Socrative: Increasing Students' Motivation and Improving Communication Competences by Making Use of Apps

Ionut Capeneata[1]

Abstract

This paper tries to present the way in which applications can be integrated in the French class and the results of the project after a year. The project has been implemented throughout the 2015-2016 school year and the target group of this project was represented by a class of 32 students from Ion Luca Caragiale National College from Moreni, Romania, 11th graders, 12 boys and 20 girls, with poor competences in French and a very low motivation for studying this language. As the initial test shown, the students' level of French was mostly A1, according to CEFR, and after I have applied a questionnaire to find out how motivated they were, I realized that they were not very interested in studying French. In order to develop students' competences and to increase their motivation for studying French I have integrated during the French class an app – Socrative. At the beginning this thing was seen very strange, as they were not used to use their smartphones during the classes, but they liked it. As an exit ticket quiz shown, after the first class 100% of the students liked this activity and wanted to use it during the French class. After three months, the students' level of motivation and their involvement during the French class increased, and their competences in French improved. As a progress test shown, they managed to reach A1+ level after three months and at the end of the school year A2 level, according to CEFR. The observation grids I have applied shown that the students' motivation and their involvement increased, and some questionnaires and a focused group revealed that the students love French and the French class now.

It is also notable the case of five students which after six months managed to pass a simulation of the DELF exam on the B1 level.

1. Introduction

One of the biggest challenges for today's teachers is how to educate Homo Zappiens in a more efficient way. Due to the changes that occurs at the level of the cognitive patterns, the way in which the students concentrate and maintain their concentration changed in the last two decades [1], but also the way in which they can be motivated suffered major changes. It also affected the way in which they communicate [3], the internet becoming the most efficient and the most preferred way of communication among children and teenagers and as we can easily see, the computers begin to lose the battle with the smartphones and tablets, letting the way open for the applications (aka apps), highly structured shortcuts, which become a part of the students' daily life, thanks to the mobility and the comfort they provide. The students internalized the principle that the apps should satisfy all our desires, and if there is no app to satisfy one particular desire, this desire doesn't matter, [2] that's why these apps have a great potential to be used in education, being a source of motivation and engagement, satisfying the students' dependence of apps and smartphones, and creating a bridge between digital immigrants and pure-digital natives, as we always witness teachers who say that their students always watch their smartphones, even during the classes, and they don't know what to do. Here's a solution – let's use them in a constructive way.

Taking into consideration that most of nowadays students never get lost [2] because they use apps that can guide them everywhere, the school should adapt to their needs so that they do not lose compass when learning. One way is by integrating the apps into the classroom, taking advantage of its app-dependent side, but using them in an app-enabling way.

2. Methodology
2.1. General Data about the research

At the beginning of the school year I got a new class to teach French to. It was a philology class, 11th graders, with an intensive study of English. I discovered that this was a class with poor results in French, as the initial test shown – most students had an A1 level of French.

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[1] Ion Luca Caragiale National College, Romania

After applying a questionnaire, I found out that they weren't motivated to study this language, considering that it is boring, useless, and there is no point in studying it, so I began asking myself what to do. Having the experience of some previous researches on ICT, I decided to integrate an app, and taking advantage of the fact that all of them were app-dependents and pure-digital natives I started to implement this project, in order to see what are the results of using apps in the foreign language class and their impact upon the students' motivation.

So, the project started in September 2015 and has been implemented throughout the 2015-2016 school year. The target group of this project was represented by a class of 32 students from Ion Luca Caragiale National College from Moreni, Romania, 11th graders, 12 boys and 20 girls, with poor competences in French and a very low motivation for studying this language. After establishing their level in French and their lack of motivation three more steps were to be made:

- establishing which app should I use – so I chose Socrative, a free app which can be used in an enabling way. This app can be used on all types of smartphones and students do not need to create an account; they can log in by simply typing the room's name and their name. Socrative also has some features that can involve all the students; it can provide support for three types of items (multiple choice, true/false and short answer); a "space race" divides the class into two or more competing teams, an "exit ticket" can be used to provide feed-back, and by improvising, it can be used for reading, writing, listening and speaking activities (for example, we can copy a text as a short answer question). The app also offers three types of quizzes (student paced with an immediate feedback, students paced – student navigation, which allows them to navigate the quiz and skip questions their own way, and a teacher paced navigation). There is also a live results table which allows the teacher to monitor their answer and to see who's connected and who's not.
- choosing the suitable activities to assure the students' progress. These activities were chosen gradually, and were focusing all the four main competences from the Common European Framework of Reference.
- monitoring the students' progress, by using progress tests in order to verify the development of the communication competences, but also monitoring grids, and questionnaires to see if there is any improvement regarding their motivation and their attitude towards French.

