ORIGINAL ARTICLE

USING THE VOSCREEN APPLICATION AS A PEDAGOGICAL TOOL TO IMPROVE STUDENTS' LISTENING AND READING SKILLS IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

UTILIZANDO O APLICATIVO VOSCREEN COMO FERRAMENTA PEDAGÓGICA PARA APERFEIÇOAR AS HABILIDADES DE ESCUTA E LEITURA DE INGLÊS DOS ALUNOS

UTILIZACIÓN DE LA APLICACIÓN VOSCREEN COMO HERRAMIENTA PEDAGÓGICA PARA MEJORAR LAS HABILIDADES DE COMPRENSIÓN AUDITIVA Y LECTURA EN INGLÉS DE LOS ALUMNOS

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ABSTRACT: This research paper introduces the Voscreen application as an extra pedagogical tool that EFL teachers can use in the classroom as an attempt to improve students' listening and reading skills. Also, it shows how digital resources can promote an engaging, interactive, and efficient learning. Our research can be classified as a bibliographical study of a descriptive nature, since we propose to analyze studies developed by some scholars. Therefore, as a theoretical base, we had the studies of Gil (1994), Paiva (2013), Taylan (2018), Tucker-Seeley (2005), Singhal (1997) and Stosic (2015). We believe that the new social demand requires that teachers should include digital resources in their pedagogical practices to enhance the quality of their classes. Also, we believe that the use of interactive applications can be a good strategy adopted by teachers. due to the fact that students are already inserted in this technological context.

Keywords: Voscreen application; Digital resources; English skills; Efficient learning.

RESUMO: Este artigo apresenta o aplicativo Voscreen como uma ferramenta pedagógica extra que professores de língua estrangeiras podem utilizar em sala de aula objetivando melhorar as habilidades de escuta e leitura dos alunos. Além disso, esta pesquisa mostra como os recursos digitais podem promover uma aprendizagem engajadora, interativa e eficiente. Nossa pesquisa pode ser classificada como um estudo bibliográfico, de cunho descritivo, porque propomos analisar estudos desenvolvidos por alguns estudiosos. Portanto, como base teórica, tivemos os estudos de Gil (1994), Paiva (2013), Taylan (2018), Tucker-Seeley (2005), Singhal (1997) e Stosic (2015). Acreditamos que a nova demanda social sinaliza que professores devem incluir recursos digitais em suas práticas pedagógicas com o intuito de melhorar a qualidade das aulas. Acreditamos também que o uso de aplicativos interativos pode ser uma boa estratégia adotada pelos professores, considerando que os alunos já estão inseridos neste contexto tecnológico. Dessa forma, conclui-se que as tecnologias digitais auxiliam no processo de Ensino-Aprendizagem de Língua estrangeira, uma vez que os alunos são considerados nativos digitais.

Palavras-chave: Aplicativo Voscreen; Recursos Digitais; Habilidades da Língua Inglesa; Aprendizado eficiente.

RESUMEN: Este artículo presenta la aplicación Voscreen como una herramienta pedagógica adicional que los profesores de lenguas extranjeras pueden utilizar en el aula con el objetivo de mejorar las habilidades de comprensión auditiva y lectura de los alumnos. Además, esta investigación muestra cómo los recursos digitales pueden promover una aprendizaje atractiva, interactiva y eficiente. Nuestra investigación puede clasificarse como un estudio bibliográfico, de carácter descriptivo, porque nos proponemos analizar los estudios desarrollados por algunos estudiosos. Por lo tanto, como base teórica, contamos con los estudios de Gil (1994), Paiva (2013), Taylan (2018), Tucker-Seeley (2005), Singhal (1997) e Stosic (2015). Creemos que la nueva demanda social indica que los profesores deben incluir recursos digitales en sus prácticas pedagógicas para mejorar la calidad de las clases. También creemos que el uso de aplicaciones interactivas puede ser una buena estrategia adoptada por los docentes, teniendo en cuenta que los alumnos ya están insertos en este contexto tecnológico. Así, se concluye que las tecnologías digitales ayudan en el proceso de Enseñanza-Aprendizaje de Lengua Extranjera, ya que los estudiantes son considerados nativos digitales.

