

ABSTRACT

A CROSS COMPARISON AND EFFICACY STUDY OF DUOLINGO AND AN ENTRY-LEVEL GERMAN 1A COURSE

This study compares the skill sets that participants are able to gain in German through either using the language learning application DuoLingo or taking an entry-level German 1A university course. The participants of the study in both groups were given a test in different language skills developed by myself and the German professor at CSU, Fresno in order to understand what skills were gained. The participants in both groups acquired different skills, but the participants in the university course were able to outperform the participants in the DuoLingo group.

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A CROSS COMPARISON AND EFFICACY STUDY OF
DUOLINGO AND AN ENTRY-LEVEL
GERMAN 1A COURSE

by

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Study

“Just as music does not reside in the piano, teaching, learning, and knowledge do not reside in the computer” (Warschauer, 2011, p. 5). The current research has not made any astounding conclusions about its capabilities, specifically in the area of language learning. Can it be beneficial? The research says yes (Hubbard, 2009). Should it be the sole contributor? The research has yet to make or support such claims, as can be seen in the next chapter. Since learning is a human process, before we entrust our learning experience into such an autonomous system, a lengthier investigation should be done.

For this study there were a total of five participants who utilized the German course in the smartphone application Duolingo (also available on a computer) to see which skill sets the participants were able to attain. The participants were asked to use the application on a daily basis, committing anywhere from 10 to 20 minutes each day over the course of 3 months. After the hours were completed, approximately 26-49 hours, the participants were given a multiple choice and open-ended skills test (Appendix A) in order to see what skill sets they have acquired. In addition, there were 10 participants enrolled in the California State University, Fresno (CSU, Fresno) entry-level German course (German 1A) who were given the same test to compare the skills that were attained throughout the semester (54 class hours with approximately 27 hours out of class for a total of 81 hours). After the skills test was completed, the results were compared to gain a better understanding; the data are presented in chapter 4 and discussed in chapter 5.

1.2 What Is the Problem?

With the turn of the century, technology is constantly making its way into our different learning environments. It has come to play an ever more important role in the learning process, in and out of the classroom, so it is imperative that we study the options available to ensure quality and adequacy instead of blind adoption. The problem is that the majority of the research that has drawn conclusions on these language learning apps has been research that has been sanctioned by the companies themselves. Since there is the potential for bias, regardless of how accurate such studies actually are, it is necessary to have parties that are not involved in any way conduct research as well in order to develop a deeper understanding of the application's usefulness for learning a second language.

1.3 Description of the Application

The other portion of this thesis focuses on the application DuoLingo, which can be used through a person's smartphone or on a computer through an internet browser. It is a free application available for download through both the Apple App Store and Google Play Store on a smartphone or tablet. Another option is available through an internet browser on a computer, <https://www.duolingo.com>. DuoLingo is a very user-friendly interactive application, which utilizes a user's numerous learning skills. When a person first starts using the application, the lessons focus on vocabulary and basic sentence structure¹. Then the application builds upon these newly learned items in various ways, e.g., picture identification, translation, word order with pre-filled tiles, etc. If the user cannot seem to

¹ The grammar lessons within the application are not explicit. All grammar is taught to the user using implicit methods.

understand or identify what is going on, the application gives the user the opportunity to click on the word which will have an English translation and a sentence about the given grammar topic, if applicable.

1.4 Description of the Class

The entry-level German 1A class at CSU, Fresno uses a very interactive class model, in which there are many scenarios where the students are using their learned language skills with the professor and other classmates on a constant basis. In addition to the instructor, whose knowledge is at the native level, the students in the course have access to a textbook (Moeller, Winnifred, Hoecherl-Alden, Berger, & Huth, 2013), which provides a greater depth of explanations about the different grammar points that are being learned. This language class utilizes mainly the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) method, which is explained in further detail in chapter 2. The CLT method focuses on classroom interaction, and the students actually have multiple opportunities to put their newly learned language skills to use. Some of the opportunities to use the learned language skills include: Small role-play activities, conversation partner activities, and class discussions, which involve the professor as a mentor and coach. Also worth noting is that most of the interaction and language use is unscripted, allowing for free use of the language. Another aspect of the German 1A class is that the students receive immediate feedback. If the material being learned is not clear, then the students have the opportunity to ask the professor for clarification, which involves multiple ways of explaining the subject matter.

1.5 Research Questions

The research questions are as follows:

1. Will using the application 'Duolingo' to learn a second language (German) prepare the users with the same or at least similar skill sets that would be attained through an entry level language course (German 1A) at the university level?
2. What skill sets will the users of the application gain?
3. What skill sets are attained through the traditional entry-level university course?
4. How did both groups perform in comparison to each other?

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Learning Properties

There have been numerous studies that look into the properties of learning a second language with technology, but the number that delve into the actual properties of using an application, i.e. Rosetta Stone and DuoLingo, rather than a traditional course is minuscule (Vesselinov & Grego, 2012). In fact, if there are studies that attempt to make conclusions on these types of language learning software, then such studies were more than likely supported through the companies themselves. There is still much to be learned about the properties of language learning and the components technology puts forth compared to traditional classes, which foster interaction and face to face communication instead of face to smartphone interaction (Brown, 2007).

Moreover, there is also one aspect that the application is not able to teach the user directly: Culture. The traditional classroom course has a cultural aspect to it that the users of the application would not be able to gain unless through some other methods of learning a second language.

2.2 Second Language Learning Theories

According to Mitchell (2004), there are two types of factors that affect learning a second language: Cognitive and affective. The cognitive factor involves intelligence and language aptitude. What this means is a person's general intelligence and ability with phonetic coding, grammatical sensitivity, memory, and inductive language learning are the main factors that contribute to the success or failure of learning a second language.

Successful learners of a second language tend to develop strategies that assist them in language learning.

