+Babbel

The impact of Babbel's virtual-classroom solution on workplace communication

Lead Investigator:
Dr. Milene Mendes de Oliveira
Early-Career Researcher
University of Potsdam

Zachary Sporn
Senior Communications Manager: Research and Pedagogy
Babbel

Lea Kliemann
Working Student: Academic Research Collaborations
Babbel

Alexandra Borschke
Master's Student
University of Potsdam

Meike Meyering
Master's Student
University of Potsdam

Executive Summary

This study investigated Babbel for Business learners' perceptions regarding the impact of using Babbel Intensive and the Babbel App on workplace and everyday communication. It assesses these learners' motivation to use Babbel Intensive, or synchronous one-on-one language learning lessons with qualified teachers via video chat, and Babbel's language learning app.

We followed a sequential mixed-method research design (Mihas, P., & Odom Institute 2019), comprising an explorative qualitative phase and a subsequent quantitative phase in which hypotheses derived from phase 1 are tested. In phase 1, seven in-depth interviews were conducted with German speakers learning English with Babbel Intensive. In the second phase, 52 Babbel Intensive users responded to a survey establishing the generalizability of insights gleaned from interviews. 67.3% of respondents were German speakers learning mainly L2 English; the remaining 32.7% responded to an English version of the survey for learners of other foreign languages. The participants represented a wide range of age groups, between 21 and 59 years. Out of 52 survey participants, 44.2% are Junior employees and 44.2% are employed in Senior or Professional roles. Most of the participants work in Communication or Information Technologies (30.8%), Marketing, Sales and Services (23.1%), and Business Management and Administration (15.4%).

Key Findings

- **Workplace communication:** Learners reported that regularly using Babbel Intensive to learn their target language **positively impacts workplace communication**. This is reflected in the survey results, **with 86.5% of the respondents saying that they feel a sense of accomplishment when they learn with Babbel. Furthermore, 86.5% of respondents also felt that learning with Babbel gives them more confidence to use a foreign language in real-life situations at work**. Babbel Intensive thereby helps learners speak freely and overcome the language barrier, which 55.8% of the participants claimed is the most challenging aspect of using a foreign language. The study also found that lacking vocabulary is the biggest challenge at work (57.7%) and gaining vocabulary is the most important aspect of Babbel Intensive (67.3%).

- **General experience with Babbel Intensive:** The study results demonstrate that learners are pleased with the Babbel Intensive classes with **all interviewees feeling an improvement or sense of empowerment** and **96.2% of survey respondents finding the live classes enjoyable**. 55.8% found the atmosphere during the Babbel Intensive sessions pleasant. However, 40.4% of the respondents want more help with tracking their progress. While **69.2% of all study participants reported using both the Babbel app and Babbel Intensive,** 38.5% would like to combine the Babbel Intensive classes with the Babbel app in a blended learning environment. **82.7% of the survey respondents appreciated the flexibility and freedom** to choose suitable times.

- **Importance of the teacher: 90.4% of the survey participants appreciate the possibility to choose a teacher they meet with regularly**. 69.2% stated that having the same teacher they previously learned with is the most important aspect when booking a lesson. Moreover, **88.5% state that the teachers are able to personalize the classes to their proficiency level,** and all interviewees felt that trusting and connecting to the Babbel Intensive teacher is important. This establishes that the teacher is a major asset to the Babbel Intensive experience.

- **Motivation:** The survey results show that the three **main reasons for learning a foreign language with Babbel are professiona**l, i.e., for conversations at work (59.6%), their employer's offer to learn a language for free (42.3%), and to improve their career prospects (32.7%). This supports findings from the initial interviews, which suggested that learners are mostly extrinsically motivated because they want to improve their professional communication skills by using the target language fluently, thereby instilling a positive impression of their linguistic competence in native speakers of their learning language.

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1. Introduction

Globalization and technological advances have greatly impacted managers and workers in companies and organizations around the world (Gunnarsson 2013). The predominance of English and other foreign languages demonstrates workforce mobility and diversity within transnational companies. Gunnarsson (2013) goes on to explain that language and communication have become more and more relevant in the workplace context. Citing McCall (2003), she asserts that "much talk at work also means much power, and little talk means little power" (Gunnarsson 2013: 164). Tenzer, Terjesen, and Harzing (2017) also highlight the fact that attention to language is growing in the field of International Business, with relevant research topics including national languages spoken in multinational corporations (MNCs), official corporate languages, and the use of Business English as a lingua franca. The authors make the point this is important and necessary since "language diversity influences almost all management decisions in modern multinational corporations" (Tenzer, Terjesen, and Harzing 2017: 815).

Related studies in the field show that language barriers have a great impact on team communication, knowledge sharing and several other processes (Tenzer, Terjesen and Harzing 2017). Moreover, the lack of foreign language skills is to blame for a greater divide between skilled and non-skilled workers (e.g., Gunnarsson 2009). Thus, learning one or more foreign languages is considered a "must" by both upper management and workers themselves.

According to Moslehifar and Ibrahim (2012), employers consider their employees' ability to effectively speak English the most important skill in terms of communication in a foreign language at work. Research findings have consistently shown that employees of MNCs rate spoken language skills as the most essential requirement in the target language (Kassim and Ali 2010; Moslehifar and Ibrahim 2012).

Therefore, it comes as no surprise that adults increasingly engage in language learning. In the current era of computer- and mobile-assisted language learning, and increasingly in response to the coronavirus crisis which has disrupted traditional language instruction, workers have taken up various language learning solutions, from app-based instruction (Loewen, Isbell and Sporn 2020) to online language learning with virtual classroom systems (Manegre and Sabiri 2020). An unfortunate downside of autonomous learning among users of self-study computer-based language learning solutions are the high attrition (i.e., dropout) rates reported in several studies. High attrition rates have been linked to problems in dealing with the software or lack of institutional support for autonomous learning (Nielson 2011) or, more broadly, users' motivation.

