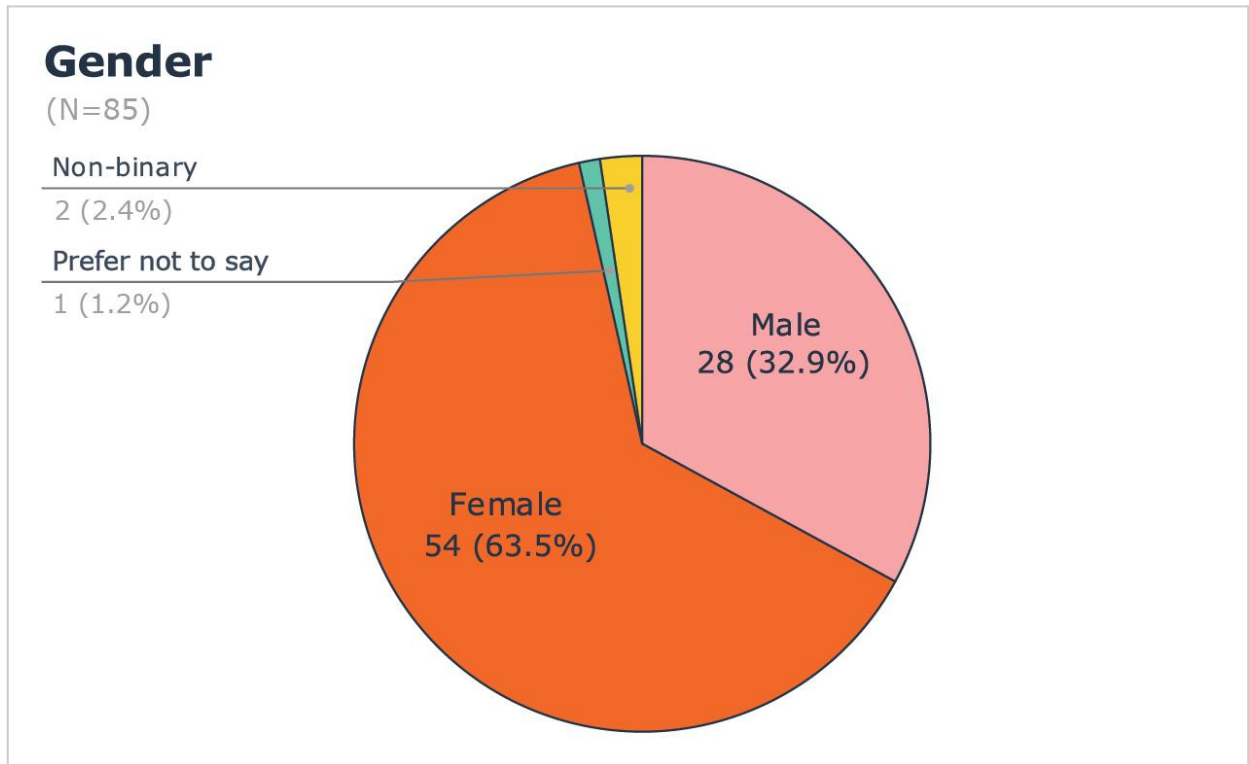


Figure 4.2: Gender distribution

3. Employment status distribution

In terms of employment status of respondents (Figure2.3), it is clearly known that the majority of them are students, with the number of 49 and making up 57.6% of the total participants from the pie chart, followed by 23 employed respondents (27.1%), 9 are engaged in freelance work (10.6%), 3 respondents are unemployed (3.5%), and 1 part timer (1.2%). Employment status is important as it might impact their availability and motivation for using language learning apps. Understanding this distribution is important as it can influence how the findings are interpreted and how they might apply to different employment status.

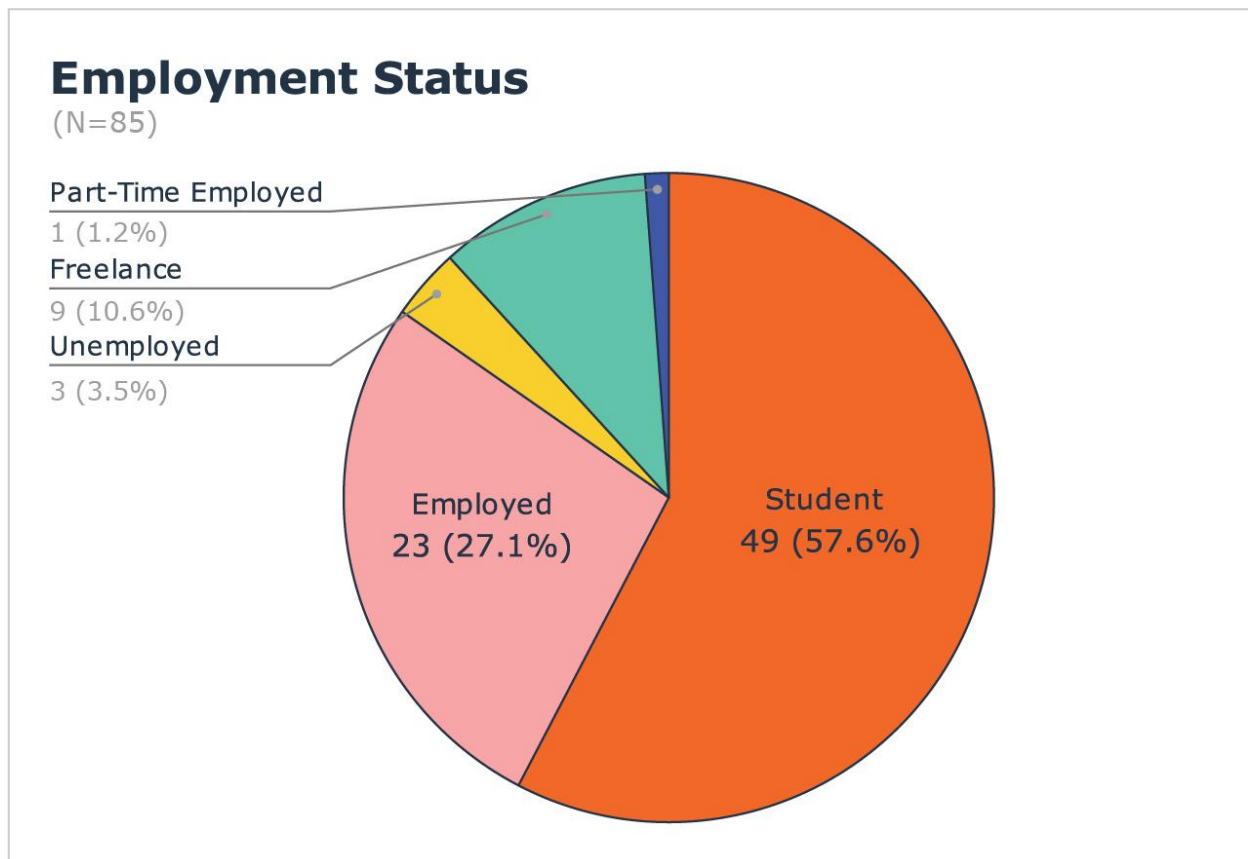


Figure 2.3: Employment status distribution

4. Nationality Distribution

The survey data in Figure 4.4 shows that despite respondents representing a wide range of nationalities, Malaysians are generally the most reflected. 67.1% of respondents are Malaysian. This is followed by respondents from the United Kingdom and Indonesia, each forming 4.7% in the sample. A small percentage of respondents are also from different regions, such as Southeast Asia, America, Europe, and East Africa. This made up 23.5% in the survey. Influenced by the distribution platform and approachable targeted audience, this results in high presence of Malaysian respondents, which may influence the overall findings to reflect local preferences and behaviours. Although, the presence of smaller numbers of respondents from various other regions adds a valuable viewpoint from abroad. Gaining an understanding of this distribution will enable researchers to know how user preferences and experiences with language learning apps may be influenced by geography.