The affective factor has three categories: language attitudes, motivation, as well as language anxiety versus willingness to communicate. A learner's attitude towards a language, its speakers, and the learning context will largely determine the success or failure of learning the second language. How the learner perceives the language determines the rest of the language learning. There are three components, according to Gardner and MacIntyre (1993), of motivation: A desire to achieve a goal, the effort put forth to achieve the goal, and the learner's satisfaction with language learning activities. The last category, language anxiety and willingness to communicate, encompasses a learner's apprehensions and openness when learning a second language. If the learner is nervous when speaking and has feelings of apprehension, the learner will be less likely to use their language skills. This leads the learner to be less successful in learning a second language (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993).

2.3 Language Learning and Motivation

Motivation can be the single largest factor that determines whether most who embark upon the task of learning a second language will either succeed or fail. There are many reasons that people begin to learn a second language, e.g., communication, migration, heritage, etc. These reasons provide the learners with determination, but if there is no goal for learning the language or the learner will not gain anything from learning a second language, the learner will not succeed (Gardner & Lambert, 1972). Moreover, if the learner finds learning a second language intrinsically motivating, then they are more likely to excel at second language learning (Noels, 1990). Learning a second language requires a person who enjoys intrinsic rewards. The other major factor that determines whether a person will be successful in learning a second language is their use of strategies. If

a language learner employs strategies when learning a second language, then the learner is more likely to be successful (Mitchell, 2004).

2.4 Classroom Language Learning

According to Brown (2007), the second language classroom has gone through many different phases over the past 50 years, or so. For the longest time, the Grammar Translation model was the only way in which languages were taught. The Direct method is next on the timeline; this method imitated the way in which a child learned their first language, hence 'direct'. Next came the Audiolingual method, used primarily by the military, which involved mostly oral activities. Between these methods and today, came many more experimental methods, which have since been abandoned.

In the classroom of today, communicative competence is of the utmost importance because the research shows that interaction with others and utilizing the learned language skills are the most appropriate ways to learn a language (Brown, 2007). This is somewhat similar to the way in which most humans learn their native language. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has become the predominant method of teaching second languages in most university classrooms. With this method, there is a focus put on expression, interaction, and communication, which is very similar to the way German is taught to the participants in the German 1A course.

2.5 Computer-Assisted Language Learning Stages

Similar to the classroom, Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) has gone through stages of its own development since the 1950s (Warschauer & Healey, 1998). According to Warschauer and Healey, there have been three stages of CALL: behavioristic, communicative, and integrative. The behavioristic stage

was developed in the 1950s, but it wasn't put into use until two decades later. This stage was built upon repetitive drills while interacting with a computer, but not like the computers of today. At the center of the communicative stage was a focus on using the language instead of on learning the forms (explicit grammar) of the language. In this stage the learners would produce utterances that they had not seen before. The final stage, which we are in right now, is the integrative. Integrating skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) and technology is now the main focus of CALL. One of the main approaches is using authentic social contexts in which the learners would actually utilize a broad range of these skills. The integrative stage is what many technologies have come to use, e.g., DuoLingo and Rosetta Stone.

2.6 Similar Studies

A thorough search through the many databases available for studies that look into the efficacy of language learning software reveals that there is not much available outside of the studies that have been conducted by the companies that own the software. These studies have had access to language learning tests that involve adaptive grading, such as the Web Based Computer Adaptive Placement Exam¹ (WebCAPE). The test progresses in a way depending on how the questions are answered by the test-takers. If the test-taker gets a question right, then the test will slowly give more difficult questions. If the test-taker gets a question wrong, the test-taker will be presented with an easier question, according to Perpetual Work's website.

DuoLingo has a study of its own (Vesselinov & Grego, 2012) in which the effectiveness of the application is studied for Spanish users. The participants were

¹ <http://www.perpetualworks.com/webcape/overview>

given a placement test in the beginning and at the end of the experiment; the placement test was the WebCAPE. The results from the beginning and end were compared in order to see whether the participants had improved. What the study found, was that participants with no prior background in Spanish had to use the application from 26 to 49 hours to cover the material that would be presented in the first college semester.

In comparison to DuoLingo, Rosetta Stone has also done an effectiveness study (Vesselinov, 2009). This particular study used the same measurement as DuoLingo, WebCAPE, and found that after 55 hours of study, participants' skills in Spanish will notably increase. According to WebCAPE, this would be equivalent to one semester of Spanish in a university that offers a six semester Spanish program.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY AND THE TEST

3.1 Participants and Participant Selection

For the purpose of this study, there were two groups of participants; the first group, Group 1, consisted of 10 students from the entry-level German 1A course at CSU, Fresno. The second group, Group 2, consisted of 8 participants who undertook the use of the application DuoLingo in the beginning, albeit in the end only 5 completed the task of the application. All of the participants, in both groups, were young adults, most of whom attended CSU, Fresno.

The participants for both groups were elicited through a survey (Appendix B) in which the participants were asked a series of questions about their background with the language. It asked whether the participants have ever taken a course in German before or if they have had extensive contact with the language previously. This was the basis of whether the participants were eligible to participate in the small-scale experiment.

3.2 Developing the Test

Creating the test took some time and careful consideration. There were multiple resources consulted for the development of the test that was given to the participants in both groups of the study. The first consulted resource was the use of the University of Leipzig's list of the first thousand words of German¹. These are common words that are utilized in both the university German course as well as the application DuoLingo. These words were consulted because they would be familiar to the participants of both groups, thus creating an equal ground for the

¹ <http://wortschatz.uni-leipzig.de/Papers/top1000de.txt>

basis of the test; they are also meant to be the most important words that language learners should learn in the beginning.

The next source referred to for the creation of the test was the Goethe Institute, the institution promoted by the German government in order to advocate for the German culture and the German language. Classes, tests, and community events are provided to assist in the promotion of the German language and culture. In Europe and many other places throughout the world The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (2001) is the relevant scale for placement that the Goethe Institute uses among many other language-learning societies. It is the counterpart of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), which is the scale used in the United States by many language teachers and schools. The CEFR uses a level system with three general levels, A, B, and C, and 2 sub levels for each level, A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, and C2. A is the first level, which is for basic beginners, B is the middle level for learners with intermediate language skills, and C is the last level in which the proficient user of the language is placed, otherwise known as near native.

