

PORTUGUÊS DE VIVA VOZ / PORTUGUESE LIVE: STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES OF TEACHING A NON-NATIVE LANGUAGE ONLINE

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ABSTRACT

The open and distance education is crucial to offer many people the possibility of continuing their education and lifelong learning. Nowadays, many open educational resources including MOOCs are available, but these do not offer mentoring. Consequently, there is a need for online courses with the support of a teacher. In the field of non-native languages, these courses face essentially two main challenges: to help the learners maintain their motivation and develop all the communication skills needed in a non-native language. These challenges were considered when the course “Português de Viva Voz / Portuguese Live” was designed at Universidade Aberta. This is a general language course, and its target public is composed of any adolescent or adult who does not speak Portuguese as their mother tongue (no matter where s/he is living or what her/his education is, as long as s/he has some digital skills and knowledge of the English language).

The goal of this work is to discuss the strengths and challenges of the before-mentioned course based on some proposals on second language instruction (e.g., Ellis, 2005; Kumaravadivelu, 2006) and online teaching (e.g., Guitert and Romeu, 2019), as well as on its piloting with some learners during the second semester of 2020-2021.

First, we point out the main ideas drawn from the research literature that support the analysis. Second, we present the macrostructure of the course and the (micro)structure of a unit while simultaneously showing how the course contributes to developing communicative skills online and which challenges still need to be overcome. Then, the course functioning is illustrated with a specific unit. Finally, a

synthesis of the course's strengths and challenges is presented.

Keywords

Online teaching, non-native language teaching, Portuguese as a non-native language

INTRODUCTION

Open and distance education is crucial to offer many people the possibility of progressing in their education and lifelong learning (e.g., DePryck, 2006). Nowadays, many open educational resources, including MOOCs, are available, but these are frequently associated with limited feedback from a teacher or even no teacher's role at all (e.g., Teixeira et al., 2016). However, the tutor's or teacher's role is also extremely important in different models of distance education (e.g., Anderson & Dron, 2011; Morgado, 2003). Consequently, there is a need for online courses with the support of a teacher, and a teaching presence. In the field of non-native languages, the vast offer of open educational resources and MOOCs also does not turn online language courses dispensable. However, these courses face essentially two main challenges: (1) to help the learners to maintain their motivation during the course (a general challenge in online courses – e.g., Pereira, 2006); (2) to develop all the communication skills needed in a non-native language (a specific challenge of language courses for which some strategies are suggested, for instance, in Barkanyi, 2020). These challenges were considered when the course “Português de Viva Voz / Portuguese Live” was designed at Universidade Aberta. Its design started in 2015, but the course is recently partially redesigned and expanded with other levels. This is a general language course, using the University's Moodle platform and its target public is composed of any adolescent or adult that does not speak Portuguese as a mother tongue (no matter where s/he is living or what her/his education is, as long as s/he has some digital

skills and knowledge of the English language). It is based on the four principles of Universidade Aberta's "Virtual Pedagogical Model": student-centered learning, flexibility priority, interaction priority, and digital inclusion principle (Pereira et al., 2007).

In a presentation, the authors of the course's first version – Dias, Manuelito & Morais (2013) – explain that it is "structured as an autonomous learning environment which highlights the advantages of e-learning technologies with a conception of plural communicative competencies where several composing aspects of linguistic, sociocultural and discourse-pragmatic are integrated within a task-based language learning approach" (p.1) and that it is based on "everyday scenarios" (p.3, our translation), like checking in at the hotel.

Being aware of the above-mentioned questions (the challenges associated with online non-native language learning and the strengths incorporated into the course "Portuguese Live"), in the present paper we intend to discuss the strengths and challenges of a specific level in the course: level A1.1 (1st part of level A1, according to the levels of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*, 2001, 2020). For that, we will conduct an analysis of the course based on: some proposals on second language instruction and online teaching, as well as on the course's piloting with four learners, between April and July 2021. The results of this reflection will be useful not only for reformulating the less successful aspects of the course, but also for sharing experiences that could guide other colleagues in designing online (non-native) language courses.

So, this paper will start with the theoretical background on non-native language instruction and online teaching (sections 2.1 and 2.2, respectively), as well as a synthesis combining these two topics (section 2.3). In section 3, we will present the relevant data on level A1.1 of "Portuguese Live": the level's macrostructure (section 3.1); its microstructure, more precisely a unit (section 3.2); the illustration of a unit (section 3.3); the results achieved by the learners and their feedback (section 3.4). To conclude, there will be a final synthesis of the course's strengths and areas to improve.

1. BACKGROUND

1.1. Non-native language instruction

Research in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) has identified different properties of the process, which should be explained by SLA theories and can be associated with the proposal of specific features in non-native language instruction (Ortega, 2015). Several authors have also analyzed the previous research in SLA and in L2 teaching methods in order to propose some principles or strategies which can guide L2 instruction and hence also the creation of teaching materials for an L2 course (e.g., Ellis, 2005; Kumaravadivelu, 2006). Consequently, as a theoretical background for the instruction in this L2 course, we tried to combine three of these proposals:

1. The ten principles that, according to Ellis (2005), should be considered in instructed language learning in a learning-centered language pedagogy;
2. The ten macrostrategies put forward by Kumaravadivelu (2006) in the context of a postmethod pedagogy, i.e., “general plans derived from currently available theoretical, empirical, and pedagogical knowledge related to L2 learning and teaching” (p. 201) that can guide the teachers while generating their own microstrategies or classroom procedures;
3. Several optimal features and instructional designs recommended for L2 instruction by different SLA theories, according to Ortega (2015).