Motivation is a vast area of research, but the most influential theory on motivation is undoubtedly Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory (SDT), according to which there are two general types of motivation, extrinsic and intrinsic. Extrinsic motivation refers to the engagement in activities to attain a goal separate from the activity (e.g., a higher salary), or to avoid possible

negative consequences (e.g., punishment or sanction). Intrinsic motivation, on the other hand, refers to the engagement in activities for their own sake, i.e., for the pleasant feeling of interest, joy or satisfaction which derives directly from the activity itself (Ryan & Deci 2017).

The underlying postulate of SDT is that the extent to which an individual embraces or disapproves a particular behavior depends on the extent to which they internalize this behavior, which in turn depends on the satisfaction of three basic psychological needs for *competence, relatedness* and *autonomy* (Ryan & Deci 2017). *Competence* refers to the feeling of mastery, capability and effectiveness when tackling an activity, while *relatedness* is defined as a feeling of connection and belonging to family members, peers or society. The need for *autonomy* plays an essential role in SDT, because only if individuals experience their own behavior as volitional and self-regulated (rather than complying with external factors), are they likely to engage in an activity whole-heartedly, intrinsically motivated. A satisfaction of competence and relatedness alone leads to less internalized extrinsic regulations, while the degree of perceived autonomy determines how well a behavior is internalized. Hence, a satisfaction of all three needs results in growth, good performance and well-being.

Satisfaction of these three needs applies to digital experiences as well. Peters, Calvo and Ryan (2018) show how the three basic psychological needs can be applied to digital solutions which support well-being. They make the case that:

> While the secrets to engagement, motivation and wellbeing have often appeared to reside inside a black box, what research shows is that it is the basic needs that are in that box. In other words, if you increase autonomy then engagement will improve, if you increase competence then motivation will increase, and if you increase relatedness then wellbeing will be enhanced–these needs become the controllers we tweak and adjust to iterate on and improve experience (Peters, Calvo and Ryan (2018: 3).

We will return to Peters, Calvo and Ryan's insights when discussing our findings.

This paper is structured as follows: first, we describe the Babbel Intensive packages that Babbel for Business (B2B) sells to corporate clients, then we briefly introduce our research questions and methodology. After that, we describe our findings. Subsequently, we discuss our findings and connect our discussions to concrete recommendations.

In the next section, Babbel's products are introduced with a special emphasis on the virtual-classroom service provided as part of company packages sold by the Babbel B2B department to companies.

2. The Babbel Intensive Solution

Babbel is an online language-learning platform founded in 2007 and based in Berlin and New York. It is the most popular and financially successful language-learning app worldwide, with more than 10 million app subscriptions sold worldwide. As a leader in the online

language-learning industry, Babbel was ranked as the world's #1 innovative company in education by the business publication Fast Company in 2016.

In the Babbel app, which is available in mobile app and web browser versions, students learn with the method of language pairs. This means that 14 "learning languages," including English, German, French and Spanish, are available to learn via nine "display languages." By basing each course on the learners' native language, the content is optimized for the respective language pairs, capitalizing on the learners' knowledge of their native language. The courses are developed by more than 150 language experts and focus on real-life conversation skills to enhance the learners' communicative competence. In total, the app offers more than 60,000 lessons across all languages, as well as supplementary interactive content including magazine articles, games, podcasts and videos.

The efficacy of the Babbel app to develop learners' oral proficiency in a foreign language, as well as increase vocabulary size and grammar knowledge, has been demonstrated in several efficacy studies conducted in collaboration with external academic researchers. A study conducted by linguists at Michigan State University showed that on average, fewer than 11 hours with the app measurably improved second language speaking skills, as well as explicit grammar and vocabulary knowledge (Loewen et. al., 2020). Independent researchers based at Yale University found that true novices learning Spanish effectively developed their conversational skills: all participants gained some measure of oral proficiency after three months (Van Deusen-Scholl et. al., 2019). An earlier study found that 15 hours of study with Babbel's app is roughly equivalent to one college semester for novice learners of Spanish (Vesselinov & Grego, 2016).

Since 2019, Babbel has offered "Babbel Intensive" packages for German, English, Italian French, Spanish, Portuguese, Polish and Swedish speakers. In addition to access to all of Babbel's app lessons for a specific language combination, Babbel Intensive grants learners access to synchronous, 1:1 lessons with qualified teachers conducted via video chat. For the blended learning experiences combining live classes with the language combinations within the Babbel app, the availability of "learning paths" (syllabi of lesson curated by Babbel's language experts) through the content play a role. Learning paths are currently available for English, French, German, Italian and Spanish speakers and the target languages English, German and Spanish; this offering will expand in the future based on demand. The learning paths are designed by Babbel's in-house team of language experts for companies and customized based on their professional development needs and learning goals.

Combining access to the Babbel app with one-on-one-lessons taught online by a personal language tutor offers learners flexibility to learn at their own pace and the opportunity to get feedback on their speaking skills. The students are also provided with additional tools, such as onboarding materials and a business learning path guiding them through recommended lessons within the Babbel app for the first 12 weeks. Within this offer for businesses, users can learn individually by combining the job-related content in the Babbel app with the booking of 30-minute language learning sessions with certified, professional teachers that can be chosen by the learners. To book a Babbel Intensive session, the learners can schedule the lesson directly in their tutor's calendar at whatever time or date is convenient for them. They can choose the

teachers based on their availability and the teacher's education, characteristics, and photo that are displayed on the website.

3. Research questions

While there is a growing body of literature on app-based language learning, studies on virtual classroom systems are still in their infancy. An exception is Manegre and Sabiri's (2020) study, which examines how teachers perceive online teaching. The instructors in their study report high levels of satisfaction with this didactic modality. By contrast, our study looks at it from the perspective of language learners; more specifically, from the viewpoint of users of Babbel's virtual-classroom and app solutions. We aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. How do users of Babbel's virtual-classroom solutions perceive the impact of virtual classes and app use on workplace communication?

