DUOLINGO: AN EXPERIENCE IN ENGLISH TEACHING

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Abstract

This paper aims to stablish some reflections on English learning using the application called Duolingo. Duolingo is a free application that can be used on computers, tablets and smartphones, and in several languages such as English, German and Turkish. The application was used at a level 1 class at CELIFF (IFF Language Centre). With the obtained results, analyzes and assessments were made to complete the experience. The application contributed to increase the vocabulary, to improve pronunciation and in simple grammatical structures. As its aesthetic appeal is similar to games for smartphones, Duolingo has motivated the students to the daily practice of a foreign language. By using this tool, students enjoyed some benefits not previously considered, managed to interact by themselves, building knowledge and gaining familiarity with the English language.

Keywords: Duolingo. Languages. English.

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, several possibilities of learning have emerged with new practices that stimulate students and teachers to seek motivating alternatives to teach and learn. This article aims to reflect on the inclusion of digital applications in the classroom and to contribute to the teaching practice for language teachers to encourage their students to use cell phones and computer applications as tools for learning English vocabulary and grammatical structures, since they have been presented as a great partner in learning and, especially, they collaborate for daily contact with the language.

At CELIFF (IFF Language Center) courses, students go through six levels until completing English language instruction, ranging from initial Level 1 to Level 6, the equivalent to intermediate or B2 in the international table of the Common European Framework of Reference for languages. In addition to the use of the textbook, the students of a Level 1 class started to use the Duolingo application as a tool to help in the acquisition of the language. The teacher introduced the application to the students and they began to use it in their free time, outside the classroom.

The methodology used in this work was based on a survey of data collection through questionnaires. In order to achieve these objectives, this work was divided into three parts: application for the CELIFF group of an evaluation questionnaire, using questions taken from the Duolingo application; the teacher kept monitoring the daily use of the application by the students, encouraging the use of at least five minutes daily; questionnaire reappraisal, evaluating and analyzing all data obtained from them to compare the students' performance and if there was a real growth of them.

TEACHING THROUGH APPLICATIONS

DUOLINGO and the school practice

DUOLINGO is an application for cell phones or computers. It is one of the most famous and praised language teaching applications on the market. It has won several awards, it is available for Android, iOS, Windows Phone and web, it works in a very simple way and it is very useful for those who are studying English and several other languages, such as Spanish, Italian, German and Turkish. It can be used for at least five minutes a day, and the users define how they would like to practice it right from the beginning.

The four skills, reading, writing, listening and speaking, are present during the learning process in Duolingo, through elaboration of questions, affirmative and negative sentences, small texts and excerpts to be heard and transcribed, and it is also possible to the students to record their own pronunciation to assess their oral performance.

Indeed, teachers must orient and assist their students to guide pedagogical practice, using creativity and new technologies in their classrooms. The new target audience of language schools is mostly young and familiar with the use of the Internet for learning. The teacher needs to follow these new trends, inserting in his practice the use of the internet, mobile applications and technology platforms. According to Jordão (2009).

The teacher is the first author who must change his way of thinking and acting in education, because there is a great tendency of repetition, in the classroom, of the models that worked in his own learning process. For this reason, teacher training must take place permanently and during his entire life. There will always be new resources, new technologies and new teaching and new learning strategies. (Jordão, 2009:12).

Although the students already use the cell phone to obtain the English or other languages, it is essential to guide them when choosing the applications used and to motivate them to spend their free time improving the practice of these languages, not only restrict to the classroom the learner's contact with English, for example. This habit will make the difference in the students' fluency in the language, giving them self-confidence and better pronunciation gradually, preparing them in a more holistic and complete way, demands of the current globalized world.

(...)What is really intended is human formation, in its broad sense, with access to the universe of scientific and technological knowledge produced historically by humanity, integrated to a professional formation that permeates understanding the world, understanding ourselves in the world and acting in it searching for the improvement of one's own living conditions (...) (BRASIL, 2007: 13).