If we consider all those principles, macrostrategies, features and instructional designs, then several properties of an appropriate L2 instruction emerge. In terms of contents, L2 instruction should ensure social relevance, by choosing the contents according to the learning goals and motivation of the learners, the language functions they will need, and the amount and variation of the input they receive outside the class (Kumaravadivelu, 2006). This is related to the need to focus mainly on meaning but also attend to form (i.e.,

the relation of specific forms with a certain pragmatic meaning) (Ellis, 2005). In fact, an optimal feature of L2 instruction according to the Interaction framework is “[a]ttention attracted to language form in the course of meaningful task performance” (Ortega, 2015, p. 263). Ellis (2005) also explains that part of the instruction which is form-focused can be implemented through grammar lessons (especially with an inductive approach to grammar) and focused tasks which demand the learner to pay attention to a specific grammatical structure in the input or output.

The forms to teach should correspond not only to structural rules but also to a good number of formulaic expressions, since the learners must be able to use both several fixed expressions, especially in early language acquisition, and specific grammatical rules, allowing them to build new sentences (Ellis, 2005).

Another important feature of L2 instruction is to foster mainly implicit knowledge of the language but also some explicit one (Ellis, 2005). Implicit knowledge is the goal of L2 instruction, as it is procedural, unconscious, and allows the learner to speak fluently; however, explicit knowledge might help language acquisition by facilitating the development of implicit knowledge. According to the Skill Acquisition Theory, “[c]ycles of carefully sequenced explanation and deliberate practice” (Ortega, 2015, p. 263) will help the explicit knowledge to become automatized, and implicit.

Notably, while choosing the structural content and the approach to teaching it, the teacher must consider the learner’s ‘built-in syllabus’ (Ellis, 2005), suppose the learners have their own ‘built-in syllabus’ for learning grammar as implicit knowledge (a natural order they follow in the acquisition). In that case, the teacher should either not propose new structures that the learners are not ready to learn or adopt an explicit approach (since this built-in syllabus only affects implicit knowledge). As advocated by the Processability Theory, it is crucial to “[c]onsider developmental learner readiness when choosing targets” (Ortega, 2015, p. 263).

As a means to teach all these contents, it is advisable to activate intuitive heuristics and foster language awareness (Kumaravadivelu, 2006): these will bring the learners to the discovery of rules and form-function mappings in an intuitive manner, by themselves and

based on many examples, and will help them to recognize the properties of the language in a more explicit manner.

L2 instruction should likewise try to minimize perceptual mismatches and raise cultural consciousness (Kumaravadivelu, 2006). This helps to overcome the differences or ambiguities (in terms of language, culture, and communicative strategies) that might hinder language acquisition, and deal with cultural diversity, in a multicultural approach.

Another crucial strategy in L2 teaching is to offer many opportunities for receiving input, producing output, and interacting in L2 (Ellis, 2005). The exposure to extensive input in the target language promotes a larger and faster learning, which means that the use of L2 should be maximized both inside and outside the classroom; the opportunities for output allow the learners to receive better input, test hypotheses, automatize existing knowledge, etc.; the interaction is associated with an increase in comprehensible input, corrective feedback, attention to language, as well as better output. Kumaravadivelu (2006) also highlights the importance of contextualizing the linguistic input (because showing the pragmatic, communicative context of the utterances contributes much to understanding its meaning) and facilitating negotiated interaction (because learners go beyond their previous receptive and expressive capacities, when they must reach the desired mutual comprehension in interaction with the teacher and other learners). While giving the learners many opportunities for receiving input, producing output, and interacting, the teacher can implement Kumaravadivelu (2006)'s recommendation of integrating the four language skills instead of approaching them separately. Specifically, in terms of output and interaction, Ellis (2005) further advocates the need to assess also the learners' free production (and not just the controlled one), since the performance in free production tasks (e.g., communicative tasks) is the one to show the true fluency and proficiency in the real world.

Maximizing the learning opportunities is another important feature in L2 instruction: the teacher should not only create many learning opportunities for their learners but also use the ones created by learners themselves when they seek clarification, raise doubts, make suggestions, etc. (Kumaravadivelu, 2006).

Finally, several authors advocate, in different ways, that L2 teaching should be learner-centered and learner-directed. Ellis (2005) mentions that it should consider individual differences by including various learning activities that will help reach students with different learning styles and foster their motivation. Kumaravadivelu (2006) recommends promoting learner autonomy, by helping them to self-direct their own learning process and use different strategies (cognitive, metacognitive, social, affective) to achieve their learning goals. The Complexity Theory contends that L2 instruction should be “[l]earner-centered, capitalizing on agentivity, creativity, meaning making; cultivate differentiated instruction and self-referential goals; attend to learner perception of affordances; support learners’ awareness of differences” (Ortega, 2015, p. 263).