2. What types of motivation can be identified among these users?

4. Methodology

Data collection for this study took place between August 2020 and January 2021. We followed a sequential mixed-method research design (Mihas & Odom Institute 2019), comprising an explorative qualitative phase and a subsequent quantitative phase in which hypotheses derived from phase 1 are tested. The recruitment criterion for interview participants was the participation in at least 5 Babbel Intensive classes which corresponds to redeeming at least 38% of the assigned Babbel Intensive lessons. In the first phase, seven in-depth interviews were conducted with German speakers working in different departments of two companies which offer Babbel as a language-learning solution to their employees. The in-depth interview comprised a list of 15 questions that ranged from users' learning history to their concrete experiences with Babbel's virtual classes. The 5 female and 2 male interviewees were between 25 and 55 years old. In the second phase, 52 Babbel Intensive users participated in a survey establishing the generalizability of insights gleaned from interviews and probing further into specific points. The survey comprised 45 items.

67.3% of survey respondents were German speakers learning mainly English as an L2; the remaining 32.7% responded to an English version of the survey for learners of other foreign languages. The participants represented a wide range of age groups, between 21 and 59 years. Concerning the gender distribution, there were slightly more female than male participants with 51.9% being female, 42.3% male and 5.8% who prefer not to say. Out of 52 survey participants, 44.2% are Junior employees and 44.2% are employed in Senior or Professional roles. Most of the participants work in Communication or Information Technologies (30.8%), Marketing, Sales and Services (23.1%), and Business Management and Administration (15.4%).
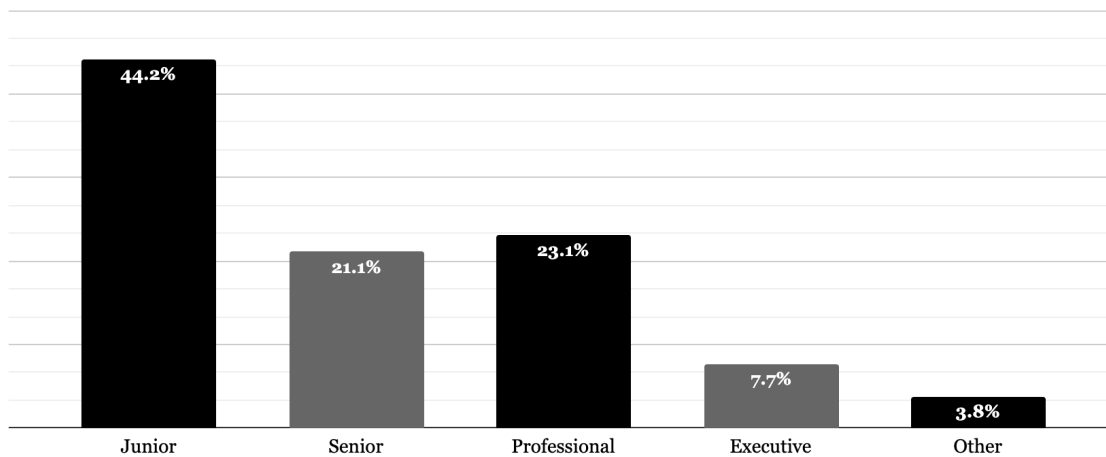
What is your level of seniority?

Figure 1: Level of Seniority

A multi-item scale principle was used for constructing the survey, which suggests using different types of questionnaire items that are "differently worded [but] [...] focused on the same target" (Dörnyei 2002: 24). This way, by asking survey participants about, for instance, their motivation in questionnaire items of different types and formulations, one can derive more accurate and detailed information about various aspects of motivation (Dörnyei 2002: 24-25). Hence, various types of survey items were developed for the survey: closed- (multiple choice and Likert scale items) and open-ended questions. Closed-ended items were especially useful for quantitative analysis; many Likert scale items were used because they require little effort from respondents and are self-explanatory (Dörnyei 2002). Furthermore, they do not require a lot of time to answer and can be analyzed quantitatively in a straightforward way. Additionally, respondents were also given a chance to offer their own answer to close-ended items in an additional comment field to ensure no valuable information would be left out if respondents could not find a fitting answer to a certain question.

We also created open-ended items to give respondents an opportunity to express their opinions more freely (Dörnyei 2002: 36). In some open-ended items, respondents were asked to complete sentences following what is known in the literature as a discourse completion task (DCT; see, e.g., Sweeney & Hua 2015). An example of such an item is "one thing I liked about this activity is…" (Dörnyei 2002: 38). This technique is a way to investigate learner beliefs that helps understand learners' strategies and motivations without asking learners explicitly what their approaches to learning are. Furthermore, DCT can reveal learner beliefs that are sometimes concealed from consciousness and "cannot be easily and directly expressed [in a language]" (Ellis 2002: 13).

Transcripts of interview responses (phase 1), as well as open-ended survey items (phase 2), were coded with the MAXQDA 2020 (VERBI software, 2019, Kuckartz & Rädiker 2019). The analysis of phase 1 yielded 1.056 codes which were divided into 7 categories, namely (a) the use of Babbel Intensive; (b) the use of Babbel App; (c) the use of Babbel Intensive in combination with Babbel App; (d) workplace communication in the target language, (e) motivation to learn

the target language; (f) learning processes and learner beliefs; (g) feelings and emotions associated with Babbel Intensive. Out of these categories we decided to look further into the following topics in the survey: (a) learning processes and learner beliefs, (b) workplace communication in the target language, (c) the use of Babbel Intensive solutions with a focus on the role of the teacher, (d) learners' satisfaction with Babbel Intensive solutions, and (e) users' motivation to learn a foreign language with Babbel. In the following, we present a summary of our findings for each of these topics.

5. Findings

The following sub-sections are divided into the categories that were relevant for the survey design and analysis. However, findings from phase 1 which are relevant or offer complementary information to the ones arising from the survey are also highlighted.

5.1 Learning processes and learner beliefs

In the analysis of this survey section, we broke down responses to DCTs, categorizing them into semantic groups. For instance, the response "The foreign language [learned with Babbel] is like a chameleon because you can always discover something new about it" stresses the complex and multifaceted features of learning the language.[1] The response "learning a language online is like a hike which is exhausting but comes together with success and broadens one's horizons" emphasizes a sense of struggle coupled with development in association with online learning.