There is no doubt that the Language teacher is a fundamental piece in this gear, since he can stimulate students to obtain better results and guide them to choose applications such as Duolingo, in which is even possible to learn more than one language at the same time. Perhaps also for its aesthetic appeal similar to games for Smartphones, Duolingo has a differential. Through the use of this tool, the students enjoyed benefits previously considered, interacting alone, and acquiring familiarity with the English language.

The benefits of language teaching through the application

Important studies in the area of language collaborate so that the teacher can effective in his pedagogical practice the use of technologies and the advantages obtained with this practice.

For Almeida Filho (2002), "communicating is an activity that presents a high degree of unpredictability and creativity, both in the form and in the senses constructed in discourse" (Almeida Filho, 2002: 47-48). He further emphasizes that in the communicative language teaching, the student should gain prominence, since he will be the subject and agent in the process of teaching and learning.

In this proposal for the use of Duolingo concomitant with teaching in language schools, there were numerous advantages, surpassing the commonplace: increasing vocabulary and better development of simple grammatical structures. Besides those mentioned gains, we can see a significant improvement in the performance of all students, without exceptions, as shown in the graphs below.

In the first application of the questionnaire, eleven students obtained the performance shown in figure 1. First, students achieved results between 33% and 87% of correct answers. As we can see in Figure 1, four of the eleven students evaluated were below average, even though they had already had contact in the classroom with the content evaluated.
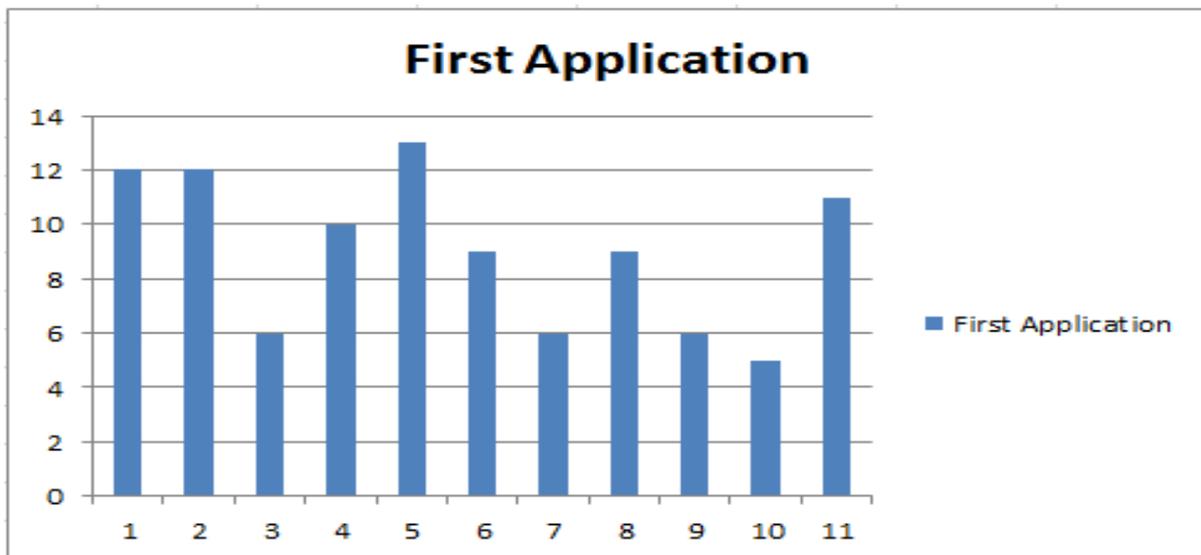

Figure 1 :Result of the first test, prior to the use of Duolingo.
Source: The authors