1.2. Online teaching

In terms of good online teaching practices, there are many proposals (e.g., Morgado, 2003; DePryck, 2006; Pereira, 2006). For instance, DePryck (2006) refers that designing an open and online course should take into account several factors such as the type of education to offer, the learning theories to adopt, the possibility and need to adjust the distance education means to different learning styles, the tools available for distance learning, and the main basis of the instructional design. Pereira (2006) goes deeper in detailing several pedagogical concerns involved in distance learning: besides mentioning the choice of the instructional design, this author also presents different options in terms of pedagogical environments and learning models, and introduces the roles of the online teacher (e.g., learning facilitator, guide, manager, collaboration facilitator, evaluator, motivation promoter). Morgado (2003)’s proposals for the roles a tutor should play in online teaching also take the same line. In fact, this author emphasizes that an online tutor should promote students’ motivation, mediate the learning process, and facilitate student interaction in a learning community. However, we will adopt a recent and simple synthesis offered by Guitert and Romeu (2019), which assigns seven roles to the online

teacher, as these can be used as key ideas to configure the course. According to the proposal by Guitert and Romeu (2019), the online teacher should act as a designer (*diseñador/a*), manager (*gestor/a*), guide (*guía acompañante*), dynamics facilitator (*dinamizador/a*), collaborator (*colaborador/a*), evaluator (*evaluador/a*), and researcher (*investigador/a*) (see roles mentioned in Figure 2, p. 12; our translation). The fulfilment of these roles implies several tasks.

First, the online teacher must select and organize the contents, competencies, and skills to develop, as well as choose or create the resources and learning activities (that should be learner-centered to help the learner to assume his/her active role in the learning process). The result of this work is implemented in the learning environment.

When the course starts, the teacher begins to assume other roles. S/he has to manage time, the learning environment, and the information, and act as a guide that offers practical guidance, helps to solve problems, and serves as a mediator between contents and learners. Besides, s/he must not only collaborate actively with the students, and be present in the group's activities, but also promote interaction and dialogue between all parties, a learning environment of trust and close relationships among all participants (namely by proposing activities, strategies, and tools for collaborative work). It is noteworthy that this dimension of collaboration facilitator is also very much highlighted by Morgado (2003) and Pereira (2006).

During the learning process, the online teacher should also use various instruments and methods to offer frequent teacher feedback (both at the individual and general levels), and to promote peer and self-assessment.

Finally, after the course's end, the teacher should act as a researcher that reflects on the online teaching experiences, thinks of ways to innovate the learning process, and disseminates knowledge.

1.3. Synthesis

After considering the proposals mentioned above on L2 instruction and online teaching, it is possible to reach a synthesis with the most important ideas to use in the analysis of our course. First, it is essential to highlight the mix of different approaches and focuses. In fact, both Ellis (2005) and Kumaravadivelu (2006) contend that language pedagogy should combine different approaches (sometimes really opposite ways of instruction) and not just one specific method. So, a good language course should include:

- _a combination of teaching formulae and rules;
- _attention to meaning and form;
- _the ultimate goal of developing implicit knowledge combined with some explicit teaching of grammar in order to foster the implicit knowledge;
- _many opportunities for receiving input (with a clear, pragmatic context), producing output, experiencing interaction and integration of the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing);
- _moments of assessment of both controlled and free production.

Besides, the online L2 course should also:

- _take into account both the individual differences (differentiated instruction to diverse preferred learning styles among the learners, and self-referential goals) and the social relevance (of the content, of the instructional goals);
- _promote the learner's autonomy, as well as language and culture awareness;
- _foster the online teacher's roles of guiding, collaborating, facilitating dynamics among the learners, and evaluating in a formative and summative way, so that the students continuously receive feedback and (extrinsic) motivation.

2. PORTUGUESE LIVE A1.1

2.1. Macrostructure

The level A1.1 of “Portuguese Live” is implemented in the Universidade Aberta’s Moodle platform. Everything is written in Portuguese and translated into English (at least in the first occurrence of an item)¹. Image 1 presents this level’s general view, which corresponds to its macrostructure.

In the “General” view, there are two forums – one for news given only by the teacher and another for students’ questions. Employing these forums, the online teacher guides the learners through the tasks to do, clarifies questions, serves as a mediator between the learners and the contents whenever necessary, etc. (see recommendation by Morgado, 2003; Guitert and Romeu, 2019). There are also 14 sections: a first section, called “Introduction”; 12 sections corresponding to several topics organized in 12 weeks of work; and a final section, named “Resource library”.

As it can be seen from Image 1, the addressed topics are socially relevant to a student who wants to learn basic Portuguese for general purposes because the topics of each section are related to daily communicative life, such as “waiting at the airport” and “to greet” (see recommendation by Kumaravadivelu, 2006). Being designed for 12 weeks, the last week of the course corresponds to reviews and the final evaluation. In terms of summative assessment, before the final evaluation, including listening and reading comprehension, vocabulary, and grammar (in the last week), the learners are required to complete eight communicative tasks of written and/or audio-recorded prepared production (across three different weeks of the course). The four language skills are thus evaluated.

¹ For levels A1.2 and beyond, only new or difficult words are translated.



Image 1. General view of level A1.1

In the section of “Introduction” (see Image 2), the students have the learning guide, the course calendar, and a forum where each learner and teacher should introduce him/herself. By interacting with students in this forum, the teacher acts as a dynamics facilitator and he tries to promote a learning environment of trust (see recommendations by Morgado, 2003; Guitert and Romeu, 2019). The learning guide includes many pieces of relevant information about the goals and the functioning of the course, and it aims at

promoting the teacher as a guide, since the students can read the contents and clarify their doubts with the teacher (see Morgado, 2003; Guitert and Romeu, 2019).