Out of the responses for these optional items, we learned that the target language is described as (a) complex and multifaceted by 44.0% of survey participants (b) linked with development and process by 20.0% and interestingly also as opposing poles, namely, as (c) an obstacle by 20.0% and (d) an enabler by another 20.0%.[2] Here are examples for each category:

(a) *The foreign language is like a chameleon because it is always special and can be changed*, D_08;[3]
(b) *The foreign language is a rosebud, because if it gets enough sun, water, good ground and patience, it will become a beautiful flower in the future,* E_06;
(c) *The foreign language is like a wall because you need to work hard to crack it,* E_17;
(d) *The foreign language is like an open gate, because it allows me to communicate with people all over the world,* D_21.

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[1] Research has shown that figurative language and most importantly figurative images can impact the effectiveness of advertisements by capturing attention and being emotionally engaging and persuasive (Pérez-Sobrino, Littlemore, Houghton 2019).

[2] Note that, except for likert scale questions, responses to closed-ended items do not add up to 100%, since respondents were given the chance to choose up to 3 answers.

[3] Throughout this paper, unique pseudonyms are used for each study participant. Survey participants who answered the survey in German are pseudonymized as D_01, D_02, etc. Participants who answered the English version of the survey are E_01; E_02, etc. Interviewees are pseudonymized as I_01, I_02, etc.

Learning a language online was associated with (a) flexibility by 32.7% , (b) struggle coupled with development by 32.4%, (c) diversity of content by 25.0%, (d) entertainment and personalization by 15.4%, and (e) efficiency and self-discipline by 13.5%. Examples for each group of responses can be found below:

(a) *Learning a language online is like turning on music, because I can do it almost always and at any time,* D_21;

(b) *Learning a language online is like learning a musical instrument because it sounds crooked at the beginning and sounds better with time,* D_35;

(c) *Learning a language online is like playing a game, because the activities are fun,* E_01;

(d) *Learning a language online is like a great opportunity because, unlike the experience at school, I can learn the language at my own pace with positive reinforcement,* D_05;

(e) *Learning a language online is like going to the gym, because if I don't keep at it and keep self-disciplined, I'm not going to improve,* D_28.

Here it is interesting that associations are mostly positive, but even the negative ones complement the positive ones to a certain extent. For instance, since the target language is seen as an obstacle by some, a certain struggle is necessary, but the result is still positive, i.e., personal or professional development.

Speaking of the relational antonyms "learner" and "teacher," 44.1% of the respondents conceptualized successful learners as the ones who (a) make an effort, (b) 17.6% with being interested in cultures, and (c) 14.7% with having fun while learning. Examples are:

(a) *A successful learner is like a competitive athlete because he has to train hard every day to achieve his goal,* D_17;

(b) *A successful learner is like an explorer, because he/she has to immerse in the language (tv/reading/podcasts),* E_05;

(c) *A successful learner is like a good friend because I enjoy the conversation and playfully learn new things by talking on an equal footing,* D_10.

Here, "effort" appears again, along with two other points which underlie characteristics of intrinsically-motivated learners, namely being interested and having fun.

A good teacher, on the other hand, is conceptualized as the one who (a) focuses on the learner by 38.2%, (b) cares for a positive atmosphere by 20.6%, and (c) corrects and motivates learners by 17.6%. The overall conclusion from this item is that users appreciate teachers who offer a personalized experience. Here are a few examples:

(a) *A good teacher is like a personal trainer, because she challenges and encourages me, while responding to my needs,* D_28,

(b) *A good teacher is like a light cocktail because it clears the head and loosens the tongue,* D_13, and

(c) *A good teacher is like a mother because she praises and motivates her children even when they make mistakes,* D_01.

In her research paper, Borschke (in preparation)[4] conducted an in-depth analysis of responses to the DCTs of the survey and grouped them into different categories. The following categories feature as the most prominent ones: flexibility, self-discipline and personal development. 82.7% of survey respondents appreciated the flexibility and freedom to choose suitable times and topics for their online lessons. Learners also recognized that they should make an effort and discipline themselves to attend lessons regularly. This, in turn, positively influenced their personal development process, suggesting that most learners strive towards specific learning goals and appreciate a sense of accomplishment.