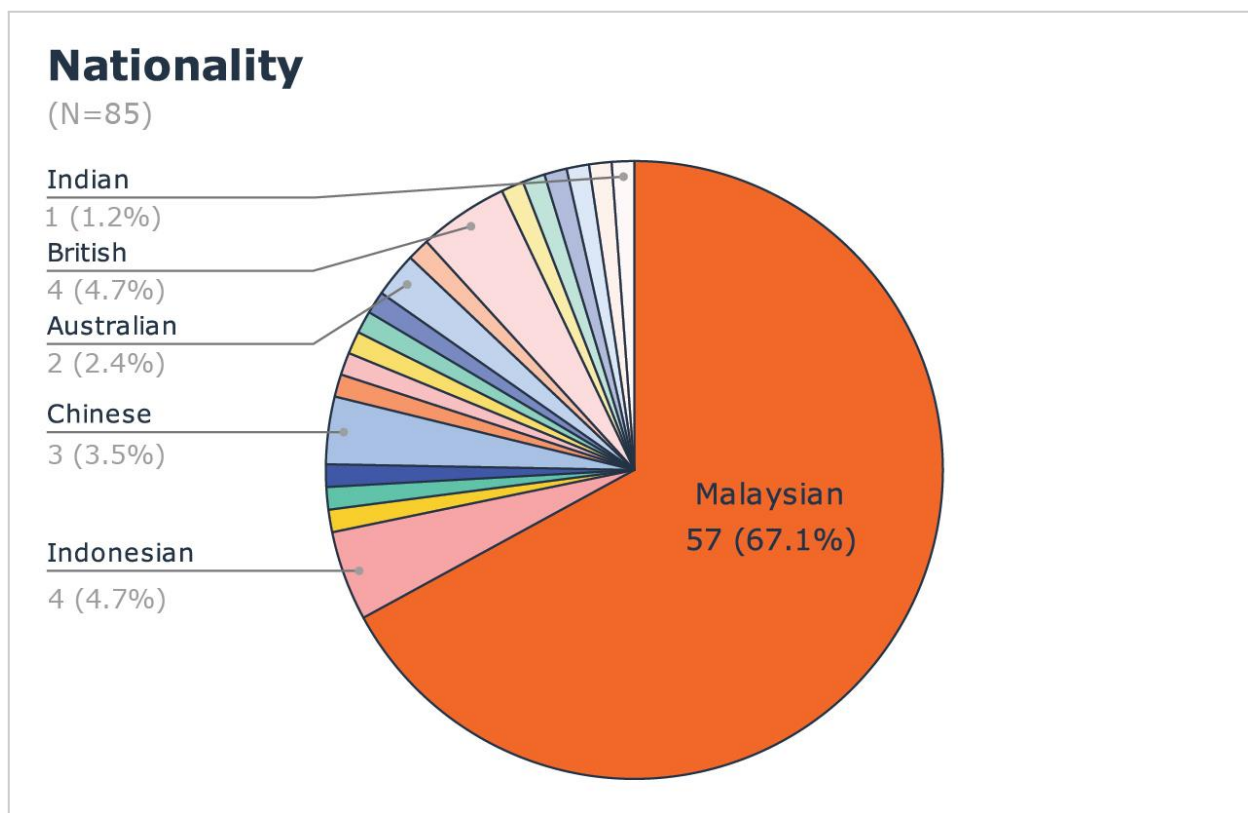


Figure 4.4: Nationality distribution

5. Educational Background

For the educational background of the respondent, which showed in Figure 4.5 , the majority of them (56.5%) from bachelor degrees background, 25.9% from STPM, diploma or equivalent qualification, followed by 12.9% respondent from master's degree background, while a smaller number, 4.7%, have a background in secondary school education. The result shows that most of them have higher educational levels. It is important to know this distribution since it may affect how the survey results are interpreted, especially when it comes to learning preferences and technological proficiency.

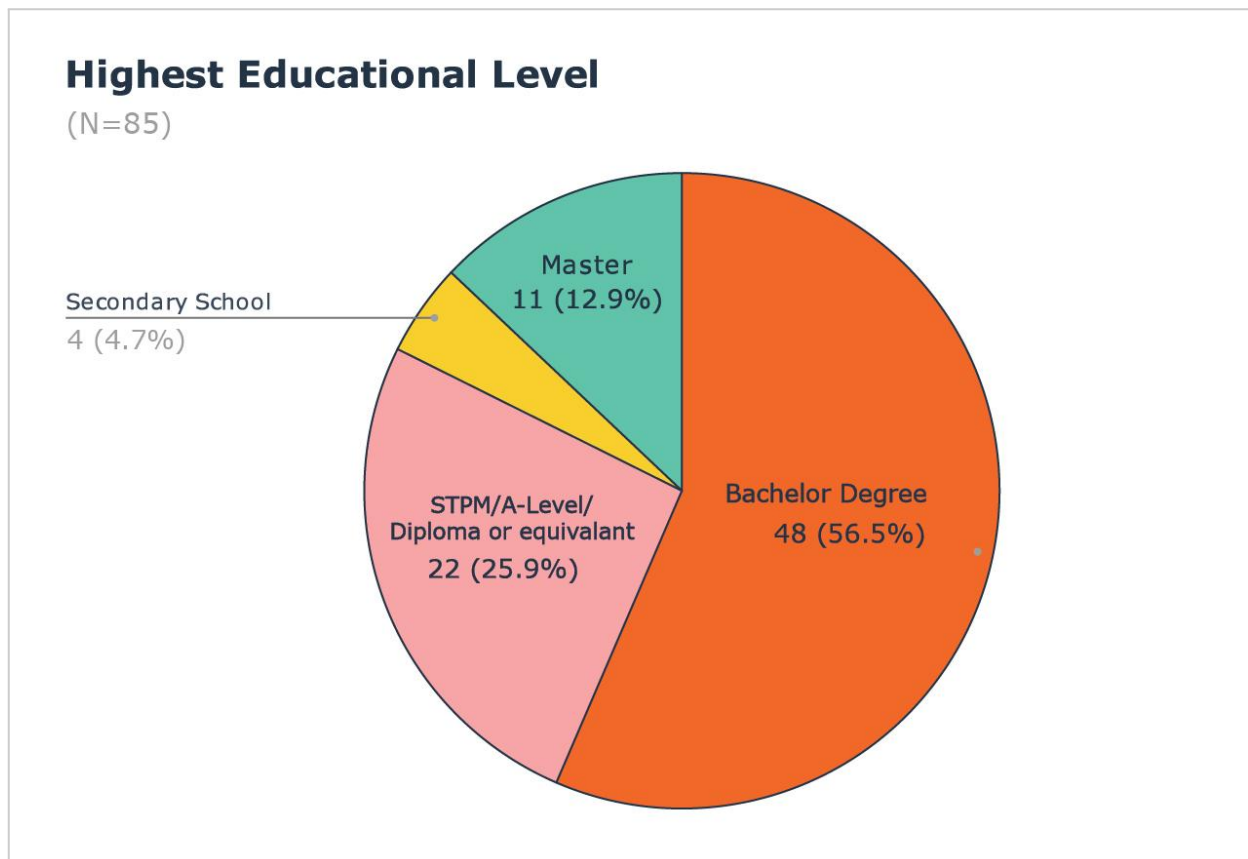


Figure 4.5 Educational background

4.2 Section 2: Language Proficiency & Technology Familiarity

6. Primary language distribution

The results of the study in Figure 4.6 show that respondents speak a wide variety of primary languages. In figure 4.6, 35 people (41.2%), the majority, indicate that Chinese is their first language. Then come 23 responses (27.1%), all of whom speak English as their first language. 7.1% of respondents said they speak Indonesian. The other responses included Malay Tamil, Greek, Portuguese, Vietnamese, Burmese, Bangla, Malay, and Brazilian Portuguese.

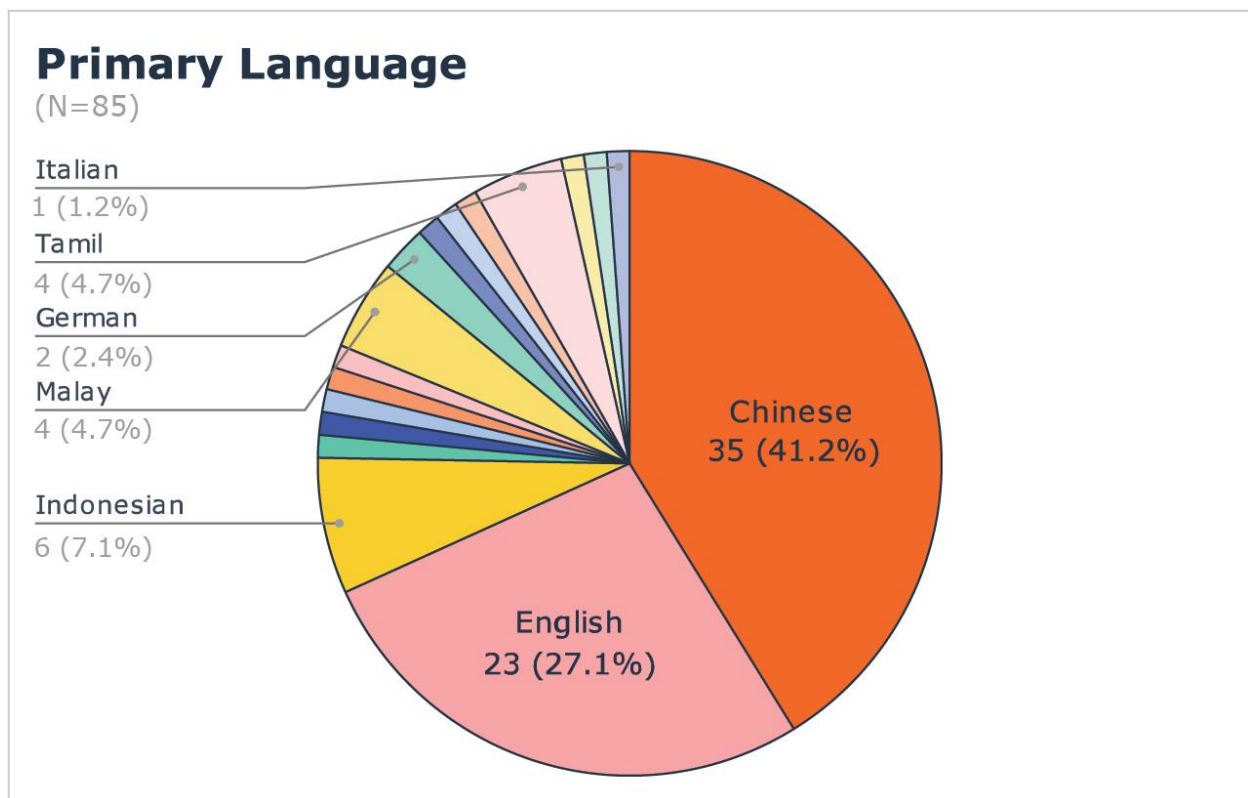


Figure 4.6 Primary language distribution

7. Number of Languages Spoken Fluently

The distribution in Figure 4.7 shows that most respondents have a relatively high level of language proficiency. 32.9% of respondents speak at least two languages, followed by trilingual speakers which makes up 31.8%, 17.6% of respondents speak only one language, 12.9% speak four languages, and 4.7% speak more than 4 languages. Recognising this level of skill is important as it provides information about the respondents' potential and ability to adapt when picking up new languages.