The last sources that were consulted were the German 1A course at CSU, Fresno and the application DuoLingo. Activities that are typically done in class or in previous tests were utilized in order to provide familiarity of the test to the participants in Group 1. Taken into consideration were the activities involved in the application when developing the test in order to provide familiar tasks to the Group 2 participants. The task for this group, Group 2, which was used in the test, was the translation section, which is discussed in further detail in the next section. The task that was used for the Group 1 participants was the sentence building section, discussed in further detail in the next section. Since most students have

familiarity, multiple-choice questions were chosen to facilitate an easy experience with the test.

After consulting these resources, the test was developed into nine sections based on different testable skill sets: Listening, speaking, writing, grammar, vocabulary, build a sentence, reading, translation (English> German & German>English), and culture. The listening, speaking, and reading sections were taken from a resource test available on the Goethe Institute's website² for the A1 level (Balme, 2013). This test is given to students who wish to go on to the next level, A2. Furthermore, the rest of the test was created through consultation with the German professor at CSU, Fresno and the first thousand German word list. Moreover, the sections were chosen to represent the skills that each student/participant should attain through either the use of the application or the university level language course.

The first section, listening³, was taken from the Goethe Institute's A1 level test. It consists of six multiple-choice questions; for each questions there is a short conversation. The conversation is played twice for the participants to ensure there was nothing missed and to provide clarification. Also, there is an adequate break in between each conversation of approximately 20 seconds. After listening to each conversation the test-taker is then prompted to answer one question, which involves three pictures and a few words for each to choose from. Some of the questions are very clear while others can be more difficult, thus creating a challenge for the participants.

² <http://www.goethe.de/lrn/prj/pba/bes/sd1/mat/enindex.htm>

³ There is a transcript of the listening section in Appendix C.

Next, the speaking section, also taken from the Goethe Institute A1 level test and adapted, consisted of a simple task. The participants were given a sheet with seven cues on it. The cues were: *Name* (name), *Alter* (age), *Land* (country), *Wohnort* (residence), *Sprachen* (languages), *Beruf* (job), and *Hobby* (hobby). Then, participants were asked to say different things about themselves in at least five complete sentences in German. If the participants were unable to use the cues and couldn't say anything about themselves, they then were asked about what they did yesterday (*Was haben Sie gestern gemacht?*).

The writing section comes next, and it consists of only one task. The participants were asked to use at least 10 words in a complete sentence. The question was "What do you like to eat and drink?" This section only tested their basic knowledge of their writing skills since that is the purpose of the course, and it is adequate when compared to the CEFR standards.

There were a total of seven questions in the grammar section. All of the questions looked at different grammar points that were covered in both the application and the university course. This section consisted of multiple-choice questions, and the questions were in sentence form with a blank in which the participants must select the correct word to make the sentence grammatical. The first question dealt with the participle form of the verb in the present perfect tense. Next, the second question asked for the appropriate subordinator based on the word order and content of the sentence. The third question, based on the content of the sentence, looked for the appropriate adjective form of the word. The fourth question asked for the correct declination of the word each (*jeder*) based on the case of the sentence. The fifth question looked for the correct plural form of the word man (*Männer*). The sixth question looked for the dative personal pronoun

him (*ihm*). The seventh question looked for correct conjugation based on the content of the sentence, or subject-verb agreement, of the verb (*isst*).

The next section of the test was the vocabulary section. This section consisted of five questions, all of which looked for knowledge of the first thousand words of German. In order for the students to choose the right word, the participants had to understand the context of the sentence. Only then would the participants be capable of choosing the most appropriate word based on the content.

The sixth section, build a sentence, tested the participants' skills in German word order and verb conjugation. In this section, the words were presented separately, and the participants were tasked with reorganizing the words in the correct manner and conjugating the verb correctly based on the subject of the sentence.

In the seventh section, reading, the participants were tasked with multiple choice questions based on a passage that was taken from the Goethe Institute's A1 level test. The specific questions were adapted to this test from true/ false to multiple-choice in order for the questions to be more appropriate based on the readings. There were two passages with a total of five questions.

The next section, section 8, was the translation section; this section was included because DuoLingo has many activities within each lesson that teach the language through translation. There were a total of four questions with two from German to English and two from English to German. The words were selected from the first thousand words⁴, and the grammar for the sentences was selected

⁴ <http://wortschatz.uni-leipzig.de/Papers/top1000de.txt>

based on the grammar that the participants from both groups would have encountered.

Finally, the last section of the test dealt with culture. This was probably the most debated section to include in the test because the application, DuoLingo, does not have any explicit activities dealing with culture, but the university course does. This section was ultimately included because culture has a major role in language (Calvi & Geerts, 1998). There are some things that can only be learned in a classroom or by actually experiencing the culture.

3.3 How the Test Was Scored

The greater part of the test was scored on a correct or incorrect basis with the majority of the questions only receiving one point, e.g., listening, grammar, vocabulary, and reading. Other sections required more detail, and thus were scored differently. The details of those sections' assessments are explained below.

The speaking section, section 2, was by far the most difficult to score. This is due to the fact that speaking and a point value system do not directly correlate. The German professor and I took into account how many sentences were spoken, the content of the sentences, the grammaticality, and the fluency of the sentences. After these considerations, the score for each participant was put onto a 6-point scale (0: Nothing produced; 1: Failure to communicate effectively; 2: Difficulty communicating effectively; 3: Little difficulty in communicating effectively; 4: Communicates effectively; 5: Complete ease in communicating effectively).

The sentence building section was scored based on two criteria. The first point was awarded for proper word order in the sentence. The second point was given for correct conjugation of the verb or verbs that were in the sentence.