Image 2. “Introduction” section: List of contents + Contents of “Learning guide” (inside the box)

The “Resource library” (see Image 3) comprehends eight electronic books with all the vocabulary, speech acts, grammar, cultural notes, and oral properties presented during the course. Part of Image 3 illustrates the content of a book: on the left-hand side, we see a chapter where the word “avião” is presented with its image, definition, some examples, and other pieces of information; on the right-hand side, we can see the table of contents of the whole book (with an entry for each chapter which, in the case of this book, corresponds to a specific word).


This library of resources allows the teacher to develop learners' autonomy since the students can quickly look up what they need in these lists and focus their attention on what they choose to go deeper more autonomously and easily (see recommendations by Kumaravadively, 2006, and the Complexity Theory, in Ortega, 2015). Such a library also serves the purpose of taking into account learners' individual differences (see Ellis, 2005) because these types of lists with no exercises match more autonomous learning styles very well and complement the way the information is presented in the resources (with many audios and exercises, as we will see).

BIBLIOTECA DE RECURSOS | Resource library

- 1.ª-5.ª SEMANAS | Vocabulário
- 1.ª-5.ª SEMANAS | Comunicação
- 1.ª-5.ª SEMANAS | Gramática
- 6.ª-11.ª SEMANAS | Vocabulário
- 6.ª-11.ª SEMANAS | Comunicação
- 6.ª-11.ª SEMANAS | Gramática
- Notas Culturais
- Marcas de Oralidade

1.ª-5.ª SEMANAS | Vocabulário

4. AVIÃO | plane



a.vi.ão [plane]
nome masculino singular: o avião
nome masculino plural: os aviões

Veículo aéreo com asas, que transporta passageiros e carga.
[Aircraft with wings, that transports passengers and cargo.]

Exemplos:
1. O avião levantou voo. (= O avião decolou.)
[The plane took off.]
2. O avião aterrou.
[The plane landed.]

Índice

- ABREVIATURAS | abbreviations
- AEROPORTO | airport
- AMIGO | friend
- AVIÃO | plane**
- CONHECER | to know
- DESCANSAR | TO REST
- ESPERA / À ESPERA | wait / waiting for
- ESTADO CIVIL | marital status
- ESTAR | to be
- FÉRIAS | holidays
- IDADE | age
- IRMÃO | brother
- LEMBRAR-SE | to remember
- MORADA | address
- MORAR | to live
- NOME | name
- NÚMEROS CARDINAIS E ORDINAIS | cardinal and ordinal numbers
- PAÍSES E NACIONALIDADES | countries and nationalities
- PISO / ANDAR | floor
- PRIMO | cousin
- PROFISSÕES / OCUPAÇÕES | professions / occupations
- SER | to be
- TELEFONE / TELEMÓVEL | telephone / mobile phone
- VIR | to come
- VIVER | to live

Image 3. "Resource library" section:
List of contents + Example of "1.ª-5.ª Semanas | Vocabulário" (inside the box)

2.2. Microstructure

The microstructure of the course consists of a learning unit, explored over one week. As a rule, each learning unit presents one or two resources, two or three activities, and two to four assessment tasks. The resources include new content like texts, vocabulary, speech acts, culture, oral properties, grammar, multimedia objects, and exercises with automatic feedback. The activities are either quizzes with automatic feedback or forums where the students can get feedback from teachers and colleagues. Finally, the assessment tasks are composed of four formative tasks with automatic feedback (for comprehension, vocabulary and communication, grammar, and pronunciation) or, in some weeks, two or three summative tasks that receive manual feedback from the teacher. Both the activities and the assessment tasks provide the students with abundant and frequent feedback, an important feature of online teaching (e.g., Guitert and Romeu, 2019). Image 4 exemplifies the structure of a unit with the contents of Week 8: one resource, three activities, and four tasks of formative assessment.

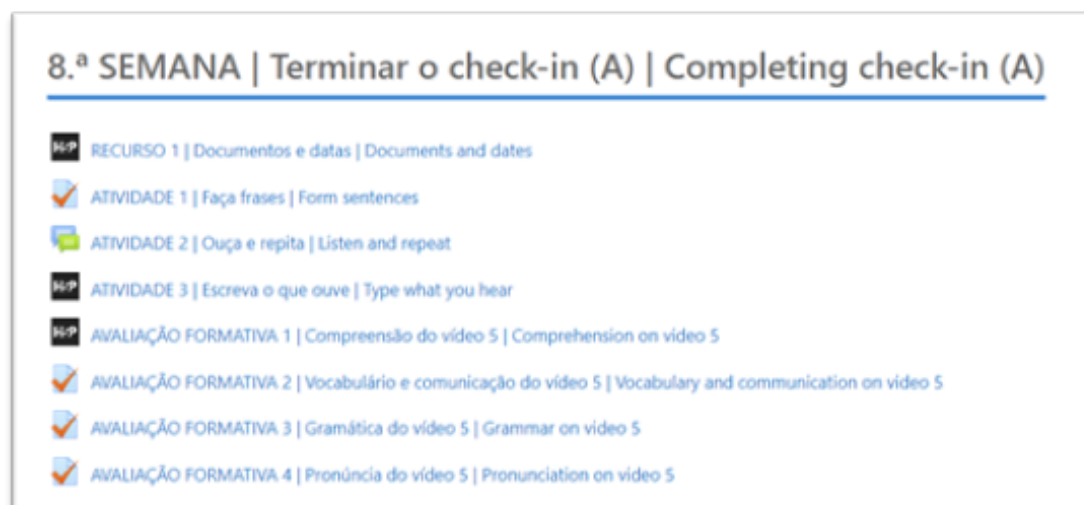


Image 4. Example of contents in a weekly learning unit: List of contents in “Week 8” section