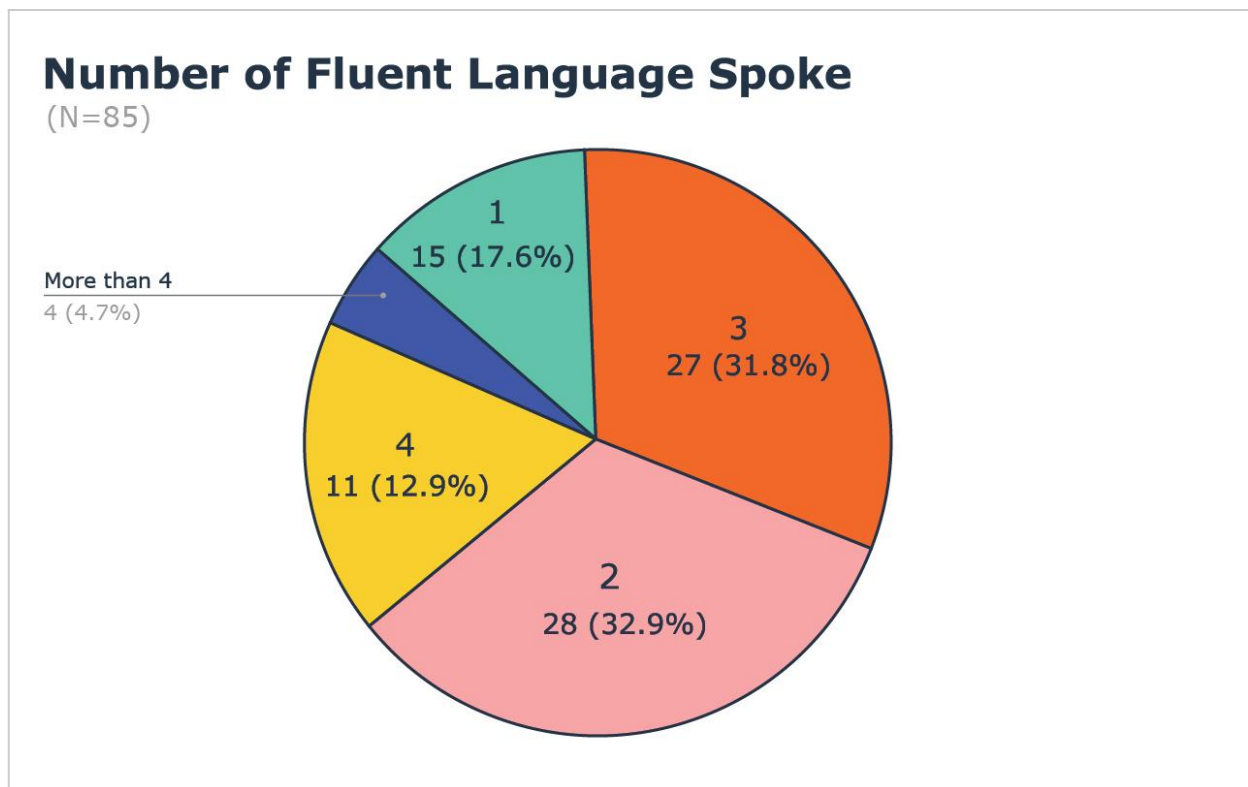


Figure 4.7 Distribution of the number of languages spoken fluently by respondent

8. Self-Rated Familiarity with Mobile Apps

The results in Figure 4.8 show that the majority or more than 80% of the respondents are familiar with using mobile applications, which is graded on a scale from 1 to 5. 43.5% gave their familiarity a highest score, 38.8% of respondents ranked their familiarity at a 4. Fewer respondents—11.8% at level 3, 3.5% at level 2, and 2.4% at the lowest level of 1.

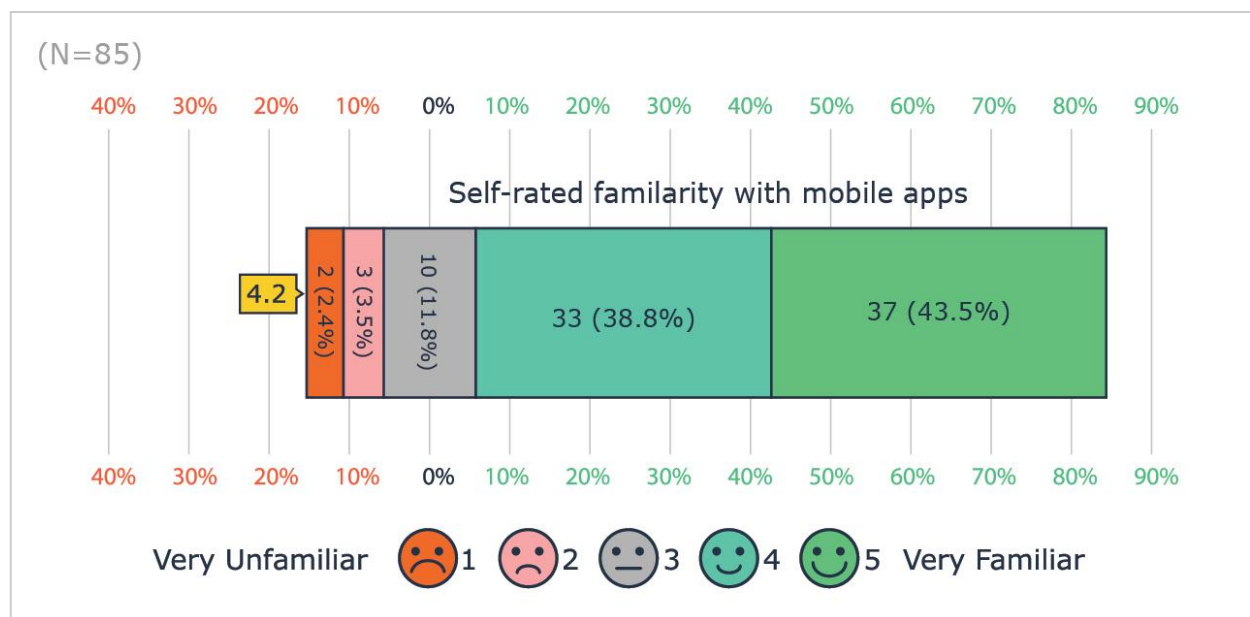


Figure 4.8 Self-rated familiarity with mobile apps

9. Frequency of Digital Device Usage

According to the data in Figure 4.9, smartphones have the highest usage frequency, with 57 respondents using their smartphones nearly all the time, followed by computers which made up of 40 for using almost all the time, and lastly tablets. The usage of tablets is relatively lower than others, with 22 of them using it all the time while 27 of them use it rarely. This shows that many of the respondents are highly adaptable to digital devices.

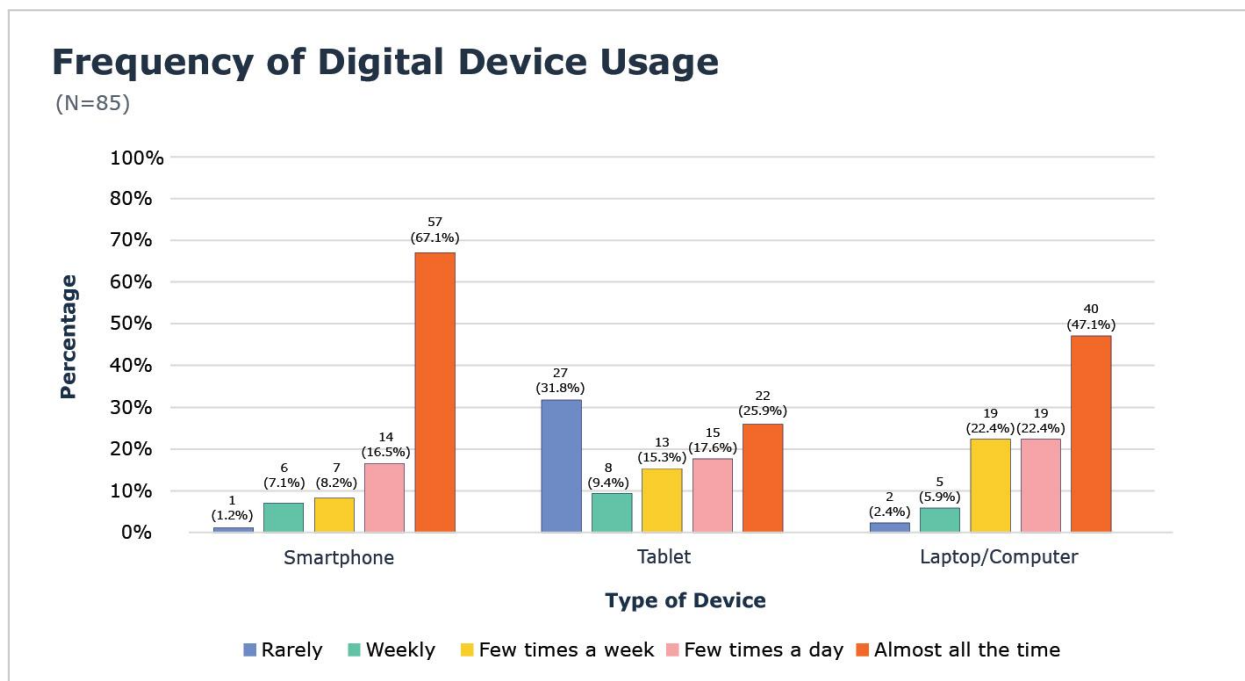


Figure 4.9 Frequency of digital device usage

4.3 Section 3: Language Learning App Related Questions

10. Language Learning Apps Used

According to the survey result in Figure 4.10, respondents have obvious preferences for language learning applications. The most commonly used app is Duolingo, which is used by 76 respondents (89.4%) of the survey. 20 respondents (23.5%) used Babbel, 19 (22.4%) used Memrise, and 16 (18.8%) used HelloTalk. Rosetta Stone, Busuu and WordUp used by 10 (11.8%), 8 (9.4%) and 7 (8.3%) respondents each. Other language study resources including Hanzii, Simply, Super Chinese, Google Translator, and Grammarly were also mentioned by a few respondents. It could be said that most of the respondents have experienced using gamified language learning apps with reward systems.