The translation section was very clear, but still more complex than just assigning a point. This section was scored based on the general meaning of the translation created. If the sentence had the correct meaning, but there were some minor mistakes a point was still given. This is because the most important aspect of translation is the idea, and if the idea was present, then a point was awarded.

Finally, the last section of the test was the culture section. Despite the questions for this section being open-ended, the assignment of points for a correct answer was fairly easy. The first question gave two options, so the participants had to decide which one was correct. The second question was asking for a number, and the participants had to be within 5 of the correct answer, which was 16. The third question asked for a specific name, so if the name was not correct then no points were awarded. Question number 4 was perhaps the easiest one with many answers because it asked for a German food, which can be something of general knowledge. The last question asked for the capital (Berlin) of Germany, and there is only one correct answer.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

Once the data was gathered and put into tables, the scores for each group were averaged in Microsoft Excel; also, each individual section's scores for both groups were averaged. Participants 1 through 10 are from Group 1, German 1A, and participants 11 through 15 are from Group 2, DuoLingo.

4.2 The Data

Table 1 and Table 2 show the scores for the speaking section for both Groups 1 and 2. Group 1's highest score was 5 while the lowest score was 2. Group 2's highest score was 1 and the lowest was 0. Moreover, the points were averaged with Group 1 and 2 receiving 3.75 and 0.2 points, respectively.

Table 1

Group 1 Speaking Scores

Particip.	P. 1	P. 2	P. 3	P. 4	P. 5	P. 6	P. 7	P. 8	P. 9	P. 10
Score	5	3	2	2.5	3.5	4.5	5	4	4	4

Table 2

Group 2 Speaking Scores

Participant	P. 11	P. 12	P. 13	P. 14	P. 15
Score	0	0	1	0	0

The second section of the test was the listening section; the total points possible was 6 points (Tables 3 and 4). The mean score for Group's 1 and 2 were 4.1 and 4.2, respectively.

Table 3

Group 1 Listening Scores

Particip.	P. 1	P. 2	P. 3	P. 4	P. 5	P. 6	P. 7	P. 8	P. 9	P. 10
Score	3	4	5	3	5	4	5	3	5	4

Table 4

Group 2 Listening Scores

Participant	P. 11	P. 12	P. 13	P. 14	P. 15
Score	5	5	4	3	4

The next section, section 3, was the writing portion of the test (Tables 5 and 6). The total points possible for this section were 10, and there were multiple participants in both groups who achieved this score. The mean score for Groups 1 and 2 were 8.2 and 7 points, respectively.

Table 5

Group 1 Writing Scores

Particip.	P. 1	P. 2	P. 3	P. 4	P. 5	P. 6	P. 7	P. 8	P. 9	P. 10
Score	10	10	8	10	0	10	10	8	8	8

Table 6

Group 2 Writing Scores

Participant	P. 11	P. 12	P. 13	P. 14	P. 15
Score	5	10	10	0	10

The grammar section was worth a total of seven points (Tables 7 and 8). There was only one participant who achieved the total points in Group 1. The highest score in Group 2 was 2 points. The means for both groups were 3.4 and 0.6 points, respectively.

Table 7

Group 1 Grammar Scores

Particip.	P. 1	P. 2	P. 3	P. 4	P. 5	P. 6	P. 7	P. 8	P. 9	P. 10
Score	3	1	1	4	3	2	7	6	4	3

Table 8

Group 2 Grammar Scores

Participant	P. 11	P. 12	P. 13	P. 14	P. 15
Score	2	0	1	0	0

In the vocabulary section, there were a total of 5 points. Participants 3 and 7 scored five points each in Group 1, and in Group 2 Participant 11 scored the most with 2 points (Tables 9 and 10). The means for both groups were 3.1 and 2.2 points, respectively.

Table 9

Group 1 Vocabulary Scores

Particip.	P. 1	P. 2	P. 3	P. 4	P. 5	P. 6	P. 7	P. 8	P. 9	P. 10
Score	3	1	5	3	1	4	5	4	3	2

Table 10

Group 2 Vocabulary Scores

Participant	P. 11	P. 12	P. 13	P. 14	P. 15
Score	1	2	5	1	2

The sixth section, sentence building, was scored using two criteria totaling six points for the three questions (Tables 11 and 12). There was only one participant, Participant 7, who scored the total possible points for this section. The means for Groups 1 and 2 were 3.8 and 0.6 points, respectively.

Table 11

Group 1 Sentence Building Scores

Particip.	P. 1	P. 2	P. 3	P. 4	P. 5	P. 6	P. 7	P. 8	P. 9	P. 10
Score	5	5	0	3	1	5	6	5	5	3

Table 12

Group 2 Sentence Building Scores

Participant	P. 11	P. 12	P. 13	P. 14	P. 15
Score	3	0	0	0	0

In the reading section there were a total of five points; Participants 6 and 7 scored all five points (Tables 13 and 14). The means of the scores for Groups 1 and 2 are 3.1 and 3 points, respectively.

The translation section was worth 4 points, and only one participant from both groups achieved all 4 points, Participant 7 (Tables 15 and 16). Group 1 had a mean score of 2.2 points, and Group 2 had a mean score of 0.6 points.

Table 13

Group 1 Reading Scores

Particip.	P. 1	P. 2	P. 3	P. 4	P. 5	P. 6	P. 7	P. 8	P. 9	P. 10
Score	3	1	1	3	3	5	5	4	3	3

Table 14

Group 2 Reading Scores

Participant	P. 11	P. 12	P. 13	P. 14	P. 15
Score	2	3	4	3	3

Table 15

Group 1 Translation Scores

Particip.	P. 1	P. 2	P. 3	P. 4	P. 5	P. 6	P. 7	P. 8	P. 9	P. 10
Score	2	2	1	2	3	1	4	3	2	2

Table 16

Group 2 Translation Scores

Participant	P. 11	P. 12	P. 13	P. 14	P. 15
Score	0	0	1	1	1

The last section of the test, the culture section, was worth five points, and neither group had any participants score the full amount (Tables 17 and 18). The mean score for Groups 1 and 2 were both 2.2 points.

