

THE DEGREE TO WHICH DUOLINGO CAN IMPROVE THE FLUENCY OF ONE'S FOREIGN LANGUAGE (NARRATIVE RESEARCH)

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Abstract

Learning a foreign language has become a very appealing and important ability in the contemporary world. The advantages of learning foreign languages are mushrooming as the world becomes increasingly globalized. This research explores the degree to which Duolingo can improve the fluency of one's foreign language. The participant is the researcher herself as it uses narrative research (autobiography). The participant had taken the Diplôme d'études en langue française (DELFF) – Level A1 test after using Duolingo for a month. This research explores the methodology the researcher used to improve the fluency of her French. The results suggest that Duolingo can improve the fluency of one's foreign language to some extent that it helped the researcher pass the A1 level test by 83%. The skills being tested are listening comprehension, reading comprehension, writing production and speaking. Each of these skills is tested and graded respectively by the by France Education International (France Éducation international or FEI) for France's Ministry of Education. The researcher got 16/25 in the listening comprehension, 21/25 in the reading comprehension, 22/25 in the writing production, and 24.5/25 in speaking. Recommendations to extend the effectiveness of using Duolingo to improve the fluency of one's foreign language is discussed further in the research. In general, it is suggested that the learner should be determined to use Duolingo as the first language learning source and meet the daily streak in the application. Moreover, the learner should commit to improving the foreign language they are learning for at least two hours a day.

Keywords: Duolingo, DELF, Narrative Research, Streak.

Introduction

In today's society, learning a foreign language has become a highly desirable and vital skill (Anvarovna & Toshmuratovna, 2021). The benefits of learning foreign languages are multiplying as the world gets more globalized, and bilingualism is perhaps possibly the most important real-world skill ever existed, rather than simply a cool party trick (O'Hagan, 2019).

Foreign language learning is all about learning how to properly communicate and connect with others a crucial life skill that can only be developed via interaction with others (Gökçen, 2022). When you master a foreign language, you may use your

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new superhuman ability to understand what someone is saying, recall the appropriate vocabulary and grammar, place that vocabulary and grammar in the appropriate context, and respond back all on the spot and in a timely manner (Dick, 2021)

In many cases nowadays, learning a foreign language involves using language learning software or computer assisted self-study, which means integrating technology in the learning process (Namaziandost et al., 2021). Well-established technologies, such as the personal computer and internet access, have become nearly ubiquitous for foreign language (FL) learning in many industrialized countries (Wulandari & Budiyanto, 2017). In addition, relatively new technologies, such as smartphones and other mobile internet-accessible devices, are increasingly available (Gendreau & Moorman, 2016). Other technologies, such as natural language processing (NLP), are still maturing (Kang et al., 2020). As technologies mature, become readily available, and are adapted for FL pedagogy, instructors may alter their teaching strategies or adjust their teaching activities to most effectively utilize available resources (Blau et al., 2016). At their best, technological innovations can increase learner interest and motivation; provide students with increased access to target language input, interaction opportunities, and feedback; and provide instructors with an efficient means for organizing course content and interacting with multiple students (Golonka et al., 2014)

There are many language learning software tools available out there, some more popular than others. One of these learning software is Duolingo, which is an American language-learning website and mobile app. This study investigates the degree to which Duolingo can improve the fluency of one's foreign language. Therefore, a research question is raised as a guidance for this research which is To what extent Duolingo can help achieve fluency of one's FL?

Metode Penelitian

In order to answer the research question, the researcher uses descriptive qualitative method which gives holistic description and rich collection of the data. In narrative research designs, researchers describe the lives of individuals, collect and tell stories about people's lives, and write narratives of individual experiences (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). As a distinct form of qualitative research, a narrative typically focuses on studying a single person, gathering data through the collection of stories, reporting individual experiences, and discussing the meaning of those experiences for the individual. With recent popularity, national research conferences have devoted sessions and papers to it, and educational journals have published stories reported by teachers, students, and other educators. In the case of this research, the individual is the researcher herself, and the story that is told is hers.

