

## Evaluating English-Learning Tablet Apps before Implementing Them at a Brazilian University: Busuu x Babbel

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### Abstract

Due to the access that Brazilians are having to ICT through a more balanced economic situation, professors have witnessed an increasing presence of smartphones and tablets in university classrooms. This study evaluated the pedagogical resources as well as the overall interface functions designed to promote English learning via T.A.L.L (Tablet-Assisted-Language-Learning) from two applications (*free versions*) available at AppStore and Google Play. This research helped to evaluate both apps and it will be considered to the implementation of one of them in the English Language course syllabus (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> semesters) from Universidade Tiradentes – a 50 year old Brazilian University. We believe that apps focused on English learning are somehow used by most university graduates, not only English language majors.

Mobile learning happens anywhere, in special outside of class, it is focused on the student (learner-centered) and it is thoroughly ubiquitous (Valk, Rashid & Elder, 2010). To Vavoula (2005), "any learning situation that is not at fixed predetermined location has to be defined as m-learning". The learning opportunities provided by these gadgets regarding their time and space possibilities cannot be taken for granted and any study dwelling with it has to be considered. Learning through an online community reinforces L2 as we could see on the concepts of Lan et al (2007), "language learning is no longer limited to one-way individual learning, but can be expanded to a two- or multi-way collaborative learning".

As a professor at the English College at UNIT (Aracaju, Brazil), I will be on the forefront of the implementation of m-learning to the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> semesters next year. This new pedagogical procedure will prepare "future teachers of the idiom to the reality of their audience in post-modern educational times" (Campos, 2008). We decided to perform an Action Research (AR) because according to Torbert (2004), AR is "an action that helps individuals, teams and organizations become more capable of self-transformation and thus more creative and more aware". We investigated all learning possibilities presented on the applications named *Busuu* and *Babbel*, our study analyzed their HCI (human-computer interaction) and classes content, how the apps define language progress, the choice of vocabulary, themes, dialogues and finally, the pedagogical approach focused on language learning that these tablet versions presented; as we found that notebook and desktop versions are a little different.

The findings helped me understand which app would be more adequate to the course subjects entitled English Language I and English Language II. As a conclusion, we ended opting for one of the applications as it presented a wider range of possibilities for effective learning and a higher level of adequacy to the profiles of the students we have. Summing up, tablets are here to stay, at households and educational institutions, and as Brazilians are hosting the next World Cup and Olympics Games learning English is not a personal option for our population – it is an urgent necessity.