Finally, summing the total of the participants' scores in each section there is a possibility to achieve an overall score of 53 points (Tables 19 and 20).

Participant 7, in Group 1, was the only participant to score the nearest with a total of 49 points. The overall mean scores for Groups 1 and 2 are 33.85 and 20.6 points respectively. With both of the average scores, the difference between the averages is 13.25 points.

Table 17

Group 1 Culture Scores

Particip.	P. 1	P. 2	P. 3	P. 4	P. 5	P. 6	P. 7	P. 8	P. 9	P. 10
Score	3	2	1	2	4	2	2	2	1	3

Table 18

Group 2 Culture Scores

Participant	P. 11	P. 12	P. 13	P. 14	P. 15
Score	2	2	2	2	3

Table 19

Group 1 Total Scores

Particip.	P. 1	P. 2	P. 3	P. 4	P. 5	P. 6	P. 7	P. 8	P. 9	P. 10
Score	37	29	24	32.5	23.5	37.5	49	39	35	32

Table 20

Group 2 Total Scores

Participant	P. 11	P. 12	P. 13	P. 14	P. 15
Score	20	22	28	10	23

Table 21 shows the total hours of application use the participants in Group 2 recorded.

Table 21

Group 2 Total Hours of DuoLingo Usage

Participant	P. 11	P. 12	P. 13	P. 14	P. 15
Hours	28	28	35	26	31

4.3 Statistics

For the sections that had data that was very close or overlapping, a two-tailed T Test was run assuming equal variance. Table 22 shows the results from the test.

Table 22

Individual Section T Test Results

Section	Listening	Writing	Vocabulary	Reading	Culture
T Test	0.83588284	0.547511654	0.296731991	0.881969776	1

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

5.1 The Overall Study

The first item worth noting about the participants is that in the beginning for Group 2 there were a total of 8 participants. When it came time to test the participants for their acquired language skills, it came to be known that there were three participants, from Group two, who only completed an hour, at most, of time using the application. Since their data would not help the study in any way, they were not tested. This shows that learning a language takes motivation and commitment, which are qualities that not everyone has.

5.2 Test Sections

The listening section of the test proved to be fairly easy for most of the participants. Both groups scored practically the same in this section. There was a difference of only 0.1 points amongst the means for both groups. For this task the participants in both groups performed well with the total scores for each participant averaging at 60% or above.

The Participants in Group 2, DuoLingo group, attempted the same speaking portion as Group 1, German 1A course, and failed miserably. Only one of the 5 participants in Group 2 was able to utter a single sentence in German (*Meine Name ist Amy.* = My name is Amy). The other 4 participants just stared blankly as the voice recorder started. Despite the fact that the application, DuoLingo, uses speech recognition software, it does not utilize spontaneous speech, unlike a classroom environment. The way the application works is it shows a sentence in German, and then the participant is to repeat the sentence. This application is geared more toward pronunciation and not toward spontaneous speech production. The low scores that Group 2 received in the speaking section can be attributed to

the fact that the application does not provide the users with the opportunity to practice any form of spontaneous speech.

Both groups proved to be very successful in the writing section. This success can be attributed to the fact that this task only required the participants' knowledge of basic words in German. More than half of the participants received 8 or more points in this section.

As can be seen from the previous chapter, neither group performed very well in the grammar section of the test. Group 1 did outperform Group 2 by a significant amount. This can be attributed to the fact that Group 1 receives more formal training in the classroom with the various grammar topics, whereas Group 2 has substantially less formal training with grammar through the smartphone application. In the classroom, students have multiple resources for the various grammar topics, e.g., the teacher, the textbook, and classmates. In the application there is sometimes a very brief explanation for a newly introduced sentence structure. The application and the internet are the only resources the application users have access to. This can sometimes lead to confusion and never truly understanding the grammar of the language that is being used.

“Although there are many existing prospects for more sophisticated programs for grammar learning, they do not appear to have reached the wider language education market, and it is fair to say that most grammar programs are still very basic in the ways they process learner input, diagnose errors, and provide feedback” (Levy, 2009, p. 770). This quote is very fitting in reference to Group 2's performance on the grammar section. It seems that implicit grammar instruction does not lead to knowledge of the language's grammar explicitly. For most native speakers there is no knowledge of the actual grammar unless there has been explicit instruction or a second language has been learned in the classroom.

When looking at the averages for the vocabulary section, Group 1 outperformed Group 2; albeit, the outperformance was only by less than a whole point, 0.9 to be exact. This was an interesting outcome since there is more interaction in Group 1 with a wider range of vocabulary in the German 1A course¹. Most new vocabulary words are introduced in the application through pictures, in which the users must attempt to match with the given word. For example, one of the questions in the vocabulary section:

Ich _____ mit dem Auto nach Berlin.

fahre

suche

reite

mache

I _____ with the(DAT) car to Berlin

drive (a car)

search

ride (a horse)

make

Correct Answer: *Ich fahre mit dem Auto nach Berlin.*

I am driving by car to Berlin.

This question specifically required the participants to draw upon their knowledge of the context of the sentence. The distinction between the two possible answers, *fahre* and *reite*, is that one verb is specifically for driving man-made objects, and the other verb is for riding an animal, in this case a horse, respectively. Group 1 had a 100% success rate with this particular question, whereas Group 2 did not have a single participant answer this question correctly.

¹ In the textbook for the German 1A course, each chapter has a list of approximately one hundred specific vocabulary words. There are still many other words in the course and book that the students must come to recognize. Also, for each chapter, one of the requirements of the students is to create a flashcard for each word; the students are then given a grade for completing this requirement.