Palabras-clave: La aplicación Voscreen; recursos digitales; Competencia en el idioma inglés; Aprendizaje eficiente.

A few Introductory Thoughts

The world of technology has been transforming the way modern society works. These transformations have affected education directly and positively in the whole world, providing a series of resources that make it possible for teachers to adapt their classes to their students' social context. In fact, technology is widely used nowadays by teachers, and it not only aims to improve students' learning, but also to promote their autonomy in the learning process.

Singhal (1997) points out that "technology and foreign language education are no stranger to one another". Based on that, we can infer those digital resources should be used by teacher, because these two fields are closely related, and it may bring benefits for both teachers and students. According to Tucker-Seeley (2005), teachers who use digital resources allow students to develop critical thinking skills, high levels of understanding and solve problems of any kind. This is only possible because technology has become part of students' everyday lives, and as they are inserted in this "new world," they can gain many benefits from technology (such as becoming proficient in the target language, working in a virtual environment, and so on) if they know how to use it correctly.

Presently, a large number of websites and applications have started to appear in the field of foreign language education, they are diverse and may have different purposes. Some of them that aim to introduce a foreign language and develop it by repeating exercises are Duolingo, Wlingua and Busuu (these are the most known). For specific skills we have, for example, Voscreen that focuses on training pronunciation, reading, and listening skills. And for improving what was already learned, people have as support websites like BBC-British Broadcasting Corporation or OOE- Oxford Online English, which are categorized as the best websites in the field of foreign language education.

Therefore, this study consists of bibliographical research that has as general objective of discussing the use of the Voscreen application as a pedagogical tool to improve students' English listening and reading skills. In addition, as specifics objectives, we are going to: (i) describe the functionalities of the digital tool Voscreen; (ii) show how digital tools can support the teacher; (iii) Emphasize the use of apps and/or websites in promoting interactive, collaborative, and authentic teaching. We also suggest some alternative resources that EFL teachers could use in the English language classrooms, and we also show the positive effects of using applications like Voscreen in teaching foreign languages. Our research is based on the studies of Gil (1994), Paiva (2013), Taylan (2018), Tucker-Seeley (2005), Singhal (1997) and Stosic (2015).

We characterized this paper as bibliographic research that, according to Gil (1994) is developed from already elaborated materials and the researcher (or researchers) needs to reflect critically on the study

material and follow some steps to reach the objectives. In this regard, Gil (1994) affirms that when a researcher wishes to develop a bibliographic work, first of all, they must: "Determine the objectives; draw up a work plan; identify sources; locate sources and obtain material; read the material; make notes and write the work" (p. 72-73, our translation).

In this research paper, we intend to analyze qualitative data, since the research of this content seeks to understand human phenomena that aim at giving a detailed and complex view through a critical scientific analysis of the issue in question. We have divided this paper into five sections: in the first section, we show the importance of technological resources in teaching (especially in foreign language teaching field); then, in the second section, we provide an overview of Voscreen application, including the wide variety of benefits that a foreign learner can get if he/she uses it correctly; in the third and fourth sections, we describe how to use Voscreen application and detail the main functions of this app, respectively; in the last section, we discuss the Voscreen application as a pedagogical tool to be used by EFL teachers in the classroom. In this regarding, we also point out the necessity that teachers have in this new social educational context to use digital resources in their classes to promote an interactive and engaging learning.

The importance of Educational Technology in Teaching

Over the last few decades, technology has made immense changes to human life, but what is Technology? According to Stosic (2015), the word technology is "derived from the Greek word *techno* which means the willingness, knowledge of the way, and *logos* which means science, word, learning, mental state" (STOSIC, 2015, p.111). Based on that, we can see that technology encompasses the study of learning and knowledge; technology is the result of human attempts to facilitate and change our lives.