The data is collected through the personal account of the learner who is the researcher herself.

A. Research Participants

The participant was 26 years of age, native speaker of Arabic, not from European origin and not advanced user of French, and she resided in Indonesia. She

has practiced in the research by using Duolingo for one month. The researcher tracks the progress of the learning through the application itself.

B. Data Collection Instrument

This study uses DELF A1 exam as measurement of the fluency of the learner. DELF (Diplôme d'Etudes en Langue Française) is one of the only French-as-a-foreign-language diplomas issued by the French Ministry of Education. It is valid for life and is recognized worldwide. It allows their holder to officially validate their French learning. The diploma constitutes a recognition of the school, university and/or professional background in French language. Moreover, DELF allows their holder to study, work and immigrate in a French-speaking country.

C. Data Collection Procedure

There is only one step of collecting the data, which is the researcher/ learner taking the DELF A1 exam. Next, the researcher/ learner reflects on the result and analyze the learning process to find out the degree to which Duolingo can improve one's foreign language fluency.

D. Data Analysis Procedure

Since the data collection procedure uses DELF A1 exam, the results are calculated from the skills being examined in the test, which are listening comprehension, reading comprehension writing production, and speaking.

To make the self-learning more systematic, the learner followed the S.M.A.R.T learning method. This SMART goal setting brings discipline, structure, and trackability into the language learning goals and objectives.

Specific by avoiding making simple goals like: "Learn Italian in 2022".

Measurable Make the goals measurable. That is, by putting a number, quantity, time, date, or anything that makes a goal even more precise and offers noticeable results. For example, setting concise learning goals such as writing three paragraphs around 100 words in a week or fewer verb tense errors in your email writing.

Attainable An unrealistic goal may cause the motivation levels to drop significantly. Making sure the goal is attainable within a realistic amount of time is important by breaking the tasks down into small milestones.

Relevant That is, the goals are relevant to the learner's needs. For example, enrolling in a foreign language course in the city could be helpful. Selecting the classes carefully so that it is aligned with the learner's objectives and competence level is important. Why learn complex Spanish subjunctive tense if the only goal is to know basic phrases?

Time-bound Every goal needs a target date or deadline within which one wants to achieve the small goals. It essentially means setting a deadline for achieving the goal.

Results and Discussion

A. Listening comprehension

Listening Comprehension is part of the communication skills such as the development of reading and writing comprehension. Listening Comprehension has the multiple processes of comprehension in language when it is understood, interpreted and spoken (Zhao et al., 2021).

This communication skill is connected to cognitive learning as it works with the development of memory, attention, vocabulary, grammar and comprehension monitoring (Megasari, 2021).

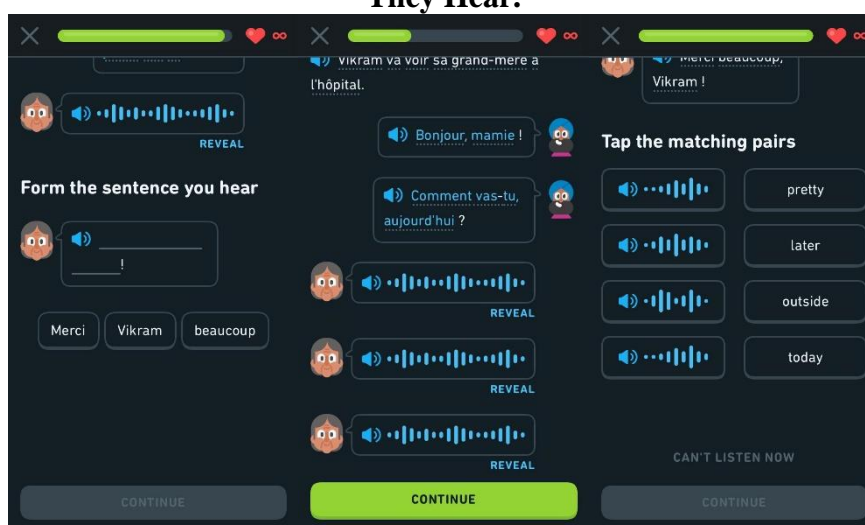
Listening then is the interpretation of spoken language and this includes the recognition of discourses of sounds, the understanding of the meaning of individual words or the understanding of the syntax of sentences that may arise in a dialogue or discourse (Wingfield & Tun, 2007).