The sentence building part of the test, in which the participants were given all of the words of the sentence, but in a scrambled order with verbs that were not conjugated, was another section that Group 2 had a tremendous amount of difficulty with. This is not a task that would be encountered in the application. What this section specifically tests is the participant's knowledge of German word order, which can be very strict. One way these results can be interpreted is that users of the application are not aware of the strict rules in which words are ordered in German. For example, one of the questions for the test was:

1. Georg/ dem Hund/ geben/ müssen/ das Wasser
 Georg/ the (DAT) dog/ give (INF)/ must (INF)/ the water
 Correct Answer: *Georg muss dem Hund das Wasser geben.*
 Georg must give the dog the water.

This particular question had very interesting answers. The modal verb *müssen* must come after the subject; all modal verbs must appear here first. The second verb in the sentence, *geben*, is automatically put at the end of the sentence, and it must stay in its infinitive form. The interesting answers came from the participants in Group 1. Almost half of these participants chose to put the ditransitive verb *geben* after the subject and the modal verb *müssen* at the end of the sentence.

In the reading section, both groups of participants scored almost identical averages with a difference of only 0.1 points. This suggests that both the application and the German 1A course foster good reading skills.

The translation section had perhaps the most surprising results, especially among Group 2. The results are very surprising because the application depends on translation for many of the activities in which the users are engaged. Only 3

participants in Group 2 scored just 1 point; the others scored nothing. The sentences that the users were to translate involved both vocabulary and grammatical structures with which the application users would have familiarity. So, it is astounding that Group 2 was so unsuccessful with this task.

The culture section produced an interesting result, where both groups had the same average scores, 2.2 points. Most of these questions were based on common knowledge; most who have some familiarity with German culture would find them easy answer.

Overall, Group 1 outperformed Group 2 on the test as a whole. This outperformance can be seen as a means of suggesting that learning a language in a classroom still has many benefits versus learning a language through free software on an electronic device. As stated previously, learning a language is a difficult task for adult-learners, and many of the methods available are not always as reliable as an actual class.

If the hours of use by Group 2 participants are compared to their respective overall test scores, one can see a small trend that the more time a user spends on the application, the better the overall performance on the test.

5.3 Active Versus Passive Tasks

One of the most interesting aspects of this study was the participants' performance on the active tasks versus the passive tasks. The passive tasks were the listening, reading, grammar, and vocabulary sections. These sections required the recollection of knowledge without any output. The active tasks were the speaking, writing, word order and verb conjugation, translation, and culture sections. In the active sections output was of the main importance, whereas in the passive sections, input and comprehensibility were important. Group 1 performed

well in the active tasks, outperforming Group 2 by a wide margin. Group 2 performed well on the passive tasks, but Group 1 performed equally as well. This can be attributed to the fact that the application, Group 2, focuses mainly on passive learning with few active activities; whereas, Group 1 receives training in both passive and active activities.

5.4 Statistics

After the data were collected, it was noticed that some of the scores were closely related. In order to find out if these scores were distinguishable, a T Test was run in excel for the listening, writing, vocabulary, reading, and culture sections of the test (Table 22 on Page 23). According to the results, the values of 'p' were greater than 0.05 for each of these sections, which means that the results cannot be distinguished. This can be interpreted to mean that both the German 1A and DuoLingo groups are equivalent in teaching the listening, writing, vocabulary, reading, and culture skill sets to the learners. The other sections of the test did not have close enough or overlapping scores to warrant a T Test. It can be seen that these skills are very much distinguishable from each other.

5.5 Negotiation of Meaning

When it comes to choosing an answer, and the test-taker does not know the correct one immediately, most start looking at the question logically and resort to the knowledge they have of the second language in order to negotiate the meaning (Ellis, 1997). Although there is no direct evidence of the participants' use of negotiation of meaning, it can surely be assumed for some of the participants' answers in the multiple-choice sections. Moreover, the use of negotiation of meaning would be considerably more difficult in the production sections of the test.

5.6 Motivation

As discussed in chapter 2, motivation is a major factor in language learning. If one does not have reasons (motivation) to learn another language, not much language learning will take place (Oxford, 1996). This can be said of most of the participants in Group 2. Moreover, as mentioned earlier in this chapter there were three participants who ended up not completing their agreed upon portion of application usage. This is self-evident that motivation is a significant factor in second language learning. Unlike a person's first language, which is motivated through the need to communicate, most second language learners have ulterior motives, such as careers or migrating to another country in order to learn another language (Oxford, 1996).

5.7 Research Questions Addressed

In this section each of the research questions are answered.

1. Will using the application 'Duolingo' to learn a second language (German) prepare the users with the same skill sets that would be attained through an entry-level language course (German 1A) at the university level?
2. What skill sets will the users of the application gain?
3. What skill sets are attained through the traditional entry-level university course?
4. How did both groups perform in comparison to each other?

As seen from the data and discussion, the answer to question 1 is simply no. Looking at the results of the test, with the majority of the sections, Group 1 outperformed Group 2 by a wide margin.

The skill sets attained by the Group 2 participants are listening, writing, and reading. Listening and reading skills are passive tasks; writing is the only production or active task that the users seem to have gained or excelled in.

Group 1, the university course group, achieved success² in the speaking, listening, writing, vocabulary, build sentence, reading, and translation sections.

In comparison to each other Group 1 outperformed Group 2 by a wide margin. Nevertheless, according to the results of the test, the data suggest that adhering to the suggested time-usage provided by DuoLingo is not the equivalent of an entry-level university language course.

² Success for the purposes of this study is averaging more than half of the available points for the section.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

Throughout the process of the experiment, there were some items that could have been executed in a more formal fashion. One item in particular that was not realized until after it was too late, was that there were no recordings created of the German 1A course participants' speaking section of the test. This was a lesson learned, and recordings were created for the DuoLingo group, despite the fact that only one participant was capable of uttering a single sentence in German. The writing section could have been more challenging for the participants instead of just asking about something very basic such as food and drink. The question could have been open ended, and it could have required more critical thinking skills to show the participants' true second language skills. This would have more than likely brought forth results that showed a greater differentiation between the groups.