Then we observed that in the second application of the same 15-question questionnaire, based on the ones contained in the application that were relevant to the content worked at level 1, all students increased the amount of correct answers obtained. This can be seen in Figure 2. After daily use of Duolingo, all of them achieved performances above average. With growth being observed in all cases.
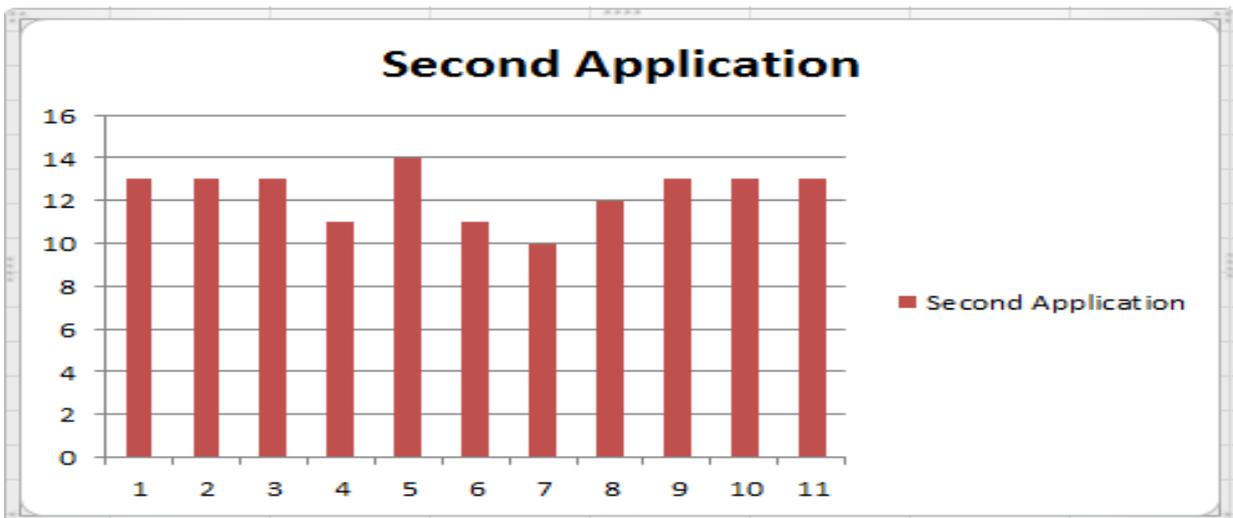