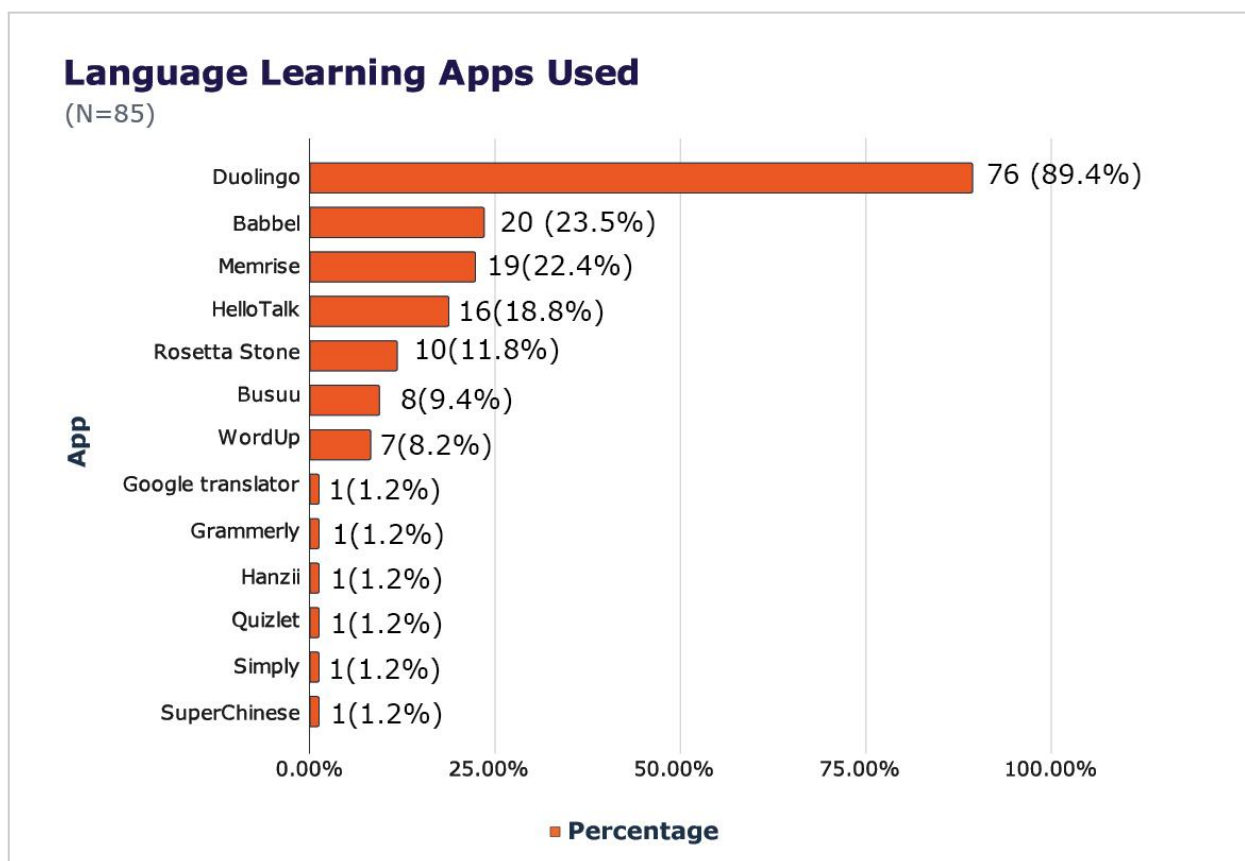


Figure 4.10 Language learning app used

11. Languages Learned via Apps

Result for question 11 (Figure 4.11) showed that English are the most frequently learned languages; with each hold 36 respondents (or 42.4%), followed by Japanese with 27 responses (31.8%), Korean and Spanish each with 23 respondents (27.1%), Followed by Italian and French each with 20 (23.5%) and 19 (22.4%) response. Relatively less respondents are learning Chinese and Malay which hold about 17-18% each. Additionally, some respondents mentioned learning other languages such as Tamil, Indonesian, Russian, Turkish, and Danish. English is a commonly used language so it would definitely hold the highest learning rate while some of the people learning Japanese might due to personal interest, cultural interest and career development.

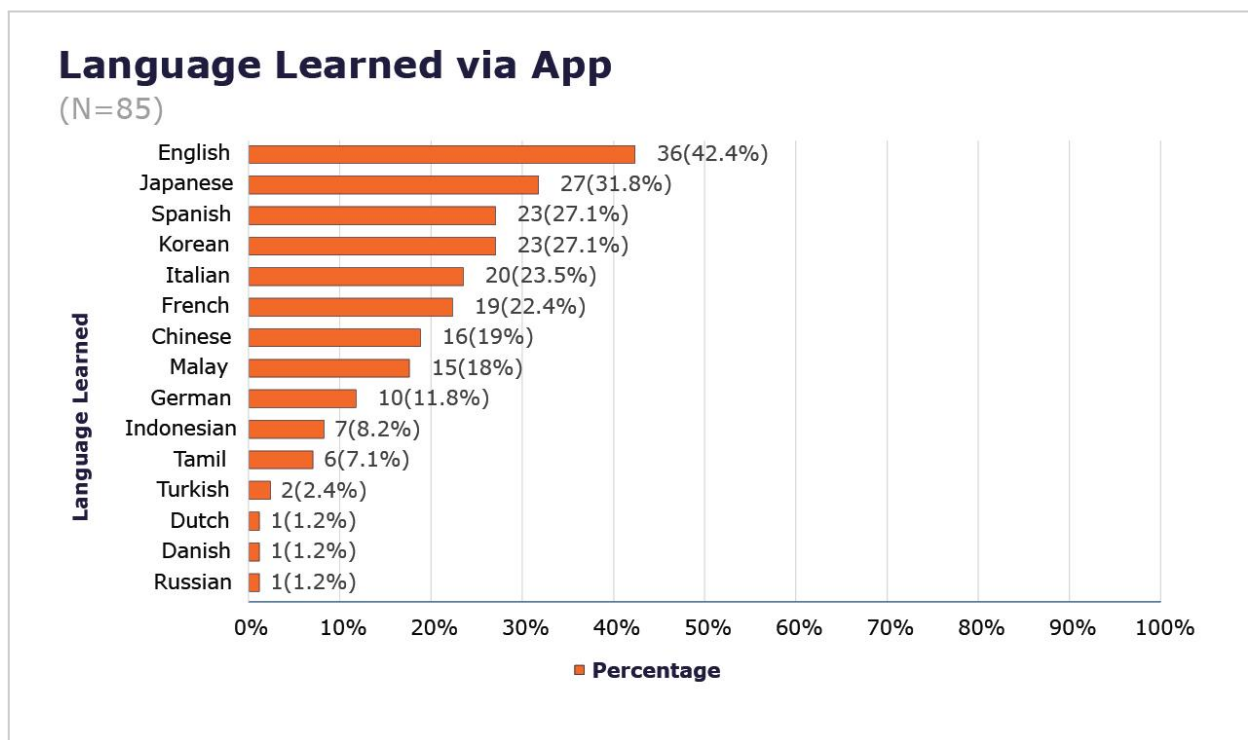


Figure 4.11 Languages learned via apps

12. Duration of using language learning apps

According to the result in Figure 4.12, 31.8% of the respondents have lower engagement with just using them for a month or less. A further 23.5% of participants have been using the applications for a longer time, spanning from 1 to 3 months, showing a basic engagement. The smaller percentages of respondents who have used the applications for from 3 to 6 months (17.6%) and between 6 to 12 months (12.9%), respectively. 14.1% of participants had been using language learning applications for over a year, showing a consistent long-term engagement and potential satisfaction with the apps' performance.