An example of the contents of a resource (i.e., a presentation with new content) is available in Image 5. Normally, the resources start with a video providing the interaction context (whose dialogue constitutes the main text of the unit) and a table of contents. Each symbol represents something in the table of contents: transcription of the text, translation, new vocabulary, culture, communication, grammar, or oral properties. After the initial slide, there are slides with vocabulary (presentation of new vocabulary with the words' translation, the indication of the stressed syllable, the audios, the images, and some exercises with automatic feedback for immediate application of the new vocabulary); cultural information (that helps to raise the students' cultural consciousness, as supported by Kumaravadivelu, 2006); speech acts related to the video; grammar; and oral properties relevant in the video dialogue (which draws students' attention to specific properties in the oral production of European Portuguese, and thus responds to the recommendation of Kumaravadivelu, 2006, of promoting learners' language awareness).

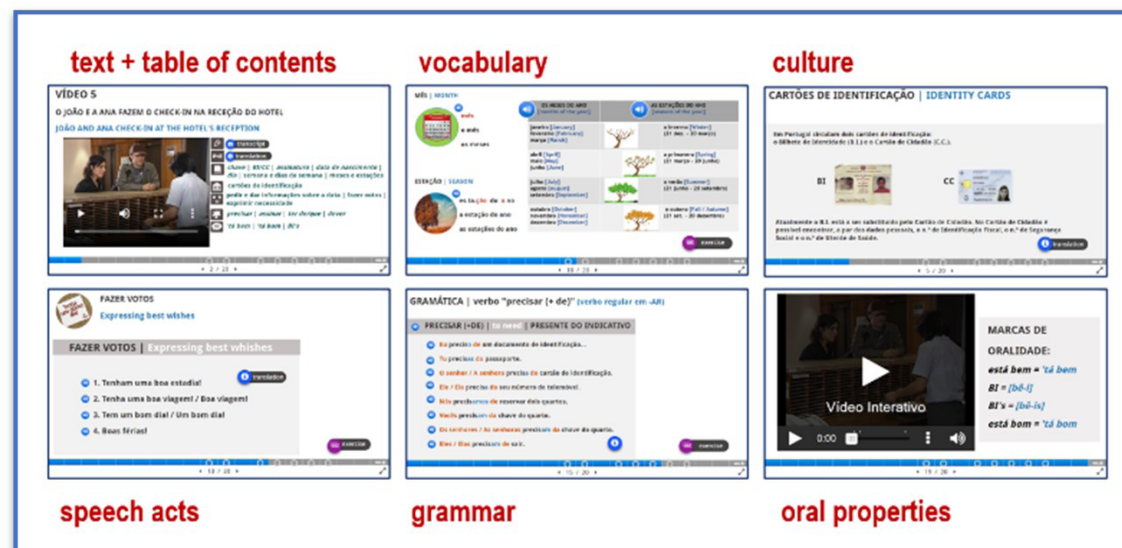


Image 5. Example of resource's contents: Resource for Week 8

Image 6 shows activities that are frequently found in a unit. Activity 1 consists of forming sentences within a quiz. The second activity consists of listening and repeating sentences recorded by native speakers. It is important to note that this is a forum where the students can receive manual feedback on their pronunciation from their peers and the teacher. Activity 3 is “Type what you hear”, a dictation. Here the learners can listen to sentences previously recorded at a normal and slow rate, they write them down what they have heard and have immediate feedback on their corrections. So, all these types of activities help the teacher to play his/her role as an evaluator (in activities 1 and 3 the students are given automatic and immediate feedback) and a collaborator (in activity 2, the teacher collaborates with the learners, not only giving them manual feedback, which is very important in the learning process, but also promoting the collaboration and interaction among them). Acting as an evaluator and a collaborator are extremely relevant features in online teaching (e.g., Morgado, 2003; Guitert and Romeu, 2019).

The screenshot displays a web-based learning environment with three main sections:

- Left Panel (Quiz):** Titled "Pergunta 2" (Question 2), it asks the user to "Arraste as palavras para fazer uma frase com sentido." (Drag the words to form a correct sentence). The words provided are "é", "a nossa", "que", "horas", "reunião", and "A". A "Submeter" (Submit) button is at the bottom.
- Middle Panel (Forum):** Features a header image of three people wearing headsets. Below it, instructions in Portuguese and English guide the user to listen to audio samples and post their own audio recording to the forum.
- Right Panel (Dictation):** Titled "É hora do ditado! (exercício de treino)" (It's dictation time! (training exercise)), it provides instructions for a dictation exercise, including a list of items to pay attention to: punctuation, word accentuation, case letters, and numbers.