Many areas have been contemplated with the development of technology; however, here, we will focus on the field of technological resources on education. Stosic (2015) points out that educational technology has three domains of use; he says that it can be used in the school's environment as "a tutor; as a teaching tool and as a learning tool" (STOSIC, 2015, p.111, adapted). According to him, each of these domains may give to the teacher good results if they are used properly and at the right time.

According to Mishra and Koehler (2006), to use digital resources in EFL classrooms is very important because it can change the environment as well as can turn the subject matter more accessible to the learner's social context. The new social demand establishes that teachers should adapt their pedagogical practices based on technology's principles; however, it does not mean that in every single class the teacher needs to do so. In this regard, Morgan (2008) affirms that: "EFL teachers must decide how - and how not - to use technology in the classroom".

In the following sections, we will introduce and discuss the Voscreen application, as well as the benefits that it brings as a modern pedagogical tool in order to foster an interactive, engaging, and effective learning process.

Understanding What Voscreen Is

We start this research by giving a definition of what Voscreen is. Voscreen is an online platform and also a mobile application that was developed by Sesli Ekranlar Bilisim ve Egitim A. S company. According to the providers, the app aims at "helping learners to improve their English language skills on their own, without the express need for outside instruction" (VOSCREEN, 2015). Furthermore, by using Voscreen app learners will be able: "to increase their comprehension speed; to improve their reading skills quickly, and to amplify their reflexive thinking abilities" (VOSCREEN, 2015).

Voscreen application has been awarded with a bronze award in the category of "Best Educational App" in Reimagine Education 2016 hosted by Wharton Business School, UPENN. The Gold and Silver Awards were held by BYJU's: The Learning App - making millions fall in love with learning (from India), Duolingo (from United States) and Memorang: Leveling the playing field in higher education (also from The United States), respectively. In addition to this, Voscreen provider points out that over 1.3 million people in 74 different countries are using this app, either teachers (as an extra tool in the classroom) or students (as an autonomous guide). See in the illustration I below the main page of Voscreen.

Illustration I:

Source: https://www.voscreen.com/
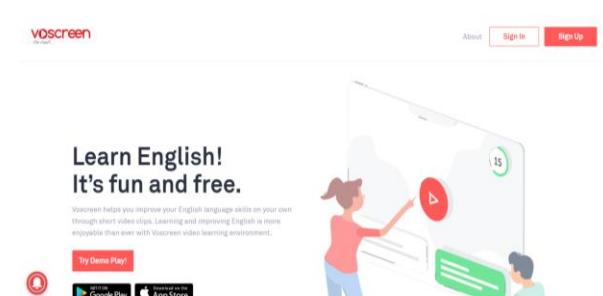
How To Use Voscreen?

Firstly, Voscreen application is available to anyone who wants to sign up on it and there are two alternatives for gaining access to the online platform or app. The first alternative is that the user should have an email account and they have to fill a form with their personal information (first name, last name, email, and mother tongue). Another alternative for gaining access to this app is to use a Facebook account,

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which is considered more practical and easier because it is not necessary for the user to fill in anything. However, Voscreen provider claims that they do not share anything on the user's account.

After gaining access, the user gets a welcome and a tutorial appears on the screen that can be skipped. However, it is better not to skip it because it can help the user to understand how the app works. The new user has an unlimited number of short videos, each grounded in easy to understand, real life contexts with concrete meaning, surrounding the learner with English. This app provider points out that "all the learner has to do to achieve the goal of becoming proficient in English is to spend 20 to 40 minutes using Voscreen every day to ensure constant exposure" (VOSCREEN, 2015, p. 1). Based on that, we can infer that Voscreen app really helps foreign English learners to improve their skills, especially in pronunciation, reading and listening.

In the next section, we will detail the tools that Voscreen app offers to make it easier for users to know how it really works so that they can enjoy every single benefit this app provides. See illustration II.

Illustration II:

Source: https://www.voscreen.com/

With each new update, Voscreen providers try to enhance the app to make the users' learning process easier and also to promote an "engaged, authentic, rich and free educational environment" (VOSCREEN, 2015, adapted). In the latest update, the app has been enhanced, and it make it possible for users to have an extensive toolset that allows them to customize their accounts based on their needs.