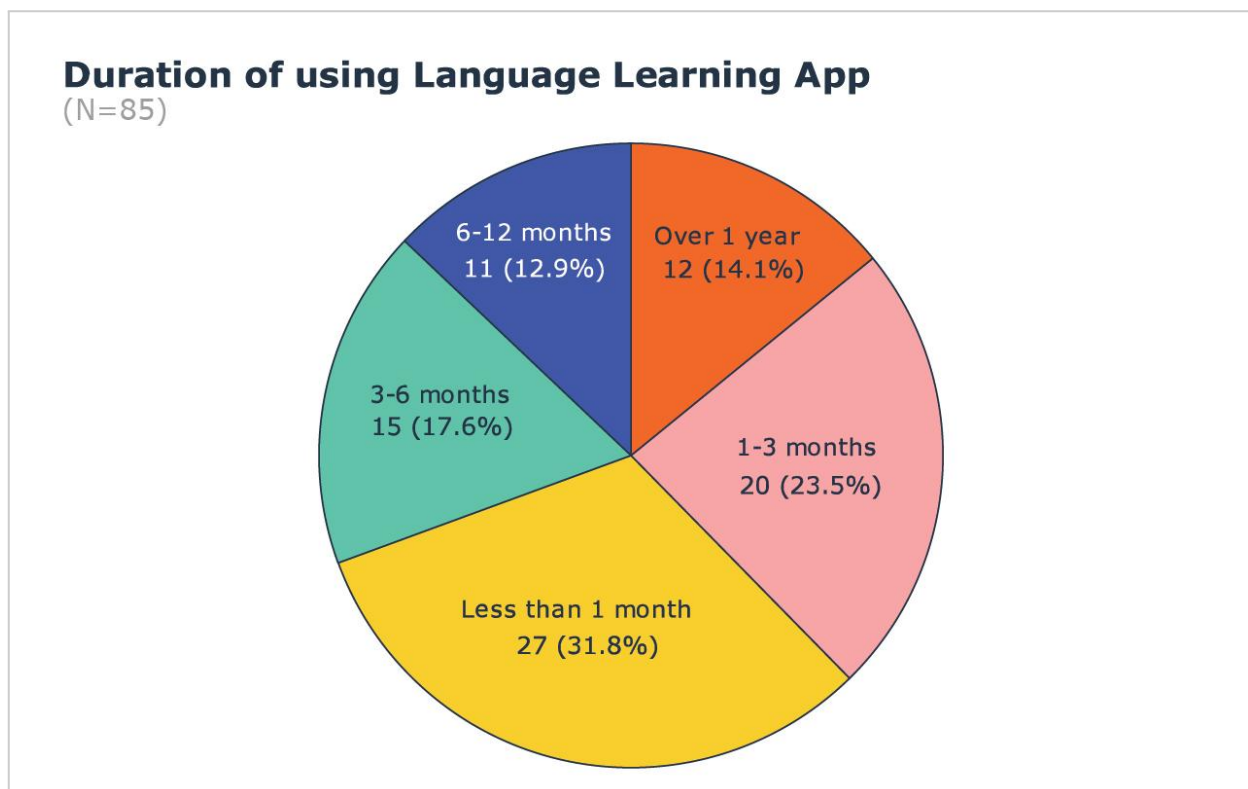


Figure 4.12 Duration of using language learning apps

13.Frequency of App Usage

In terms of the frequency of app usage (Figure 4.13), nearly half of respondents (41.2%) had previously used language learning applications but have now stopped using them. From the previous question (Question 12), we can predict that the respondent with a shorter usage period had a higher possibility of abandoning the app. This high rate of user reduction shows areas that need more effort on improvement in order to retain consumers and highlights the potential issues in maintaining long-term user engagement. However, 16.5% of respondents use language learning applications on a daily basis, reflecting a high level of engagement. These everyday users are likely to find the apps useful and motivating, showing high satisfaction with their learning experience. A smaller number of respondents (20%) use the applications a few times per week, reflecting moderate and consistent engagement. 12.9% of respondents use the apps once a month, showing intermittent but consistent interest. The smallest group, 9.4% of respondents, use the applications once a week.

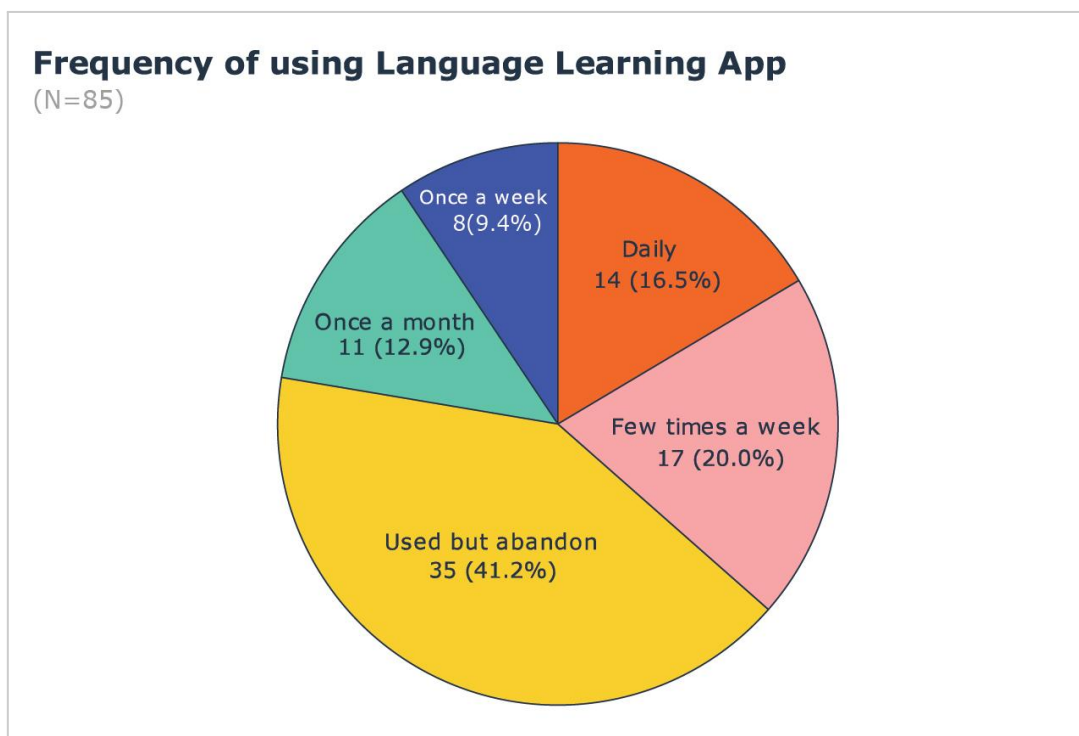


Figure 4.13 Distribution of frequency of app usage

14. Motivation to Learn a Language

Question 14 aimed to determine the motivation of respondents to learn a new language. The result in Figure 4.14 shows that many of them are motivated by personal interest, with 43.5% of respondents identifying it as their main reason. In other words, many people are motivated by a pure interest or passion for languages, which may result in greater engagement and fulfilment with language learning apps. This also raised a challenge that they might need to be more determined and disciplined to continue learning with the app. Career development is the second leading motivation (20%), emphasising the actual benefits of learning a language in terms of career advancement. Cultural interest, which motivated 12.9% of respondents who have the desire to interact with and understand different cultures through language. There are also 12.9% of the respondents motivated by academic requirement, 8.2% of respondents learned for preparation for future trips and one answer as a hobby to fight for depression (1.2%).

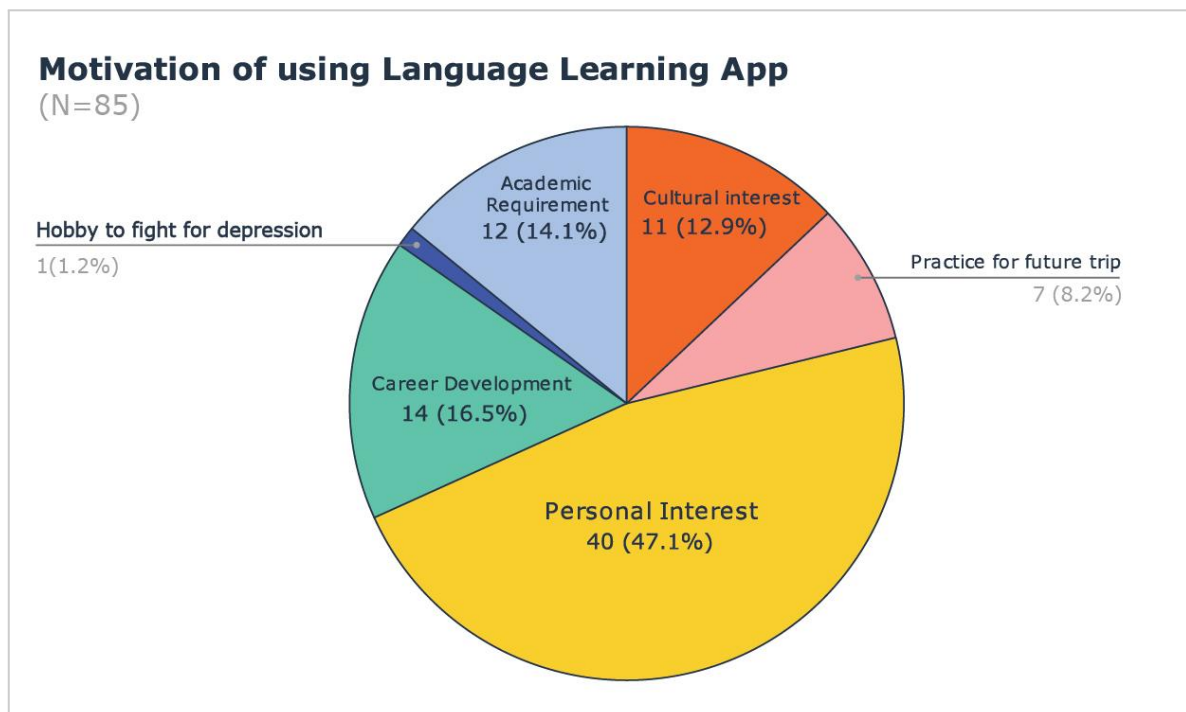


Figure 4.14 Distribution of motivation to learn a language

15. Effective reward type for boosting respondents' motivation

According to the research result in Figure 2.15, 45.9% of respondents stated that unlocking new levels or features are the best type of reward for increasing motivation. These incentives most likely offer instant fulfilment and a feeling of growth, both of which can be highly motivating. Followed by a streak which motivates 44.7% of respondents. This shows that the long-term engagement reward gives a higher motivation rate to the users, as streak requires high and consistent interaction rate with the app. Badges also gain relatively high support with 43.5% response, another instant accomplishment for the recognition of the learning process. Points and real-world rewards each motivate 37.6% of respondents. This suggests that instant reward and real benefits outside of the app can greatly increase user engagement. Leaderboard, a competition based reward system holds 35.3% of response while daily login reward has 32.9% of respondents. Finally, virtual goods are less chosen by respondents, which means this might serve as an extra entertainment for some of the users.