Perhaps if the participants in Group 2 had used the application for a longer period of time, their scores might have reflected the longer use time. This insight is based on the data that have been shown with the overall score and the amount of hours in Group 2's application usage. It is very doubtful that the scores of Group 2 would be comparable to the Group 1 scores still even with extended application usage.

Learning a second language is a great task to embark up on, and there are many ways in which one can accomplish this, whilst also being successful. Technology can be a great influence in proving a language learner's success rate, but as a sole contributor can lead to unsuccessful consequences. The only thing that matters in the end with language learning is its use outside of the classroom

and away from technology because language is the way of human interaction and communication.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: GERMAN SKILLS TEST

Comprehensive German Skills Test

Name: _____

Listening**Hören**

Modellsatz

1 Was kostet der Pullover?

 a) Dreißig Euro. b) Fünfundneunzig Euro. c) Neunzehn Euro
fünfundneunzig Cent.

2 Wie spät ist es?

 a) 15 Uhr. b) Gleich 5 Uhr. c) Halb 5 Uhr.

3 Was isst die Frau im Restaurant?

 a) Pommes. b) Fisch. c) Wurst.

Start Deutsch 1

Kandidatenblätter

4 In welche Klasse geht Frau Hegers Sohn?



a In die neunte Klasse.



b In die dritte Klasse.



c In die vierte Klasse.

5 Wie kommt die Frau in den 2. Stock?



a Mit dem Aufzug.



b Auf der Treppe um die Ecke.



c Mit der Rolltreppe.

6 Wohin fährt Herr Albers?



a In Urlaub ans Meer.



b Zur Arbeit.



c Zur Familie.

Start Deutsch 1

Kandidatenblätter

Teil 1 Sich vorstellen.***Name?******Alter?******Land?******Wohnort?******Sprachen?******Beruf?******Hobby?***

Writing

1. Was essen und trinken Sie gern? In approximately 10 words tell what you like to eat and drink.
-
-

Grammar

1. Unsere Gäste sind gestern _____
A. kommend
B. zu kommen
C. kommen
D. gekommen
2. Wir sind gestern nicht schwimmen gegangen, _____ es stark regnete.
A. weil
B. seit
C. für
D. darum
3. Er stellt viele Fragen, denn er ist sehr _____.
A. glücklich
B. höflich
C. merkwürdig
D. neugierig
4. Der Milchmann kommt _____ Tag um sechs Uhr.
A. jeder
B. jedes
C. jedem
D. jeden
5. Kennen Sie die Mutter des _____?
A. Mannes
B. Mann
C. Männer
D. Mannen
6. Er gibt _____ den iPad zum Geburtstag.
A. ihn
B. mich
C. ihm
D. Sie
7. Er _____ jeden Tag zwei Äpfel.
A. esst
B. isst
C. essen
D. ist

Vocabulary

1. Ich _____ mit dem Auto nach Berlin.
 - A. fahre
 - B. suche
 - C. reite
 - D. mache
2. In meiner _____ habe ich mit vielen Spielzeugen gespielt.
 - A. Erfahrung
 - B. Bemerkung
 - C. Kindheit
 - D. Dunkelheit
3. Kartoffeln, Karotten, und Zwiebeln sind _____.
 - A. Obst
 - B. Gemüse
 - C. Tiere
 - D. Menschen
4. Deutschland, die USA, und Groß Britannien sind _____.
 - A. Städte
 - B. Länder
 - C. Land
 - D. Stadt
5. Ich habe noch Durst. Bringen Sie mir _____ Glas Bier!
 - A. anderes
 - B. etwas
 - C. noch ein
 - D. noch mal

Bilden Sie Sätze: Pay attention to word order which may be different than the cue

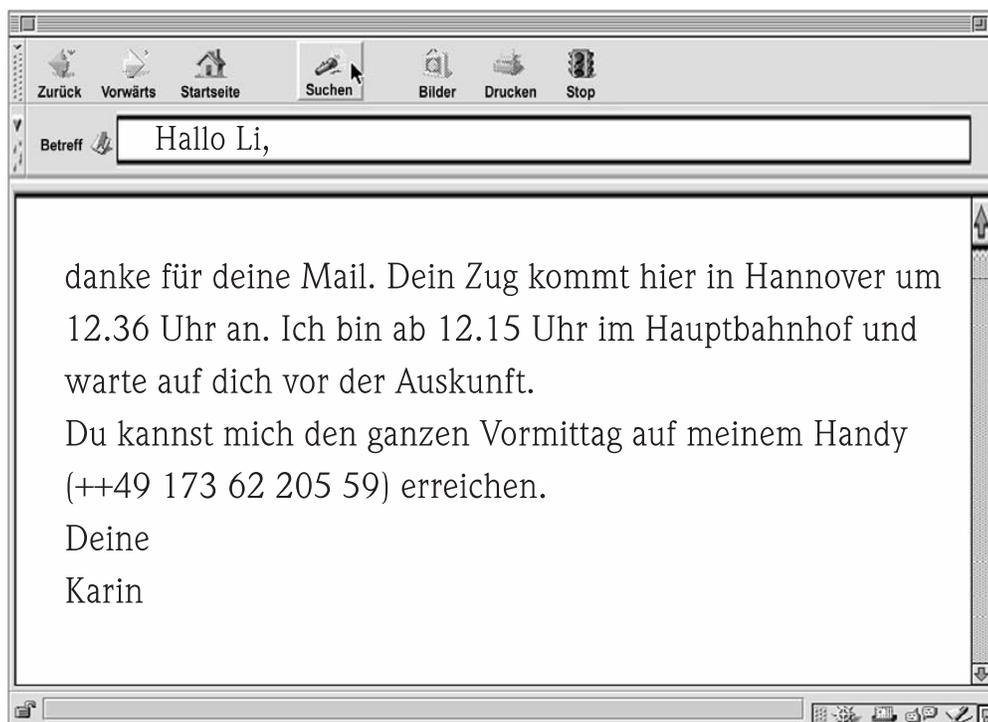
1. Georg/ dem Hund/ geben/ müssen/ das Wasser

2. können/ die Tür/ du/ öffnen

3. nicht/ das Wasser/ sein (Verb)/ sauber

Reading Section

Read the following passage about Lis and her friend Karin. Then answer the questions that immediately follow the passage.