5.2 Workplace communication in the target language

This section included closed-ended survey items with several options to which respondents were allowed to choose up to three answer options. We sought thereby to understand two concrete issues concerning workplace communication: which tasks learners use their target language for and the challenges they face in workplace communication. We learned that 65.4% of the users use the target language for writing emails, 38.5% in talks with colleagues, 30.8% in phone calls, and 25.0% in conversations with business partners (see Figure 2 below). When asked what challenges learners experience when communicating in the target language, all four skills (namely speaking, listening, reading, and writing) were mentioned, but vocabulary and grammar emerged as the most salient issues, with 57.7% reporting not having sufficient or relevant vocabulary to express themselves professionally, and 38.5% struggling with grammar (see Figure 3 below).
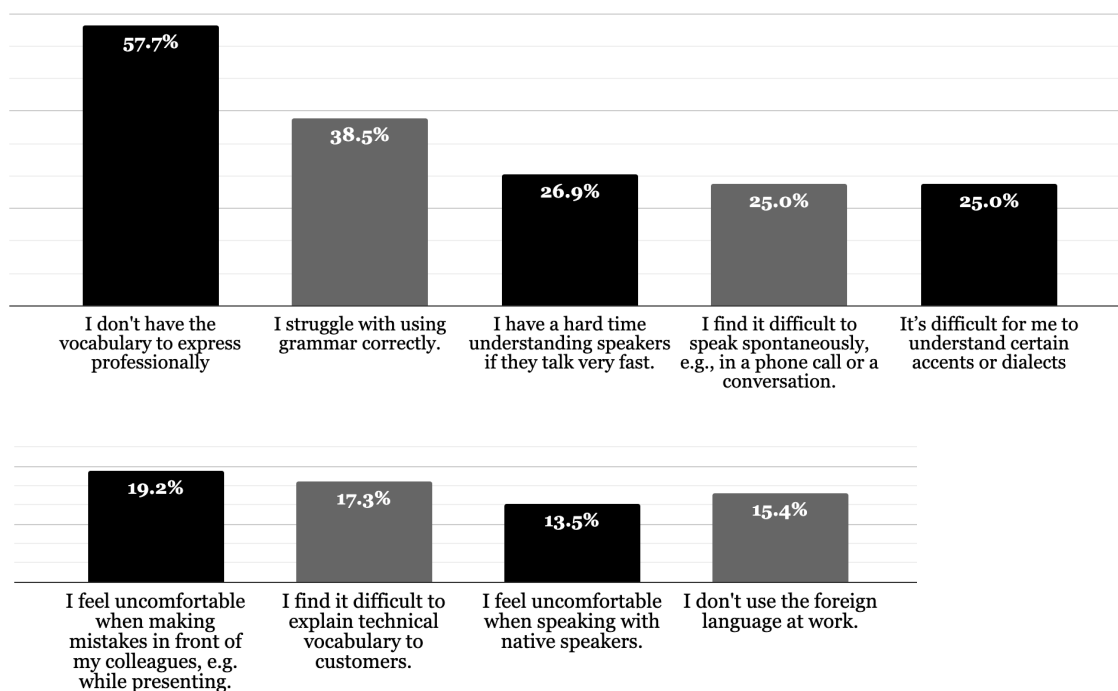
What are the most common tasks you do at work in the language you are learning with Babbel Intensive?
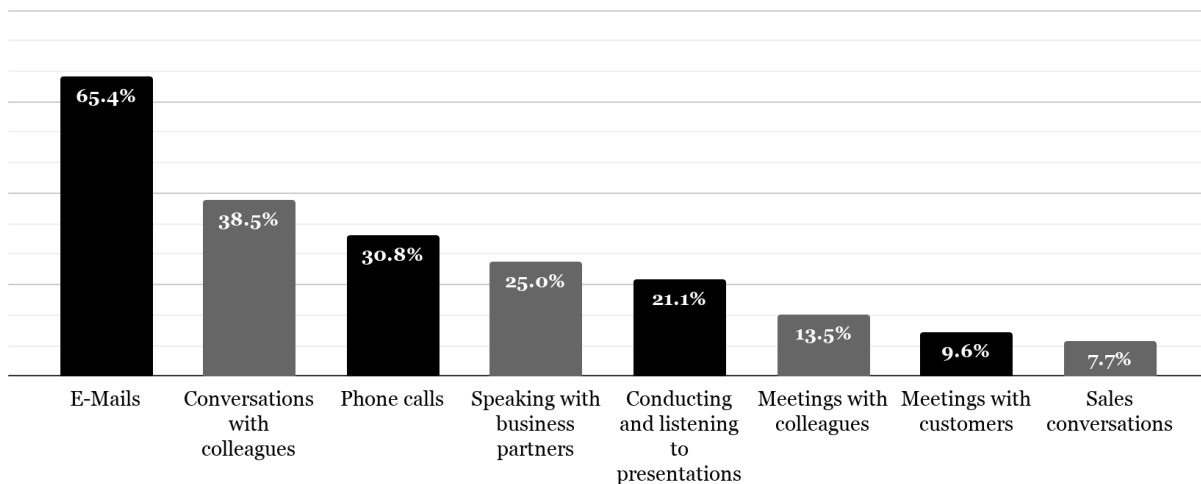
Figure 2: Most common tasks at work

What are the biggest challenges you face at work when using the foreign language you are learning with Babbel?

57.7%	38.5%	26.9%	25.0%	25.0%
I don't have the vocabulary to express professionally	I struggle with using grammar correctly.	I have a hard time understanding speakers if they talk very fast.	I find it difficult to speak spontaneously, e.g., in a phone call or a conversation.	It's difficult for me to understand certain accents or dialects

19.2%	17.3%	13.5%	15.4%
I feel uncomfortable when making mistakes in front of my colleagues, e.g. while presenting.	I find it difficult to explain technical vocabulary to customers.	I feel uncomfortable when speaking with native speakers.	I don't use the foreign language at work.

Figure 3: Challenges when communicating in the foreign language

5.3 The use of Babbel Intensive solutions: the role of the teacher

In this section, we dig deeper into several aspects of users' experience with virtual classes, from encounters with the teacher to experiences with the booking system.

First, in response to questions about the factors respondents consider when selecting a teacher, they state that instructors should help learners identify their weak spots (63.6%), be a native speaker of the language (57.7%), be friendly (55.8), and try to build a connection with the learner (25%). Thus, apart from being a native speaker of the language,[5] an ideal teacher is generally seen as providing the learner with a personalized experience.

When asked what learners expect a teacher to do during an online lesson, personalization comes again to the fore, this time associated with helping the learner to practice listening and speaking (65.4%), giving feedback on pronunciation (46.2%), offering individual support (36.5%) and helping with grammar practice (34.6%).

The salience of "speaking" as the most important skill appears not only in the descriptions related to expectations about the teacher, but also when respondents are asked which aspects they associate with Babbel Intensive lessons per se. Here, 57.7% state they practice their speaking

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[5] Even though native speakers are regarded by a number of respondents as better qualified to teach their first language, the research team, leaning on research findings from the field of English as a Lingua Franca (e.g. Ehrenreich 2010; Kankaanranta and Salminen 2013) , counters this position and encourages new approaches to teaching and learning foreign languages that consider the plurality of these languages as well as skills that are capable of making a difference in contexts of intercultural communication, such as the ability to accommodate to ones' interlocutor and build rapport in interaction. For an interesting blog post on this topic, see Bosso (2021).

skills and 42.3% that they get individual feedback. Additionally, the respondents practice speaking in different situations, such as language in everyday contexts, with 38.5%, and in personal conversations, with 34.6% (see Figure 4 below).