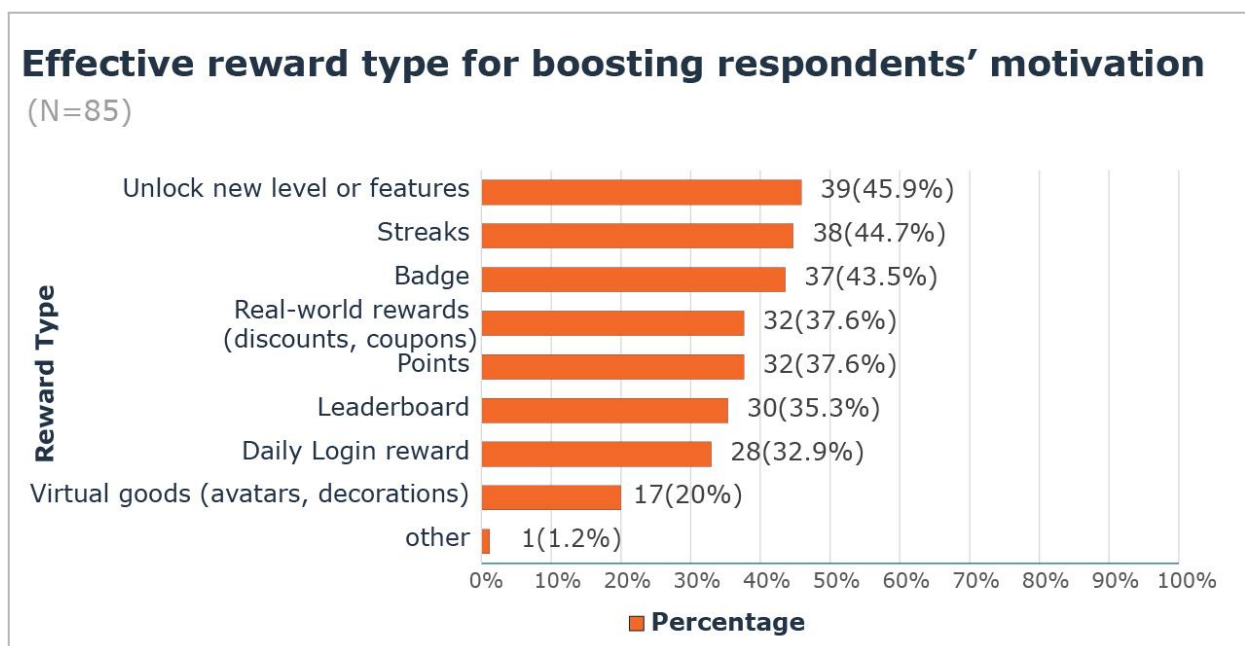


Figure 2.15 Effective reward type for boosting respondents' motivation

16. Effective Reward Experiences

In answer to Question 16, which requested participants to elaborate on examples when rewards systems successfully boosted their motivation, 22 people provided helpful responses. A common topic was the **excitement and sense of achievement**

experienced by unlocking new levels or classes after making progress. This progression-based motivation was generally recognised as an effective motivation. Furthermore, some respondents appreciated **streaks** and **notifications on streak maintenance**, saying that these features encouraged them to continue their regular learning habits. A few respondents also noted that **seeing solid progress in their language skills** was a strong motivation, supporting their choice to use the application.

17. App Dropout Rate

When asked if they had ever stopped using a language learning app for a period, a majority of 75.3% respondents, shown in Figure 4.17, answered "Yes," while 24.7% answered "No." Among the respondents who have never stopped using language learning apps, personal interest is the key incentive, with 10 out of 21 respondents mentioning this. This suggests that intrinsic motivation, such as a real desire to learn languages, is important for long-term engagement. Other motivations included career development, academic requirements, and planning for future trips. These incentives highlight the different practical benefits of language learning.

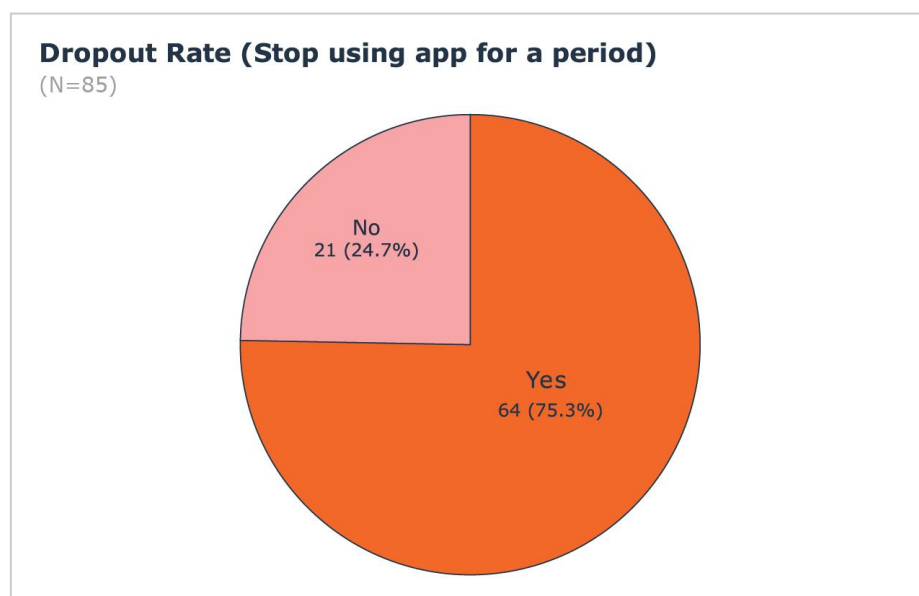


Figure 4.17 App dropout rate

18. Duration of App Inactivity

Question 18 specifically focuses on understanding the period of inactivity for the respondent who has stopped using the app for a period. According to the data, 40% of respondents experienced a long period of inactivity, with 20% stopping for 1-2 years and the remaining 20% for 2 years or more. This major response shows possible challenges with long-term engagement and highlights the importance of strategies for re-engaging users after longer breaks. Additionally, 14% of respondents stated an average period of 3 to 6 month inactivity, while 6% stopped using the app for 1 month.

19. Factor contributed to stop using the app

Respondents who stopped using language learning applications chose multiple major factors. According to Figure 4.19, lack of time was the most common reason, impacting 64.7% of users, followed by lack of motivation (62.4%), and loss of interest (58.8%). These issues show that many users do not succeed to fit language learning into their daily routines and maintain a long-term engagement. Furthermore, 36.5% found the app to be unhelpful, while ineffective rewards (25.9%), technical issues (14%) were fewer. A little number of respondents (11.8%) found a better app. (14%) were fewer. A little number of respondents (11.8%) found a better app.

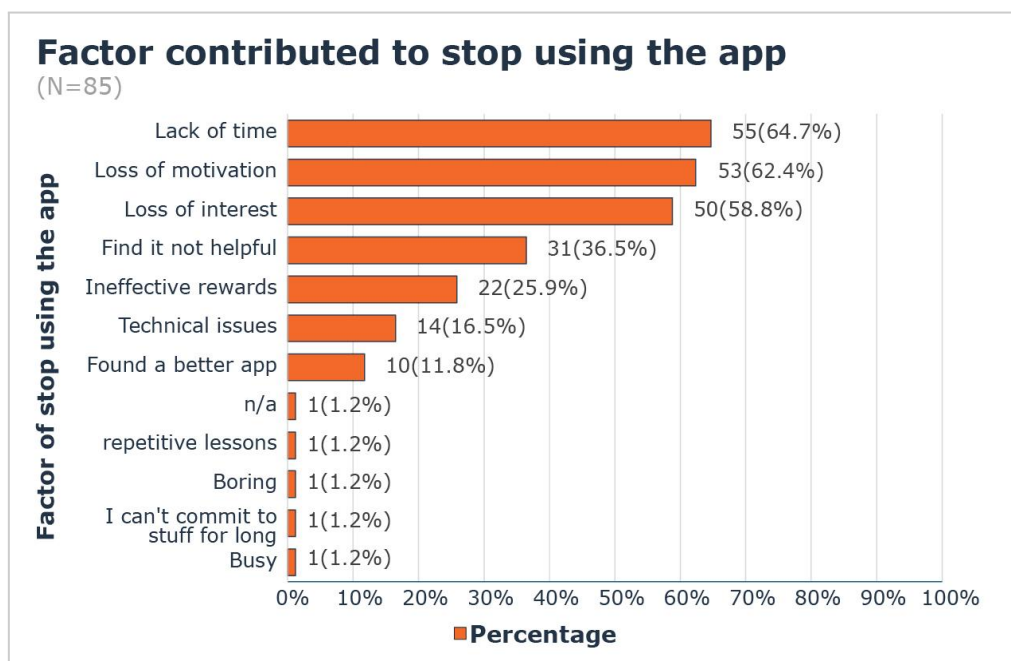


Figure 4.19 Factor contributed to stop using the app

20. Motivation to re-engage the app

Among the motivation for users to return to the app after a period of inactivity, personal goals is the top selected motivation, according to 65.9% of responses in Figure 4.20. New features or updates, as well as an improved reward system, have an impact on 32.9% of respondents each, highlighting that app improvements and stronger motivations are essential for re-engagement. External recommendations by social media, family or friends could motivate 22.4% of users to return. Some of the respondents(18.8%) agreed that the improved reward system would make them more likely to return to the app.