As this was something new for them, the students were quickly caught up. After the first class with Socrative I applied a questionnaire and results were astonishing: 100% of the students liked this type of French class and would like to continue with this app, but we also encountered a problem: not all the students had internet on their smartphone, as some of them were using it only with a wireless connection, so we came up with a solution – I made a hotspot using my smartphone and shared my internet connection. After seeing it, some students who had a lot of data traffic shared their internet and everybody was then connected.
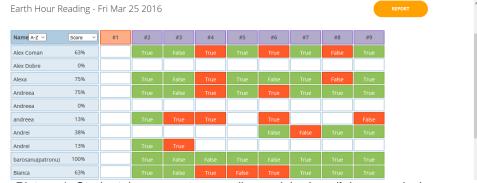
After three months, the progress tests shown that the results were good; the French competences started to improve, most of the students reaching an A1+ level. A questionnaire and the observation grids shown that the students' motivation increased and remained increased, but also involved.

Using the "space race", the students were even more involved, as they were competing against each other and their right answers were the only thing which can boost their team's result. It is interesting that even though the students didn't know who were their team mates they were not very interested in finding out. Their team's success was important.
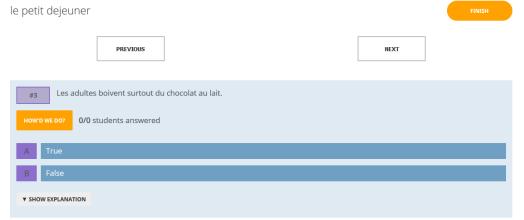
In order to see the students' reaction and to measure the students' involvement, I stopped using Socrative for a while, but after one week, one of them asked me: *Why don't we use Socrative anymore? It was funny.* proving that this new way of learning French is a preferred (and most likely a funny) one for them.

The app was used to develop all the four main competences – reading, writing, listening and speaking, for the listening activities being used with YouTube, as it does not offer support for audio or video files.

It is also notable the case of five students who, after five months managed to pass a simulation of the DELF exam on the B1 level and who decided to attend the real exam next year.
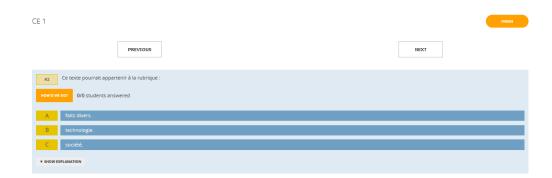
2.2. Examples of activities

Picture 1: Students' answers to a reading activity (true/false exercise)

Picture 2: Listening activity (true/false exercise)

Picture 3: Reading activity (multiple choice exercise)

The first picture and the third picture show students' responses to a "true/false exercise" during a reading activity. As the app do not allow us to insert the text, I came up with the idea to copy it as a short answer question, that's why in the first picture the first column is empty. The green answers are the correct ones while the orange ones are wrong.

In the second picture we can see how a multiple choice looks like in Socrative. The results table are similar to the one from the true/false exercise.

3. Results

Improved competences. At the end of the school year, the students' communication competences in French improved. Most of them managed to reach the A2 level of French as the progress test I applied at the end of the school year shown. It is also notable the case of five students who managed to pass a simulation of the DELF exam on the B1 level.

Motivation. The students' motivation increased, as the observation grids and a focus group shown. They feel more confident now, they enjoy the French class and six of them want to participate at the DELF exam next year on the B1 level.

Involvement. Thanks to this app, the students are more involved now, as using Socrative they always had to provide an answer to each question. Their involvement also increased during the space races, when each of them was part of a team and contributed to the team's success by providing right answers.

The problem with the use of smartphones during classes solved. As the homozappiens are highly app-dependents they were using their smartphones during classes and this thing was upsetting for teachers. Now, they are using them in a constructive way, their app-dependent side being replaced by an app-enabling one as the use of any other app during the French class was replaced by Socrative, feeding thus their dependence.

Positive attitude towards learning. The students are positive now regarding French. They discovered a funny part of this language and this thing changed their perspective upon the French class and school. As they noticed that their competences in French improved they are more confident and they know that it is not impossible to speak French.

4. Conclusions

In conclusion, this was a project that brought back the students' confidence, increased their motivation and changed their attitude towards French. By using apps during the French class we managed to improve students' communication competences and to focus from the use of apps during classes as a distracting element to the use of apps as an approach to teaching, changing the app-dependence into app-enabling.

By using apps at school, we create a familiar context for education, and we meet the students' need of technology. We also boost their confidence and we can show them that every subject can be funny and worth to be studied.

Even though the project has been implemented for a short period of time for us to manage to notice a very significant change in each students' level of French, it's certain that this approach is profitable, because it contextualises the learning process and provides a familiar environment for the digital natives.

Last, but not least, we teachers enjoy our classes and try to search for new ways of adapting the education at our students' needs, and taking into consideration that we leave in a digital era, were the children have access to digital content even from the very beginning of their life, it is very important to keep up with their needs in terms of ICT and media.

References

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