Which of the following do you believe MOST applies to Babbel Intensive lessons?
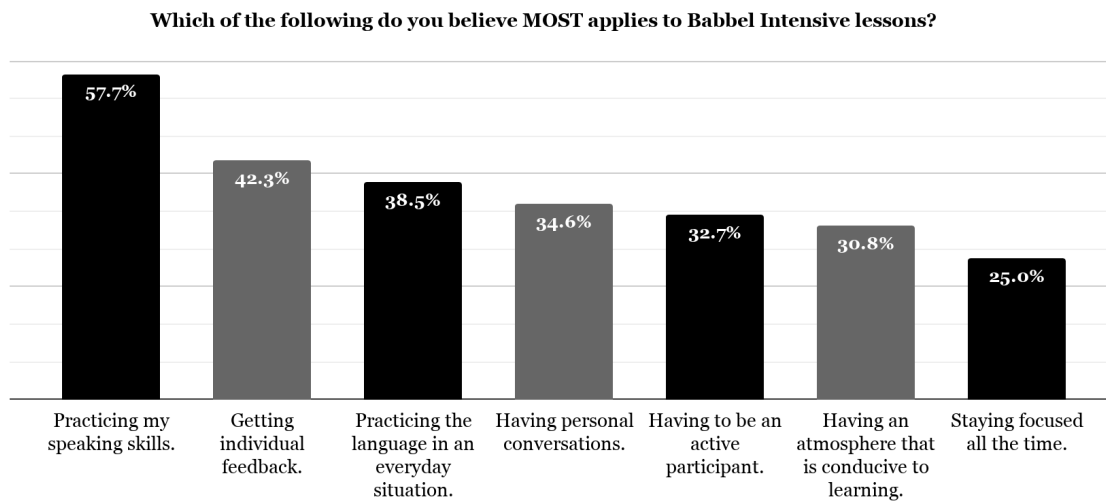
Figure 4: Aspects associated with Babbel Intensive lessons

When asked about issues they consider when booking a lesson, 69.2% of the respondents state that they preferred to choose the same teacher as in their previous session along with finding time slots that fit their schedule (51.9%). Other options involve the teacher in different ways: choosing a teacher for his/her qualifications (38.5%); for his/her availability (19.2%) and others (see Figure 5).

What was most important for you when booking a lesson?
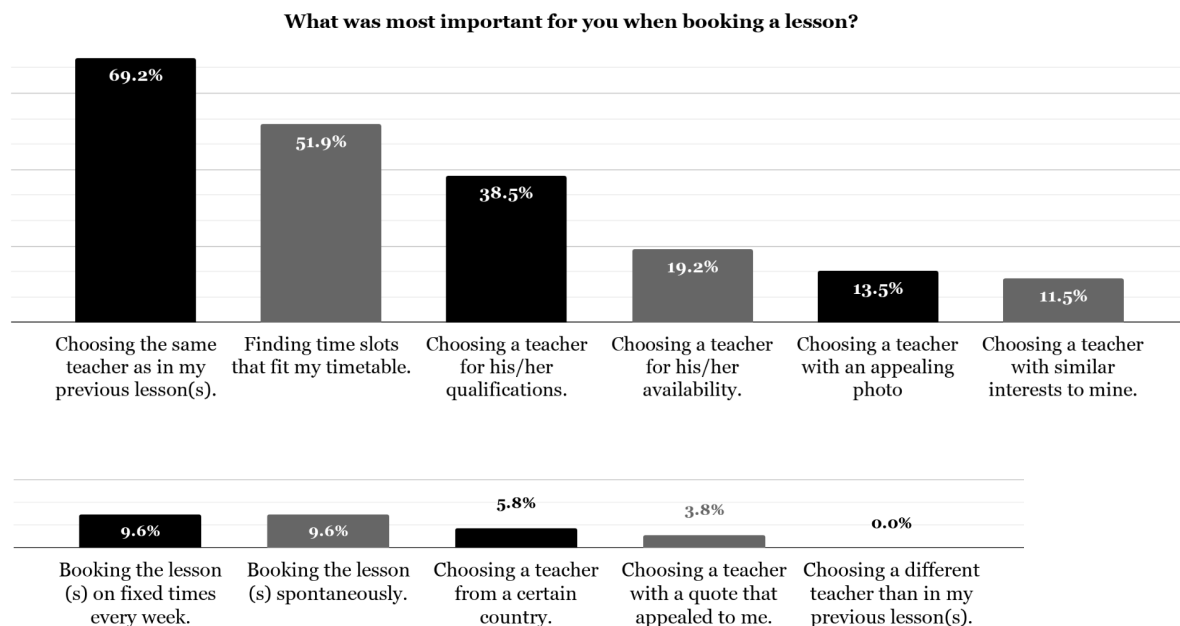
Figure 5: Booking a Babbel Intensive lesson

As the last point investigated in this section of the survey, we asked respondents about difficulties experienced when learning with Babbel and whether they wish to have more support with a few aspects. When asked what the hardest part of using Babbel Intensive is, survey

participants responded predominantly: to stay motivated, to find the time, and to find the right teacher, each with 36.5% (note that difficulties in finding the right teacher are often associated with time zone differences, as explained by some respondents in the open-comment field). Another relevant option was 'to set up a learning schedule', with 28.8%.

The next question was whether Babbel Intensive learners felt they required any additional guidance. A total of 40.4% answered they would like support with how to track their progress; 38.5% with how to combine Babbel Intensive lessons with the App; 34.6% with how to structure their learning and 28.8% with finding the right teacher (see Figure 6).

Would you like any additional guidance with the following?
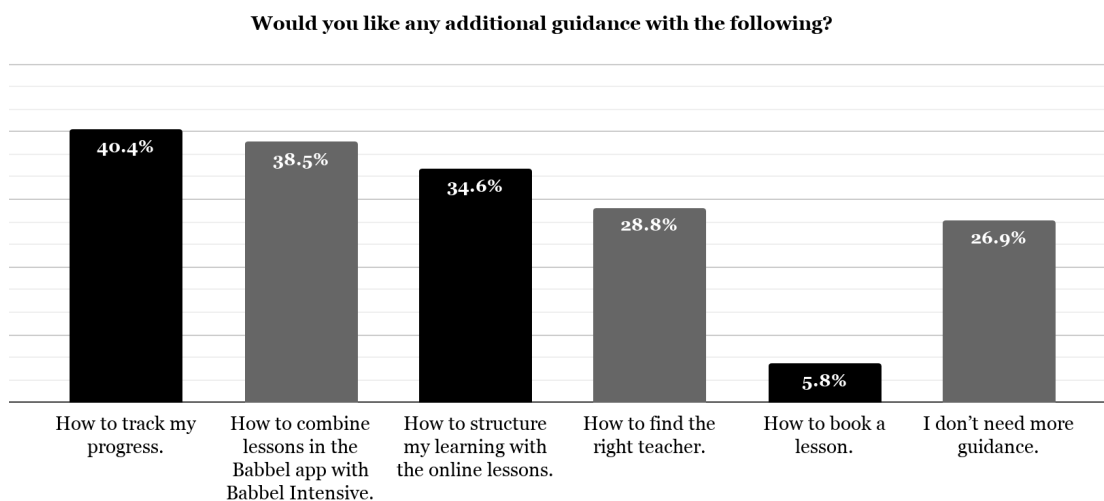
Figure 6: Additional guidance