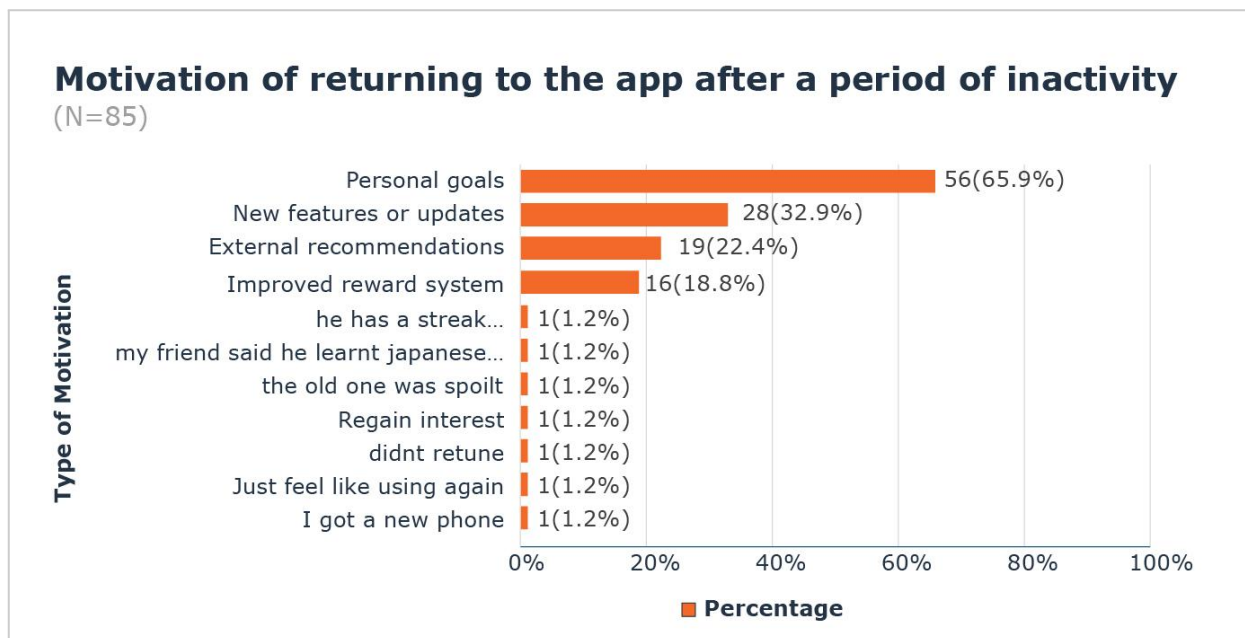


Figure 4.20 Motivation to re-engage the app

21. Effectiveness of Gamified Rewards for Re-engagement

When asked about the effectiveness of gamified rewards in pushing users to return to the app after periods of inactivity, the results in Figure 2.21 show that users mainly appreciate gamified rewards, but the overall perception on effectiveness is different and shows that there may be an area for improvement in designing more engaging and motivating reward systems. The majority of respondents (42.4%) believed it is somewhat effective. Neutral responses made up 23.5%, reflecting a moderate perception of effectiveness. 16.5% stated that rewards were highly effective. Furthermore, 10.6% said they were less effective. 7.1% viewed gamified rewards as not effective at all.

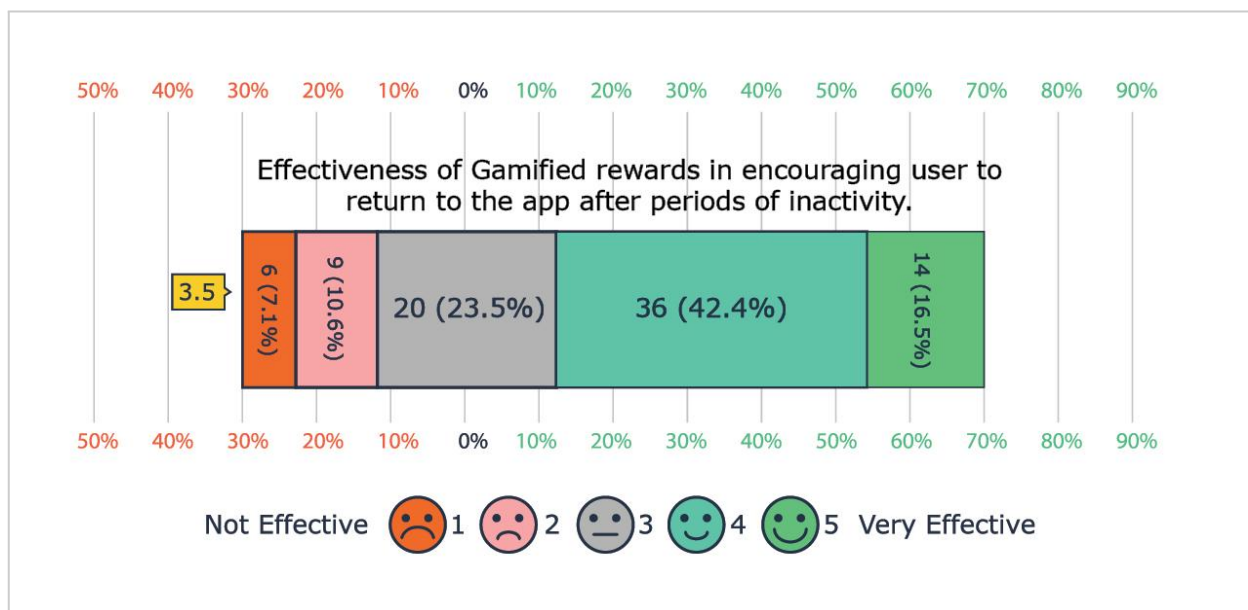


Figure 2.21 Effectiveness of gamified rewards for re-engagement

22. Improvement or additional feature suggestions

Question 22 asked about the improvement for language learning apps that would make them more likely to return the app regularly. Various suggestions and valuable insight are collected. Many users emphasised the importance of **additional rewards**, such as money, real coupons, and unique ideas or stories that use gamified elements. **Enhancing the user experience** was another common requirement, with suggestions for decreasing ads, enhancing app functionality, and making the app more interesting with daily challenges and cute avatars in notifications. There were some requests for **improved functionality**, such as reducing revision tasks after inactivity, allowing users to skip ads or unlock levels for free, including offline mode, progress tracking, and advanced lessons. **Social and interactive features** also received some attention, with some respondents wishing to talk with native speakers, having live tuition sessions, and connect with other fluent language partners. Furthermore, some of the suggestions highlight the **demand on actual language use**, grammar, cultural insights, and real-world situation applications, as well as **customisable functions** such as personalised learning paths and regular reminders.

23. Final Suggestion

Respondents are encouraged to express their own suggestion in the last question. One suggestion emphasised the importance of a visually appealing UI/UX design which would make them more likely to use the app. Another respondent gave a different opinion on gamification, stating that it is only effective if users are already engaged, otherwise it may serve as a disincentive if users must go through the app to access the lessons. Other respondents suggested adding revision features for previous lessons to reinforce learning.

5.0 DISCUSSION

This section interprets the key insights of the study, connecting the results to the research questions, theoretical framework, and relevant literature. The aim is to examine how gamified reward systems affect user engagement, motivation, and retention, and how these outcomes vary by user demographics and app usage patterns.

5.1 Motivations for Language Learning

The first research objective (RQ1) aimed to examine the underlying motivations that prompt individuals to use language learning apps. The findings reveal that **personal interest** is the strongest motivator, cited by 43.5% of respondents. This supports prior research, particularly Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), which emphasizes the critical role of **intrinsic motivation** in sustained learning behaviors.

Secondary motivations included **career development** (20%) and **cultural interest** (12.9%), highlighting that users are driven not only by personal curiosity but also by practical goals. Interestingly, even users with academic or professional goals demonstrated a tendency to disengage over time. While gamified reward systems are introduced to enhance engagement through external incentives, the findings suggest that **long-term user retention is more strongly rooted in meaningful internal objectives**. In short, gamification should boost intrinsic motivation by strategised approaches to meet the actual needs of language learners.

5.2 Effectiveness of Gamified Rewards

The second research question (RQ2) investigated the types of gamified rewards users believe are most useful in increasing motivation. Survey results show that **streaks**,

badges, and **unlocking new content** are the most popular features. However, an additional minor relationship showed up between what users appreciate and what they find actually motivating.

Many users highlighted streaks for **building initial motivations**, but many also noted that the pressure to keep them created **stress** and **quit** when the streak is broken. This emphasises a major issue in gamification research, which **short-term rewards can become demotivating** if they create pressure (Deterding et al., 2011). Unlockable content was seen as more meaningful, promoting a sense of competence and achievement. Badges have been appreciated for marking meaningful accomplishments, but were seen just as basic and missing clear learning connections.

Overall, the design and purpose of rewards are important. Solid progress and fresh opportunities boost motivation, but meaningless or overly competitive rewards might decrease engagement. These findings support Self-Determination Theory, which suggests that external rewards should promote **independence and skills** in order to boost intrinsic motivation.

5.3 Dropout Reasons and Re-engagement Potential (RQ3)

The third research question (RQ3) explores the effect of gamified rewards on long-term user engagement. Gamification could grab early attention, but **content quality, personal relevance, and learning utility** are more important factors in keeping engagement.

A high dropout rate—**75.3% reported discontinuing app use at some point**—shows the challenge of retention in MALL apps. The main reasons for dropout were **lack of time** (64.7%), **declining motivation** (62.4%), and **loss of interest** (58.8%). Even motivated users disengage when the app does not support sustained learning or adapt

to their changing circumstances.

Over **40% of users abandoned the app for a year or more**, emphasizing retention issues. When returning, most cited **personal goals** (65.9%), with **new features** and **improved rewards** motivating 32.9%. Although **42.4%** found rewards “somewhat effective” for re-engagement, only **16.5%** found them “highly effective,” indicating a need for more adaptive and personalized reward systems.

5.4 Influence of Demographics and App Usage

The findings revealed differences in how gamified elements are perceived by **age** and **usage frequency**. Younger users (18–24) responded more positively to **competitive and visual rewards** like leaderboards and flashy badges. Older users valued **learning outcomes** over symbolic achievements.

Regular users engaged more with **progress-driven features** like streaks and leaderboards, while less frequent users preferred simpler rewards such as **daily logins** or **content unlocks**. This suggests that usage frequency affects user engagement with gamification, meaning that one-size-fits-all rewards may not fit everyone’s needs.