The importance of recognising context in listening means that the person can relate what they hear to the real world in which they live as they can symbolically recognise concepts with language and link them together in order to understand what they hear and give it a meaningful meaning.

The listening comprehension is worth 25/25 score and it lasts for 15 minutes. What the learner had to do was write replies to questions on three or four short recorded items relating to everyday situations (played twice) Maximum length of the recorded items: 3 minutes. The learner got 16/25 in the listening comprehension.

Duolingo offers stories for which the learner can improve their listening with short stories. The learner would learn one story every day. Thus, the stories can improve the listening skill of the learner; however, they need to spend more time on listening to the stories (Atmowardoyo et al., 2020).

Figure 1
an Example of an Interactive Story Where The Learner Has to Form A Sentence They Hear.



Upon reflecting on the result and the method for improving the listening skill, the learner realized that more time should be spent on improving the listening skill.

B. Reading comprehension

Reading comprehension is the ability to read text, process it and understand its meaning. It relies on two, interconnected abilities: word reading (being able to decode the symbols on the page) and language comprehension (being able to understand the meaning of the words and sentences).

When we make sense of a text, however, we do not just remember the exact words and phrases we read. Rather, we form a mental model of what the text describes by integrating the sense of the words and sentences into a meaningful whole, like a film that plays in our head.

Good comprehension is vital if reading is to have a purpose, if a reader is to engage with and learn from a text and, ultimately, if a reader is to enjoy what they're reading.

The reading comprehension is also worth 25/25 and it lasts for 30 minutes. The learner is required to write replies to questions on four or five documents relating to everyday situations. In this section, the learner got 21/25.

Duolingo offers stories for which the learner can improve their reading skill with short stories. The learner would learn one story a day. It was found that the short stories can improve the reading skill of the learner.

Figure 2
an Example of an Exercise Where The Learner Has to Comprehend The Story in Order to Answer The Question



Upon reflecting on the result and the method for improving the reading skill, the learner realized that the time spent on learning how to read (one story a day) is sufficient.

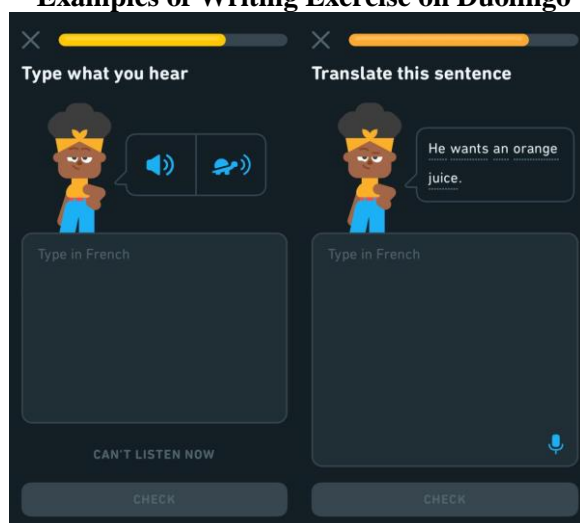
C. Writing production

Writing skills are an important part of communication. Good writing skills allow the individual to communicate their message with clarity and ease to a far larger audience than through face-to-face or telephone conversations.

This section of the exam is 20 minutes in duration and is worth 25 marks. There are two parts to this section: Part 1 covers filling in a form (information usually of a personal nature such as your name, address, marital status etc.) Part 2 requires the writing of simple sentences on everyday topics (postcards, messages, stories etc.). The learner got 22/25 in this section.