5.4 Learners' satisfaction with Babbel Intensive solutions

This section focuses on the analysis of the 12 Likert scale questions which included a scale that ranged from 1 to 5 asking participants to what extent they agreed with a given statement about Babbel Intensive. These questions were placed at the end of the survey and were based on common findings from the interviews and aimed at evaluating the learners' satisfaction with Babbel Intensive, the virtual one-on-one classes.

With regard to the improvement of their workplace communication, nearly all learners reported that regularly using Babbel Intensive positively impacts their ability to communicate effectively at work. The survey results show that 86.5% of respondents felt learning with Babbel gave them more confidence to use a foreign language in real-life situations at work. Furthermore, 86.5% of respondents felt a sense of accomplishment when learning with Babbel and 80.8% felt that they were making progress in the language after a few Babbel Intensive lessons.

The general experience with Babbel Intensive was rated positively, with 96.2% of the survey respondents finding the classes enjoyable. The flexibility of the booking process is appreciated by 82.7% which makes it easier to learn and to make progress, and 65.4% look forward to their next lessons after completing a Babbel Intensive lesson.

As reported earlier, participants' answers to these questions emphasize the centrality of the teacher to the Babbel Intensive experience: 90.4% of the survey participants appreciate the possibility to choose a teacher they meet with regularly and 75.0% prefer to have lessons regularly with the same teacher. Moreover, the Babbel Intensive classes offer an individualized experience: 88.5% of participants say their teacher personalizes the classes to their proficiency level, and 78.8% say their teacher personalizes the classes to their specific needs. All interviewees felt that trusting and connecting to the Babbel Intensive teacher is essential, further establishing that the pool of qualified teachers is a major asset to the Babbel Intensive experience.

With regard to the combination of Babbel Intensive online lessons with the language courses in the Babbel app, the survey results show that 64.4% of the survey respondents use both, and therefore make use of this blended learning offer. In this connection, 34.6% of participants agree to the statement, "The Babbel Intensive lessons with a teacher encourage me to use the Babbel app." However, a further 34.6% agree that, after participating in the Babbel Intensive lessons, they used the Babbel app less. Thus, it can be concluded that, even though the majority of the learners report using both the app and Babbel Intensive lessons, these two products do not appear to learners as being genuinely connected.

5.5 Users' motivation to learn a foreign language with Babbel's virtual-classroom solution

What was initially shown in the interviews and later confirmed quantitatively in the survey is the fact that extrinsic motivation surpasses intrinsic motivation in the group of participants. For instance, 38.5% of respondents stated that learning a language with Babbel Intensive is fun, which points to intrinsic motivation. Here is an example of an answer given by a participant in the interview:

So, just to exchange these things, find out a little bit about the country and ask questions like: How is it with you in Germany? This curiosity, this exchange in the first few minutes is important to me and I really enjoy it.
(I_06, Pos. 44)

On the other hand, 55.8% stated that they value the benefits of learning a foreign language with Babbel Intensive and 28.9% that they are learning with Babbel Intensive because they think a good employee should be able to speak a second language. Both underlie extrinsic motivation. Here are concrete examples of responses by participants:

Above all, to be able to exchange views with colleagues who do not have...the same mother tongue. Or to be able to present my projects to colleagues who do not have German as their mother tongue, i.e. where the common working language is English. (IB_09, Pos. 4)

My company was sold and is now part of an international network and English is now the "official language". I can't do my job without English, D_23)

Even though the majority of participants are extrinsically motivated, Meyering (in preparation)[6] argues that most learners have identified the benefits of Babbel Intensive as personally important and therefore are committed to and engaged in using it. This means, as long as they value the usefulness of the activity as important to personal goals, they will reflect a stable form of motivation and engagement (Ryan & Deci 2017).

On the other hand, Meyering (in preparation) suggests that respondents that stated they *have to* improve their L2—either because they need it to remain in their current position or to please their employer—are likely to show less persistence and poorer performance as their attitudes represent low levels of volition and autonomy (Ryan & Deci 2017).

In the next section, we first recall the main findings and discuss them as well as their implications.

6. Discussion and recommendations

Looking back at our first research question regarding *how users of Babbel's virtual-classroom solutions perceive the impact of virtual classes and app use on workplace communication*, we can state that users associate the experience of learning a language online with flexibility, effort/struggle, but also (personal and professional) development. The findings show that recurring tasks in the target language in the workplace are emails and conversations with colleagues or business partners (also over the telephone); the main challenges experienced by participants revolve around vocabulary, grammar, and speaking skills.

When asked about specific aspects around their experience with Babbel Intensive, users conceptualize the *teacher* as offering a personalized experience; the *session* as a chance to practice their spoken language skills, gain vocabulary and get feedback; the *ideal user* as a learner provided with tools/strategies to structure their learning (including but not restricted to combining app and virtual classes) and keep track of their own progress.

Thus, all in all, Babbel Intensive learners view the selection of teachers, the personalization offered by the virtual-classroom solution, and their progress in the target language positively. High levels of satisfaction are especially noticeable with respect to the impact the lessons have on workplace and everyday communication. Generally, participants reported having made progress and showed appreciation for the possibility to choose their teachers. This seems in keeping Manegre and Sabiri's (2020) findings, which showed an overtly positive attitude by teachers towards teaching in virtual-classroom platforms. So, our findings coupled with Manegre and Sabiri's findings point to the fact that virtual classes are perceived positively by both instructors and learners.