5.5 User Perceptions of Gamified Rewards

Participants had different thoughts on gamified rewards. Many people found badges, points, and streaks interesting and encouraging early on because they provided a feeling of progress and achievement.

However, some users stated that rewards lost value over time, especially when separated from actual learning progress. A few others described streaks as duties,

mentioned that the pressure to keep them ruined the enjoyment of learning. Regardless, users preferred rewards which were meaningful, personalised, and reflected their learning process. Rewards that are perceived as random or overly game-like carry a risk of becoming distractions or sources of stress.

These findings show that effective gamification is about delivering meaningful feedback mechanisms that correspond with user goals, reflect progress, and promote autonomy and competence. Personalised and context-aware reward systems hold the key for supporting long-term engagement while maintaining motivation.

6.0 CONCLUSION

6.1 Limitation of Study

This study has several limitations. Simply relying on self-reported survey data may contain biases like inaccurate memory recall and social expectation influence. Considering the diversity among language learners worldwide, even though the sample size is sufficient, it might not fully represent the situation of all learners. Other than that, this study concentrated on users' personal perceptions rather than concise measurement of how the application was actually used. It is challenging to show the causal relationship between gamification and long-term user retention due to the cross-sectional design.

6.2 Summary

The survey results provide crucial facts about how gamified rewards affect user retention and motivation in language learning apps. The majority of responses were young adults (18-24 years old) and female. This demographic trend may represent that younger generations' preference for digital learning supports and are more adaptable

with technology. The data shows that while gamified rewards, such as streak, badge and unlocking new features, are somewhat effective in encouraging continuous learning and app usage, they also have to be combined with engaging content to fully meet user needs. Personal interest, career development, and cultural interest are the key motivations for language learning, and reward systems and language lessons should be designed accordingly. However, notable challenges such as a lack of time and motivation are present stating that applications should offer more flexible learning options and personalised experiences. While most of the respondents showed a positive attitude towards the reward system, there are still some responses showing that gamification does not give significant impact on motivation, or would bring a negative impact to language learning journeys by disincentivizing through a complex process to access lessons. Overall, the findings give a general and in depth insight on how reward systems affect user motivation and retention, generally consistent with the research objectives, emphasising the importance of gamification in user engagement and providing useful suggestions to improve user retention based on specific rewards and attitudes.

7.0 RECOMMENDATION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Based on these suggestions, designers should concentrate on the delivery of particular user goals and motivation, as well as the goals of gamified incentives that are directly related to educational achievement at the core of user journey. Reward systems that are designed for specific user demographics and application usage levels should be considered by designers. In general, developers should avoid any punishment-type elements which require automatic activities, such as streaks, because failure to maintain a streak might lead to user burnout. Designers should look into ways to offer unlockable and/or functional rewards in their programs that can assist users develop competence and mastery, such as encouraging positive feelings like pride, accomplishment, and desire for learning. Designers should focus on improving the quality and relevance of instruction so that the user will still be interested after first interaction. Future studies should concentrate on longitudinal studies to enable researchers to understand users' behaviors and motivations. Except for the conservation of results of the gamification, longitudinal studies will also help with the determination of if, when, and how individuals finally give up on the usage of educational programs. Experimental research can also use controlled experiments to compare various types of rewards and personalized strategies related to gamification. It will also help to clarify the influence of gamification on the population if the evaluation studies fail to address demographic and cultural diversities.

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9.0 APPENDICES

Appendix A

Survey Questionnaire

Google Form Link:

https://forms.gle/k6FtPmrybw3UPzBa8https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSe7fzyfH1kd77CrgAmOcfPouJatrLEZffLag7_Aa1iAUcX4nQ/viewform?usp=sharing

The Influence of Reward System on User Motivation and Retention for Language Learning Apps

Hi! My name is Teu Yu Tian, a first year student from Taylor's University Lakeside Campus, currently pursuing Bachelor of Degree (Hons) in Creative Media. I am conducting a study regarding the **influence of reward system on user motivation and retention for language learning apps**.

Answering this survey shows your consent to participate in this study. Your answer and information will be kept confidential and be treated for academic purpose only. The survey should take around **10-15** minutes and your participation are deeply appreciated. Thank you in advance

Should you have any enquiries about the survey questions, kindly contact:

Teu Yu Tian yutian.teu@gmail.com

yutian.teu@gmail.com [Switch account](#)



Not shared

* Indicates required question

Demographic

1. What is your age? *

- ☐ under 13
- ☐ 13-17 years old
- ☐ 18-24 years old
- ☐ 25-34 years old
- ☐ 35-44 years old
- ☐ 45-54 years old
- ☐ 55-65 years old
- ☐ Above 65

2. What is your gender? *

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Non-binary
- ☐ Prefer not to say

3. Your employment status *

- ☐ Employed
- ☐ Part-Time Employed
- ☐ Freelance
- ☐ Student
- ☐ Unemployed
- ☐ Retired
- ☐ Other: _____

4. What is your nationality? *

- ☐ Malaysian
- ☐ Singaporean
- ☐ Indonesian
- ☐ Filipino
- ☐ Thai
- ☐ Vietnamese
- ☐ Chinese
- ☐ Indian
- ☐ Japanese
- ☐ Korean
- ☐ British
- ☐ American
- ☐ Australian
- ☐ Canadian
- ☐ Other: _____

5. What is your highest level of education? *

- ☐ Below Secondary School
- ☐ Secondary School
- ☐ STPM/A-Level/College/Diploma or equivalent
- ☐ Bachelor Degree
- ☐ Master
- ☐ PhD/Doctor
- ☐ Other: _____

[Next](#)

Page 1 of 3

[Clear form](#)

The Influence of Reward System on User Motivation and Retention for Language Learning Apps

yutian.teu@gmail.com [Switch account](#)



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* Indicates required question

Language & Technology Proficiency

a. Language Proficiency

6. What is your primary language? (choose only one) *

- ☐ English
- ☐ Chinese
- ☐ Malay
- ☐ Tamil
- ☐ Indonesian
- ☐ Japanese
- ☐ Korean
- ☐ Spanish
- ☐ French
- ☐ German
- ☐ Italian
- ☐ Other: _____

7. How many languages do you speak fluently? *

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ More than 4

b. Technology Proficiency:

8. How familiar are you with using mobile apps in general?

- | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
|-----------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|---------------|
| Very unfamiliar | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | Very familiar |

9. How often do you use these digital devices? *

	Rarely	Weekly	Few times a week	Few times a day	Almost all the time
Smartphone	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Tablet	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Laptop/Computer	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

[Back](#)

[Next](#)

Page 2 of 3

[Clear form](#)

The Influence of Reward System on User Motivation and Retention for Language Learning Apps

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Not shared

* Indicates required question

Language Learning App Related Questions

In this section, you will be answering questions related to gamification **reward system** in language learning app. A reward system in language learning apps includes features such as **badges, points, leaderboards, and daily login rewards** designed to motivate and engage users by recognising their achievements and progress after they completed certain task.

10. Which language learning apps have you used? (Select all that apply) *

- ☐ Duolingo
- ☐ Babbel
- ☐ Rosetta Stone
- ☐ Memrise
- ☐ Busuu
- ☐ HelloTalk
- ☐ WordUp
- ☐ Other: _____

11. What language did you learn using the app? (Select all that apply) *

☐ English

☐ Chinese

☐ Malay

☐ Korean

☐ Tamil

☐ Indonesian

☐ Japanese

☐ Spanish

☐ French

☐ German

☐ Italian

☐ Other: _____

12. How long have you been using language learning apps? *

☐ Less than 1 month

☐ 1-3 months

☐ 3-6 months

☐ 6-12 months

☐ Over 1 year

13. How often do you use language learning apps? *

- ☐ Daily
- ☐ Few times a week
- ☐ Once a week
- ☐ Once a month
- ☐ Used but abandon

14. What motivates you to learn a new language with the app? *

- ☐ Personal Interest
- ☐ Academic Requirement
- ☐ Career Development
- ☐ Practice for future trip
- ☐ Cultural interest (eg: k-pop culture/anime culture)
- ☐ Other: _____

15. Which type of reward system is effective in boosting your motivation? (select * all that apply)

- ☐ Badge
- ☐ Leaderboard
- ☐ Daily Login reward
- ☐ Points
- ☐ Unlock new level or features
- ☐ Virtual goods (avatars, decorations)
- ☐ Real-world rewards (discounts, coupons)
- ☐ Streaks (consecutive days of learning)
- ☐ Other: _____

16. Can you describe a specific experience where a reward in the app significantly increased your motivation to continue learning?

Your answer _____

17. Have you ever stopped using a language learning app for a period? *

☐ Yes

☐ No

18. If yes, how long was the period of inactivity?

Your answer _____

19. What factors contributed to you stopping using the app? (Select all that apply) *

☐ Loss of interest

☐ Lack of time

☐ Ineffective rewards

☐ Technical issues

☐ Found a better app

☐ Find it not helpful

☐ Loss of motivation

☐ Other: _____

20. What motivated you to return to the app after a period of inactivity? (Select all * that apply)

☐ New features or updates

☐ Improved reward system

☐ Personal goals

☐ External recommendations

☐ Other: _____

21. On a scale of 1 to 5, how effective are gamified rewards in encouraging you to * return to the app after periods of inactivity? (1 = Not Effective, 5 = Very Effective)

1 2 3 4 5

Not effective at all ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Very effective

22. What improvement/additional feature for a language learning app would * make you more likely to return to the app regularly?

Your answer _____

23. Do you have any suggestions or opinions to add on?

Your answer _____

[Back](#)

[Submit](#)

Page 3 of 3

[Clear form](#)