Figure 2: Result of the 2nd test, after the use of Duolingo.
Source: The authors

In Figure 3, we can see the growth in the number of correct answers per student, which was, on average, 25%, and in some cases reached 40%. The lowest performance achieved 67% of efficiency, along with the report of lower usage of the application in minutes a day. Therefore, those who dedicated themselves to the use of Duolingo, as proposed by the teacher and the application, have improved their performance both in grammatical structures and in the ability to express themselves orally and with greater confidence.
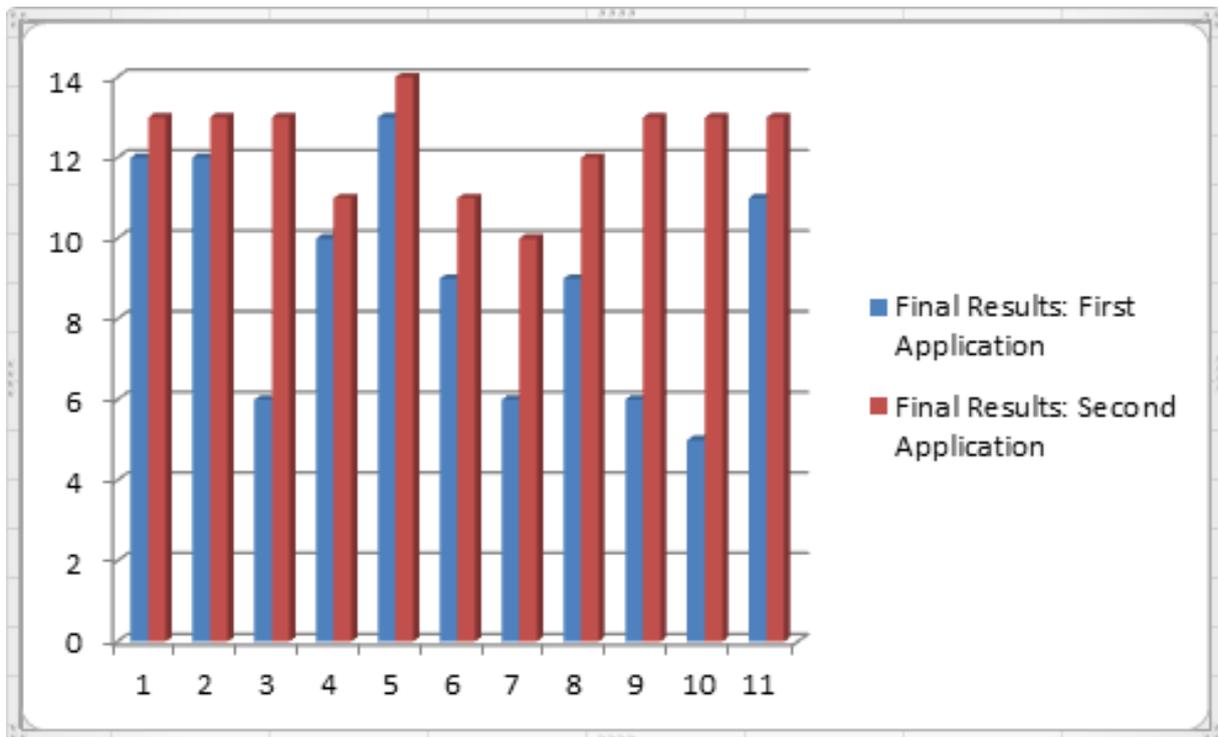

Figure 3: Comparison between the results of the first and the second application of the test.
Source: the authors

With the use of Duolingo, besides helping to insert new subjects to explore with the students, there was a significant increase in confidence and effectiveness of themselves when trying to communicate in English. Even older students. The application proposal provides a great deal of freedom related to the language practice schedule, as well as some privacy, reported by the students as a bonus. Without the inhibition of collective practice in the English classroom, the student was able to "rehearse" the pronunciation and apply the fruits of this extra-class practice in collective communication or in pairs during the classes. The lessons need to take students away from the idea that they do not know how to communicate in English and make them feel as agents in acquiring new knowledge as long as protagonists of the language acquisition process. Duolingo helped a lot at this early stage and proved to be a very effective tool in improving pronunciation as well.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

It is not enough for the teacher to provide increasing knowledge to the students, but rather to advance this expectation. As a mediator and facilitator of the teaching-learning process, the teacher should provide activities and educational proposals that are meaningfully internalized. Above all, in language teaching, this should be focused on language learning, not only through the textbook and in the classroom, but also through the insertion of alternatives and technologies that motivate the student and ensure autonomy in the acquisition of the language . As Tori (2010) describes, "little by little the educators and the students themselves are discovering that virtual resources can be an excellent support for face-to-face activities" (TORI, 2010, p. 28).

It is due to the teacher to promote the construction of a learning that integrates the cultural baggage of its students and their eagerness to grow and practice the language, promoting their fluency and motivating the collective and their individual growth.

Technology should be seen as an instrument of learning at the service of learners. Applications, games and the like can (and should) provide significant learning and facilitate the task of the teacher to stimulate and motivate students to acquire the foreign language in a playful and effective way. And the teacher must be the intermediary in this choice.

Therefore, the use of Duolingo drove the process of acquiring language in a more adequate way to the new contexts, incorporating the advantages of digital learning environments to teaching in the classroom. To this end, students and teachers must be willing to face this challenge, meeting the demands of today's society and delivering individuals who are better prepared for success and communication to the job market.

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