The videos on Voscreen app are grouped in categories and each one has specific purposes. These categories are known by: VoKido, VoStep, VoRhythm and VoStructure. The VoKido category consists of videos which are prepared for the children public, the content is more related to cartoons and animations. It is important to point out that in this category of users can use it in three different theme colours as Red, Yellow or Green; however, in the VoStep, the main category has only the black and white theme.

As we mentioned previously, the VoStep is considered as the main category, which are made considering the users' customization; we mean, in this category users are allowed to choose what they want to learn and what not. Taylan (2018), a Turkish scholar, explains, in an exceptional way, how VoStep

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category and subcategories works. He says: "(...) under the VoStep main category, there are subcategories such as Beginner, Elementary, Intermediate, Upper and Advanced. In each subcategory, there are appropriate questions about the videos at that level" (TAYLAN, 2018, p. 4).

The following categories, VoRhythm and VoStructure, make mention to the rhythm and grammar structures, respectively. In the VoRhythm category, users can select the number of words to appear during the scenes of movies, series, or advertisements. If they select the option VoRhythm 4-6, for example, during the short videos they will see sentences appropriate to those previous choices. (In this example, a sentence with 4 or 6 words will appear). On the other hand, in the VoStructure category, users can select the grammar topics that they have difficulties. For example, if they want to memorize or improve their knowledge about Present Simple or Phrasal Verbs, they select it and then a vast library of short videos about the topic selected will appear.

Thus, we already have a detailed base about how Voscreen app works and in the following section we will discuss how EFL teachers can use it as a tool in classroom.

Voscreen as a tool for EFL Teachers

According to Paiva (2013), the new social demand indicates that teachers should adapt their pedagogical practices in an attempt to enhance the quality of their classes and enable mediation between students and the target language (in this case the English language). Thus, using digital resources can elevate a class to another level because these resources belong to the students' social context; besides, a pedagogical practice based on them, may promote some benefits, like motivating students to learn, engaging the whole class in learning, as well as improving the teaching quality.

As we pointed out previously, inside the app there are a vast library of videos that refer to series, advertisements and famous movies that were probably seen by the students or that they have seen currently. So, according to the levels selected before, Voscreen algorithm takes specific scenes of series or movies, shows them and the students have some seconds to listen to them and choose the correct alternative, (the duration may vary according to the length of each video).

Besides what was mentioned, we can point out that teachers can use Voscreen as an extra activity, an evaluative activity or homework, for example because when a teacher signs up in this website, they are allowed to create a play mode. It means that he/she can select the level of the activity, the structure of the sentences and also the rhythm. And accordingly, teachers can work many skills with their students in the classroom (or out of it). However, the focus is concentrated on listening (when the students try to understand what is said by the characters) and reading skill (when students read the character's speech and have to

mark the right alternative). Another important thing that teachers should know about Voscreen is to choose the modes of English-to-English students learn how to paraphrase, and acquiring vocabulary, as well.

Final Remarks

During our discussion in this research paper, we intended to introduce the Voscreen application as well as the wide variety of benefits that it offers when used correctly by either teacher (as an extra tool in the classroom) or students (as an autonomous guide). We could see over all of our sections that the new social demands require teachers that can adopt a new pedagogical practice based on technological principles. In this aspect, a lot of scholars, as Paiva (2013), have pointed out that classes based on students' social context and technological principles have more good results than traditional ones because they can promote an interactive, engaging, and efficient learning.

Based on everything that was mentioned in the sections of this paper, we can conclude that the use of digital resources can change the teaching and learning process. EFL teachers in this new social world should look for ways to innovate their classes. Sometimes, it could be a hard task because teachers have to learn how to use online platforms or adjust materials that could involve all of their students. It takes a long period of teachers' time to adapt the subject matter to the technological resources, everybody knows. However, it is necessary to do so if teachers want positive feedback from their students.

To use Voscreen in the classroom, for example, can be a good strategy adopted by teachers to train or develop students' pronunciation, listening and reading skills and prepare them to be inserted in the globalized world where the English language is used everywhere.

Acknowledgments

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