Duolingo offers writing lessons. The tree method is used to instill the words and sentences related to the theme learned in that particular unit. There are many types of activities to teach the words and sentences, translating a sentence, and typing what the learner hears. The learner would follow the lessons in the tree.

Figure 3
Examples of Writing Exercise on Duolingo



D. Speaking

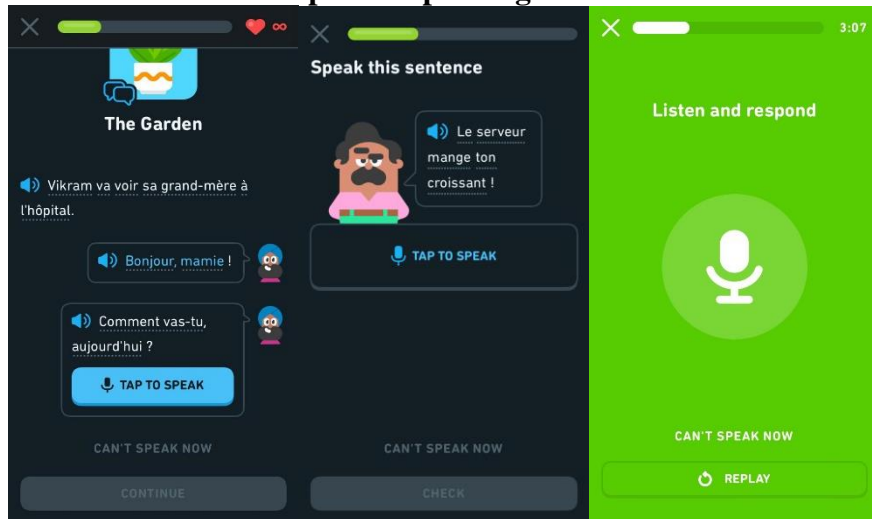
The ability to speak confidently and fluently is something which children will develop during their time at school, and something that will help them throughout their life. Speaking skills are defined as the skills which allow us to communicate effectively. They give us the ability to convey information verbally and in a way that the listener can understand. Speaking is an interactive process where information is shared, and if necessary, acted upon by the listener. So, it is important to develop both speaking and listening skills in order to communicate effectively.

This section of the exam is about 20 minutes in duration; however, the actual time spend speaking is 5 to 7 minutes. The remaining time is allocated to preparation, which is given before the speaking time. About 10 minutes before the actually speaking time, the examinee is given the associated topic that will talked about. Part one is a guided conversation, while part two and three deals with information exchange and a role play respectively. The section and is divided into three parts and is worth 25 marks. In this section, the learner got 24.25/25

Duolingo offers stories for which the leaner can improve their speaking skill with short stories. The learner would learn one story a day, one lesson from one of the main lessons in the tree, and one audio lesson. Usually, the story is between two

characters. There are two modes for reading the story; the read mode and the conversation mode. In the read mode, the learner learns reading comprehension, while in the conversation mode the learner interacts with story by taking the role of one of the characters. It was found that Duolingo can improve the speaking skill of the learner.

Figure 4
Examples of Speaking Exercises



Conclusion

The application Duolingo is considered interesting and beneficial to learn a foreign language. It has shown that it can improve the learner's foreign language by 83% on level A1. Duolingo is the world's leading language learning platform, and the most downloaded education app in the world. Duolingo believes in making education free, fun and available to everyone. There are some minor challenges in using this app related to the podcasts offered for improving the learner's listening skill. The podcasts use immediately the intermediate French discarding the beginner. However, it is suggested that the learner should commit to improving their foreign language by practicing on the app for at least two hours a day and meet the daily streak. It also turned out that the learner should develop a concrete strategy for self-learning, since the learner does not rely on a teacher for learning the language. Thus, this study has its limitation by not exploring the strategy for self-learning. Moreover, this study has its limitations in relation to the structure of the DELF A1 exam, especially the listening skill. The learner has to adjust the way they improve their listening skill to the exam in order to pass it.

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