Image 6. Example of activities:
1. Form sentences (Quiz); 2. Listen and repeat (Forum); 3. Type what you hear (Dictation)

Finally, Image 7 exhibits an illustration of the assessment part in the most common units/weeks, composed of four formative tasks: one

interactive video, with questions on the comprehension of the video (task 1), and three quizzes having different types of questions (e.g., drag and drop, multiple choice), immediate feedback, and contents of vocabulary and communication, grammar, and pronunciation/listening comprehension (tasks 2-4). Again, all these formative assessment tasks help the teacher to play his/her role as an evaluator, as someone who keeps giving feedback. The fact of having many quizzes also ensures that it is possible for the learners to really receive much feedback during the course.

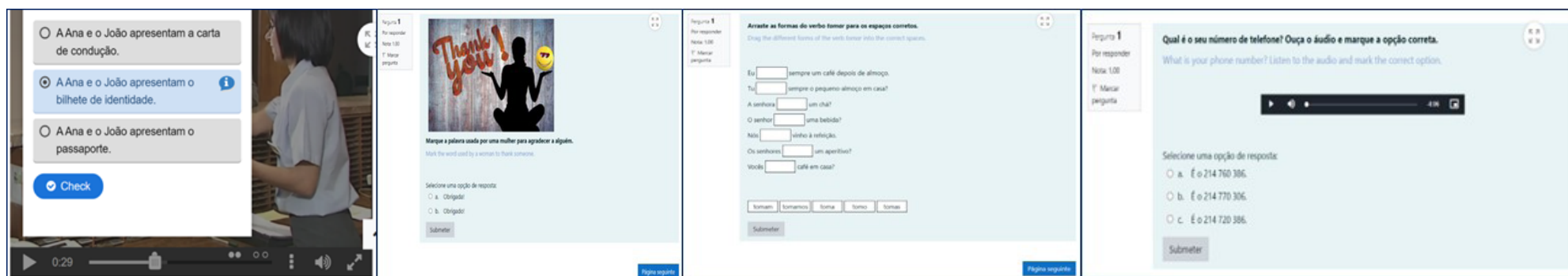


Image 7. Example of formative assessments:

1. Comprehension of video (Interactive video); 2. Vocabulary and Communication (Quiz); 3. Grammar (Quiz); 4. Pronunciation (Quiz)

2.3. Illustration of a unit

In this section, we show in detail how the learning units are organized, by exemplifying it with the “Week 4” unit, that focuses on the speech act “Introducing someone”. On the resource slide (see Image 8), there is a table of contents that lists the different items: text, vocabulary, communication / speech acts, grammar, culture, and oral properties. The input is given by a video that contextualizes oral linguistic production. The dialogue is also transcribed and fully translated (only for this first level), which is useful for learners with

different learning styles (e.g., those who prefer to attend only to the original dialogue and those who feel more secure by having the dialogue's full transcription and translation). After the dialogue, we introduce the new vocabulary, the speech acts, the grammar items used in it, and some cultural notes related to the macrocommunication act of the unit.

RECURSO 1 | Apresentar alguém | Introducing someone

VÍDEO 3

O JOÃO APRESENTA A ANA AO ANTÓNIO.

JOÃO INTRODUCES ANA TO ANTÓNIO.



- transcript
- translation
- profissões
- apresentar alguém e reagir | concordar
- demonstrativos | possessivos | *conhecer* | *lembrar-se*
- beijo | aperto de mão | abraço

0:00 / 0:25

2 / 17

Image 8. Week 4's Resource 1: Table of contents

Image 9 illustrates how vocabulary related to professions and occupations is introduced. This introduction is supported by images and an audio file with the pronunciation of each word. After the input, the students have an exercise to complete and thus apply the newly learned vocabulary.

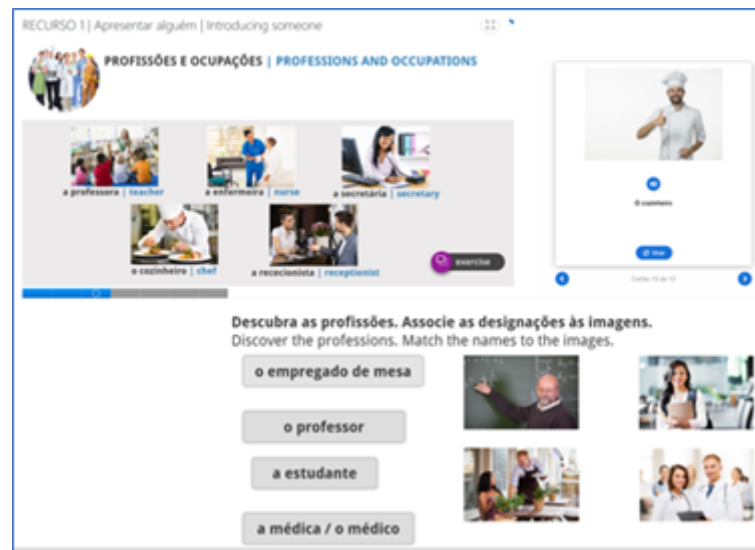


Image 9. Week 4's Resource 1: Example of vocabulary

On Image 10, it is possible to observe how students are presented with the different speech acts found in the video and their various forms of expression (which can be read and listened to). Sociolinguistic competence is also considered, since formal and informal ways of introducing someone and responding are presented. By clicking on the ⓘ icon, the students are given the various formulae and their structure (see Ellis's (2005) claim for the importance of teaching not only rules but also formulaic expressions).