1. Wann kommt der Zug an?
 - A. nach halb eins
 - B. vor halb eins
 - C. viertel nach zwölf
2. Wann kann Lis Karin erreichen?
 - A. den ganzen Tag
 - B. in der Nacht
 - C. den ganzen Vormittag

Read the following passage about Carmen and Ralf. Then answer the questions that immediately follow the passage.

Liebe Carmen,
am kommenden Sonntag habe ich Geburtstag.
Ich möchte gerne mit dir feiern und lade dich herzlich zu meiner Party am Samstagabend ein. Wir fangen um 21 Uhr an. Ist das okay für dich? Es werden viele Leute da sein, die du auch kennst. Kannst du vielleicht einen Salat mitbringen? Und vergiss bitte nicht einen Pullover oder eine Jacke! Wir wollen nämlich draußen im Garten feiern. Ich freue mich sehr auf dich!
Bis zum Wochenende
Ralf

1. Wann hat Ralf Geburtstag?
 - A. am letzten Wochenende
 - B. am kommenden Wochenende
 - C. am Samstag
2. Wie viele Leute hat Ralf eingeladen?
 - A. zwei oder drei
 - B. nur zehn
 - C. viele
3. Wo findet der Party statt?
 - A. im Haus
 - B. draußen im Garten
 - C. in einem Restaurant

Translation: Translate the given sentences into either German or English.

1. Ich habe Pizza für das Abendessen gegessen.

2. Herr Schneider fährt nach Wien.

3. I studied at the University of Heidelberg.

4. I am thirsty.

Culture

1. Is the south of Germany predominantly Catholic or Protestant?

2. Approximately how many Bundesländer are there in Germany?

3. Who is the Chancellor of Germany? _____

4. What is a typical German food? _____

5. What is the capital of Germany? _____

APPENDIX B: SURVEY

Survey

Name: _____

Have you taken any German courses before? If so, please specify. (i.e. High School)

How have you been in contact with the German language previous to this course? If so, please explain.

Do you have any relatives or friends who speak German? If so, please explain.

How long have you been learning German?

APPENDIX C: LISTENING SECTION TRANSCRIPT

Start Deutsch 1

Modellsatz

Transkriptionen

Dieser Test hat drei Teile. Sie hören kurze Gespräche und Ansagen.

Zu jedem Text gibt es eine Aufgabe.

Lesen Sie zuerst die Aufgabe, hören Sie dann den Text dazu.

Kreuzen Sie die richtige Lösung an.

Schreiben Sie zum Schluss Ihre Lösungen auf den Antwortbogen.

Teil 1 Was ist richtig? Kreuzen Sie an: a, b oder c. Sie hören jeden Text **zweimal**.

Beispiel

Frau: Ach, Verzeihung, wo finde ich Herrn Schneider vom Betriebsrat?

Mann: Schneider. Warten Sie mal. Ich glaube, der ist in Zimmer Nummer 254.

Ja, stimmt, Zimmer 254. Das ist im zweiten Stock. Da können Sie den Aufzug hier nehmen.

Frau: Zweiter Stock, Zimmer 254.
Okay, vielen Dank.

Nummer 2

Passant: Ach, entschuldigen Sie bitte.

Passantin: Ja bitte.

Passant: Haben Sie eine Uhr? ...

Wie spät ist es bitte?

Passantin: Ja – jetzt ist es gleich 5 Uhr.

Passant: Was, schon 5. Vielen Dank,
Wiedersehen.

Nummer 1

Kunde: Entschuldigung, was kostet dieser Pullover jetzt? Da steht 30 Prozent billiger.

Verkäuferin: Einen Moment bitte ...
neunzehnfünfundneunzig.

Kunde: 19,95 Euro?

Verkäuferin: Ja, Euro natürlich.

Kunde: Hm, ... ok, den nehme ich.

Nummer 3

Kellner: Was wünschen Sie bitte?

Gast: Ich hätte gern die Salatplatte und ein ...

Kellner: Entschuldigung, die Salatplatte ist leider aus, aber die Bratwurst kann ich Ihnen empfehlen ... ganz frisch heute.

Gast: Nein danke ... ich esse kein Fleisch.
Gibt es etwas ohne Fleisch?

Kellner: Ja ... nicht mehr viel: Fisch oder ...
Pommes.

Gast: Fisch ... hm ... Tja, dann wohl die
Pommes.

Hören

Prüferblätter

Nummer 4

Kollege: Haben Sie Kinder, Frau Heger?

Kollegin: Ja, einen Sohn.

Kollege: Und wie alt ist er?

Kollegin: Neun Jahre ... seit gestern.

Kollege: Ah, dann geht er ja schon zur Schule?

Kollegin: Ja klar, schon in die dritte Klasse.

Nummer 5

Kundin: Ach, entschuldigen Sie, wie komme ich denn hier in den zweiten Stock?

Die Rolltreppe da vorn ist kaputt.

Verkäufer: Da gehen Sie hier rechts um die Ecke und nehmen den Aufzug.

Kundin: Um die Ecke rechts. Danke.

Nummer 6

Kollegin: Guten Morgen, Herr Albers.

So früh schon bei der Arbeit?

Kollege: Ja, ich habe noch viel zu tun.

Morgen fahre ich doch für 3 Wochen weg.

Kollegin: Ach ja, das hab' ich vergessen.

Wohin fahren Sie denn?

Kollege: Zu meinen Verwandten nach Polen.

Kollegin: Na dann ... schöne Zeit.

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