

WAESOL Project Funding Grant Report

Elle Seidensticker & Dr. Kate Mastruserio Reynolds

Central Washington University

In receiving the WAESOL Funding Grant for \$500 to support our research study, *Gamifying Language Learning: Is Duolingo Effective for SLA?*, we felt both honored and encouraged to know that others also recognized the value and relevance of our work. Our study examined the effectiveness of Duolingo for second language acquisition (SLA) and its congruence with established SLA theory and English Language Development (ELD) pedagogy. Specifically, we explored how the application supports or constrains language acquisition through its instructional design, feedback systems, gamified structures, and approaches to vocabulary, grammar, and communicative practice.

Using a heuristic inquiry methodology, our multilingual research team immersed ourselves in the application as language learners while documenting our experiences through screenshots, reflective notes, coding processes, and collaborative analysis discussions. Across the study, we analyzed approximately 274 screenshots, 20 pages of notes, and multiple hours of collaborative discussion and coding. Through this process, we identified patterns related to Duolingo's alignment with theories such as Krashen's Input Hypothesis and Monitor Model, while also recognizing tensions connected to grammar-translation approaches, decontextualized language use, and limited opportunities for authentic interaction.

Our findings suggested that Duolingo can be effective for building high-frequency vocabulary, generating learner output, reinforcing spelling, and providing immediate feedback in developmentally staged ways. However, we also found limitations related to advanced grammar development, authentic discourse production, pronunciation instruction, academic language, and opportunities for meaningful communicative interaction. One particularly important finding involved the disparity between larger language courses, such as Spanish, and less commonly taught

languages, such as Arabic and Greek, where opportunities for interaction and communicative practice were significantly more limited.

Receiving this grant allowed us to dedicate additional time and energy to the research process, including coding, categorizing, discussing findings, and engaging more deeply with SLA and ELD scholarship. As researchers affiliated with Central Washington University and our partner institutions, we learned a tremendous amount through this collaborative process. Working together across perspectives and experiences strengthened our understanding of both language-learning technologies and qualitative research methodologies. We are especially grateful for the mentorship, collaboration, and ongoing dialogue that shaped this project throughout every stage of the research process.

This experience also deepened our understanding of the broader TESOL and multilingual education field. Through this work, we engaged more fully with the professional and academic community surrounding language education and advocacy for multilingual learners, including participation in the Washington Association for the Education of Speakers of Other Languages conference community. Receiving this grant and conducting this research reinforced for us the importance of collaborative inquiry, reflective practice, and continued professional engagement in advancing language education.

We strongly encourage students, educators, and emerging researchers interested in contributing to the field of education to apply for the WAESOL funding grant. We are deeply appreciative of the support and encouragement provided by the WAESOL funding committee and honored to have been selected as recipients. This experience contributed meaningfully to our personal, academic, and professional growth as researchers and educators.

RESEARCH AT A GLANCE

274

screenshots
analyzed

20

pages of reflective
notes

KEY FINDING

Duolingo supported vocabulary, spelling, learner output, and immediate feedback, but offered fewer opportunities for advanced grammar and authentic interaction.