RECURSO 1 | Apresentar alguém | Introducing someone

APRESENTAR ALGUÉM E REAGIR (INFORMAL vs FORMAL)

Introducing someone and responding (informal vs formal)

APRESENTAR REAGIR (INFORMAL)	APRESENTAR REAGIR (FORMAL)
- Este é o (meu amigo João).	- Apresento-lhe o senhor doutor Sá.
- Esta é a (minha amiga Joana).	- Apresento-lhe a senhora doutora Ana Sá.
- É o João / É a Joana.	- O senhor diretor já conhece o senhor professor Sá?
- Já conheces o meu amigo João?	- A senhora dona Maria lembra-se do Sr. Pereira?
- Já conheces a minha amiga Joana?	
- Lembras-te do João?	
- Lembras-te da Joana?	

Olá! Eu sou o/a...

Muito prazer!

Muito gosto!

APRESENTAR ALGUÉM (INFORMAL) | INTRODUCING SOMEONE ELSE (INFORMAL)

- Este é o (meu amigo...) / Esta é a (minha amiga...)

- É o... / É a... (This is...)

- Já conheces o (meu amigo...) / conheces a (minha amiga...)? (Have you already met...?)

- Lembras-te de... / de...? (Do you remember...?)

REAGIR QUANDO SE É APRESENTADO (INFORMAL) | RESPONDING WHEN SOMEONE INTRODUCES YOU TO SOMEONE ELSE (INFORMAL)

- Olá! Sou o... / a... (Hi! I'm...)

Image 10. Week 4's Resource 1: Example of communication / speech acts (1)

Image 11 shows part of an exercise of automatic feedback aimed at fostering the learners' sociolinguistic competence.

RECURSO 1 | Apresentar alguém | Introducing someone

Esta apresentação é formal ou informal? Clique na alternativa correta.

This introduction is a formal or informal one? Choose the correct alternative.

Manuel: Pedro, já conheces a Catarina?

Pedro: Olá, Catarina. Sou o Pedro. Tudo bem?

Catarina: Olá! Tudo bem!

FORMAL

INFORMAL

Image 11. Week 4's Resource 1: Example of communication / speech acts (2)

After having explored the dialogue-based text, the vocabulary and speech acts, and thus dealt with the grammar in an implicit way, grammar becomes the focus of attention and is explicitly taught (see recommendation by Ellis, 2005, to foster implicit and explicit language knowledge). In image 12, we can observe an example of that. Rules and instructions on the use of the grammatical item (in this case, the demonstrative pronouns) are given under the “pay attention” icon; access to the translation of the different sentences is guaranteed under the ⓘ.

RECURSO 1 | Apresentar alguém | Introducing someone

GRAMÁTICA | Pronomes demonstrativos

PRONOMES DEMONSTRATIVOS

MASCULINO SINGULAR: - Este é o João!

FEMININO SINGULAR: - Esta é a Ana!

MASCULINO PLURAL: - Estes são os meus pais!

FEMININO PLURAL: - Estas são as minhas colegas! ⓘ

ⓘ pay attention!

exercise

Image 12. Week 4's Resource 1: Example of grammar

Immediately after the explicit instruction, students can test their comprehension of the grammatical item by completing exercises with automatic feedback (see example in Image 13). Again, this kind of activity contributes to the students' autonomy, and also to automatize explicit knowledge (see recommendations by Kumaravadivelu, 2006, and Skill Acquisition Theory, in Ortega, 2015, respectively).

Arraste os pronomes demonstrativos para os espaços corretos.
 Drag and drop the demonstrative pronouns into the correct spaces.

1. <input type="text"/>	são os meus amigos Maria e André.	<input type="text" value="Estes"/>
2. <input type="text"/>	é a minha prima Margarida.	<input type="text" value="Esta"/>
3. <input type="text"/>	é o meu colega Vasco.	<input type="text" value="Este"/>
4. <input type="text"/>	são os minhas filhas, Paula e Amélia.	<input type="text" value="Este"/>
5. <input type="text"/>	é o meu tio Francisco.	<input type="text" value="Estas"/>
6. <input type="text"/>	é a minha tia Fernanda.	<input type="text" value="Esta"/>
7. <input type="text"/>	são os meus irmãos, José e Rui.	<input type="text" value="Estes"/>
8. <input type="text"/>	são as minhas amigas Susana e Filomena.	<input type="text" value="Estas"/>

Image 13. Week 4's Resource 1: Example of exercises with automatic feedback

Finally, cultural competence is also developed, in this unit, by explaining the particularities of greeting and saying goodbye in Portugal (see Image 14), which contributes to raising cultural consciousness (an important macrostrategy according to Kumaravadivelu, 2006). We illustrate these cultural habits through writing and images, to make them clearer.



Image 14. Week 4's Resource 1: Example of cultural notes

2.4. Students' results and feedback

In this section, we move to the second type of data used to reflect on this course's level: the results obtained in the piloting of the course, visible in students' results and feedback.

First, we present the students' grades in the nine summative assessment tasks. As we can see in Table 1, the students' results were very positive, the lowest grade being 16,6 points over a maximum of 20. Speaking activities, namely pronunciation, is where the students face more difficulties, although, according to our experience, compared to other students in face-to-face learning, these students showed a better level of pronunciation.

SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT										
TASK NUMBER →	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	
MAXIMAL POINTS →	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	12	
↓ STUDENTS	RESULTS									
M	0,8	0,7	0,8	0,9	0,9	0,8	0,9	0,8	12	18,6
S	0,8	0,8	0,7	0,8	0,8	0,6	0,8	0,8	12	18,1
V	0,9	0,8	0,7	0,7	0,8	0,8	0,9	0,8	11	17,4
C	0,7	0,8	0,6	0,7	0,7	0,5	0,8	0,8	11	16,6

Table 1. Students' results

As for the students' feedback at the end of the course, three of them answered the questionnaire about the course. Question 1 was about platform usability; question 2 pertained to activities and the Resource Library; question 3 asked about the teaching team; question 4 was about interpersonal relationships; question 5 asked if the course lived up to their expectations; question 6 required their self-perceived level of Portuguese before and after the course; question 7 pertained to the course's strengths; question 8 was about its weaknesses; question 9 aimed at knowing if they would recommend the course to others. The most important results are shown in Tables 2 and 3.

Question 3	<i>Totally agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Totally disagree</i>
<i>The teachers motivated me.</i>	2	1	0	0	0
<i>They were present when I had doubts/questions.</i>	2	1	0	0	0
<i>They encouraged my participation.</i>	2	1	0	0	V
<i>They gave timely feedback, contributing satisfactorily to my training path.</i>	2	1	0	0	0
<i>They showed interest in my difficulties.</i>	2	1	0	0	0
<i>They were clear in their interventions.</i>	2	1	0	0	0
<i>They supported me in solving concrete problems.</i>	2	1	0	0	0
Question 4					
<i>During the course, I felt that I was interacting more with the computer than with people.</i>	1	1	0	1	0
<i>I felt support from my colleagues throughout the modules.</i>	0	0	2	1	0
Question 5	<i>Exceeded a lot</i>	<i>Exceeded</i>	<i>Corresponded</i>	<i>Fell short</i>	<i>Fell far short</i>
<i>Did the course live up to your expectations?</i>	1	1	1	0	0

Table 2. Students' feedback (1)

As we can verify through the answers to question 3, according to the students, the teachers served as motivators and guides, and they were always available to answer their questions. Question 4, concerning interpersonal relationships, did not generate such positive results, especially relationships among colleagues, but we can recognize, considering the results of question 5, that globally the course corresponded to the students' expectations.

Question 7	Question 8	Question 9	
<i>In your opinion, what were the strengths of the course?</i>	<i>In your opinion, what were the weaknesses of the course?</i>	<i>Would you recommend this course to others?</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Nice activities and relevant content. – How the course was programmed was good, user friendly, and can reach the teachers and classmates easily. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The interactions between different participants were not sufficient in my mind. I suggest adding some synchronous sessions to enhance the quality of interaction between students-teachers and students-students. 	Yes: 3	No: 0

Table 3. Students' feedback (2)

As for the course's strengths (question 7), in an open-ended question, students mentioned the relevance of the content, the usability of the course, its conception and the ease of communicating with the teacher as well as between classmates. On the other hand, in question 8, one student mentioned the interaction as a weakness of the course and suggested we enhance its quality by adding synchronous sessions, which is not easy to implement when students live in different parts of the world, different time zones and have different schedules. Despite these points, and considering the feedback to the last question (question 9), we can conclude that the general sentiment is positive.

CONCLUSIONS

Concerning its strengths, the course generally meets the requirements identified in the synthesis of theoretical background for non-native language and online learning. In fact, the course offers extensive input with context (most of the units start with a video that represents a real communicative situation), and opportunities for output (vocabulary and grammar activities are abundant; the students have many opportunities to produce output through different activities that consider the four skills, even if there is less emphasis on writing and speaking in this first level), according to some principles proposed by Ellis (2005). Also, implicit and explicit knowledge is considered (as suggested by Ellis, 2005), like explicit teaching of vocabulary, speech acts and grammar, after the initial implicit contact with the communication dialogues.

Besides, the teaching combines speech acts and rules, giving attention to both meaning (appropriate and meaningful interactions in different communicative situations) and form. Abundant activities with automatic feedback promote the learners' autonomy. At the same time, the teacher frequently offers manual feedback (both at the individual and general levels) and motivates the students. Combining different approaches, diverse individual learning styles are taken into account. All these properties contribute to implementing different recommendations found in the literature: teaching of L2 formulae and rules, attending to meaning and form, accommodating different learning styles (e.g., Ellis, 2005); online teachers acting as evaluators (e.g., Guitert and Romeu, 2019) and motivators (e.g., Morgado, 2003); and promoting learners' autonomy (e.g., Kumaravadivelu, 2006).

Despite the positive balance, there are some challenges to be dealt with: the interactions between all parties (e.g., recommendation by Guitert and Romeu, 2019) and the need to increase the number of free written and spoken production activities (e.g., recommendation by Ellis, 2005). More specifically, in terms of interactions, the creation of a learning environment based on trust and close relationships among all participants is a big challenge in this kind of course, where students do not know each other, come from

different parts of the world, have different schedules, ages, and interests. However, learner' interactions must be further promoted, possibly by proposing more peer or group activities.

To conclude, we can say that there is some room for improvement in this course, but that its strengths vastly outweigh its weaknesses. Although these preliminary results need to be verified against a larger number of students and that this is a small scale case study with a single-level course, its results might inspire the creation of other online language courses that meet the requirements for a good non-native language course designed for an online format.

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