With respect to our second research question about the *types of motivation that can be identified among users*, we found evidence of both intrinsic and extrinsic types of motivation, with the latter outnumbering the former. Ryan and Deci (2017) explain that there are different types of extrinsic

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[6] Meike Meyering's MA thesis at the University of Potsdam is based on the analysis of data collected in this study.

motivation ranging from less to more self-regulated types (note that intrinsic motivation is the most self-regulated type). As explained in relation to extrinsic motivation, a number of participants report valuing the benefits of Babbel Intensive as personally and professionally important, which can reflect a stable form of motivation, because a level of self-regulation can be noted. On the other hand, several respondents also explain they are learning because they *have to* improve their L2 for external reasons such as (perceived) job market or employer pressure, which reveals a less self-regulated form of motivation.

We shall now look at our findings on motivation from the perspective of the three basic human needs—autonomy, competence, and relatedness—that are essential for self-motivation and well being and whose neglect or frustration leads to ill-being or distress (Peters, Calvo & Ryan 2018). Let us start with *autonomy*. Whereas it might be thought that a wealth of learning options per se maximizes autonomy, research on self-access language-learning centers has shown that only making materials available is not enough to engage learners. This is because autonomy is the "psychological need to experience behavior as self-determined" (Ushioda 2011: 223). Being provided with materials or technological solutions alone is not enough for ensuring a feeling of agency.

However, our findings do show that the basic need for autonomy is addressed by some features of Babbel Intensive, for example, when users are given the chance to choose among a pool of qualified teachers and when they are able to influence the topic of the lessons, which, as reported, is personalized to a great extent given its one-on-one format. Thus, when users get to use and explore the product, they can often experience agency. However, the feeling of agency might be lacking at an essential phase, namely at the stage of adoption. For instance, a user reports that he/she "didn't even understand at the beginning that there was an intensive course" (D_17). In this case, his/her agency was not taken into account. In this connection, Peters, Calvo & Ryan's explain that

> SDT [Self-Determination Theory] predicts that users will be likely to adopt a new technology to the extent that they are autonomously motivated to do so. Therefore, the primary question is: to what extent is a user's motivation to adopt a technology *autonomous*, that is, willing and aligned with their values and goals (e.g., "I really want to try that app because I think it will help me engage with exercise more"), versus perceived as externally controlled ("my boss is forcing me to download this app")? (Peters, Calvo & Ryan's, 2018: 7)

Thus, companies should ensure their users do not make their decision to use Babbel Intensive products based solely on the reasoning "since my company is paying for this offer, I have to take advantage of it," nor should they see the offer as a random benefit that does not meet their interests at all. That is why we recommend an in-company onboarding flow that considers users' wants and needs in terms of learning a foreign language and gives them a sense to actively make the choice to engage in language training. Concrete suggestions are (a) to have participants express interest and sign up for Babbel Intensive classes and (b) to create onboarding marketing materials that emphasize how learning a foreign language with Babbel Intensive will position users in the global world market.

Our findings also show that many users are learning a foreign language to the benefit of their employers. Therefore, it seems reasonable to expect that employers recognize this effort by rewarding learners accordingly, be it with encouraging users to have their lessons during office hours or creating programs to reward engagement with Babbel Intensive. So, ideally, the company would have Babbel Intensive as much more than a classic company benefit but actually as an investment of the company in the employee (further education). In this case, the company's "return of invest" is not only employee satisfaction but better communicative performance in the workplace.

As for the second basic psychological need for *competence*, the majority of users already report feeling a sense of progress in the language. On the other hand, users also express a desire for more support and guidance with structuring their learning and tracking their progress, both related to 'competence'. Thus, we can envision two new solutions: an app-based language-learning planner—where students can register their personal goals, tasks to accomplish these goals, and keep track of their progress—and a language-learning consultant. This consultant would meet with Babbel Intensive learners regularly to help them combine their goals with enduring strategies; think: a "personal trainer" for languages.

With respect to *relatedness*, existing features can be highlighted such as the fact that the one-on-one format of the lessons fosters the perception of personalization of goals and contents of the lessons. However, apart from the user-instructor relationship, other types of relationship (i.e., with other users) seem to be lacking. Future iterations of the Babbel Intensive experience could take into account how learners within companies could benefit from tracking their progress towards their language goals, as well as sharing and comparing their progress with coworkers or even friends and family.

All in all, we recommend a careful consideration of all stages of users' interaction with Babbel Intensive products, from adoption up to the impact in users' life,[7] in order to fulfill learners' three basic psychological needs. With this accomplished, we expect Babbel Intensive learners will agree with the following quotes from our interviewees:

> And then I looked for a new teacher again, and then at some point I ended up with Sandra[8] and then I said: Ok, we get along, we laugh a lot together, it's always a good time we spend together, we both enjoy it. I can tell her a little bit about Germany, because she is interested ... and she always talks about South Africa and we have our English lessons. And then I first booked, I think, twelve sessions in a row. So always Tuesday, Friday, always at the same time. I booked them through once and … made a note in my normal calendar [that] said something like this: Attention, make new appointments, so that I don't have too big gaps. (I_06, Pos. 64)

> I think these Babbel Intensive sessions definitely make sense, because you are simply forced to speak English and if you make a mistake, then you will be corrected without, how should I put it,

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[7] Peters, Calvo and Ryan (2018) explain how need satisfaction can explain different levels of users' interaction with technology: technology adoption, interaction with user interfaces, related tasks, behavior, up to an individual's life and societal levels.

[8] The name of the instructor was changed.

without having a guilty conscience, [you can] just talk and see where there is something [wo was liegt]. (I_03_Pos. 28)

We talked together, we improvised, we discussed various topics in English, just to practice speaking freely and that appealed to me very much (I_04, Pos. 57)

And I've already noticed over the months that my vocabulary has grown and that speaking is also becoming more fluent, now especially in class. And I think that's pretty good (I_02, Pos. 41)

I always talked a lot and she [the teacher] only asked a few questions. And then I noticed how cool it is when you can speak so much yourself. And especially if it isn't about getting to the point, as it actually is in a company when it comes to communication. But really to practice speaking...and so on...that is really good in individual lessons, I think.

I found...that my brain picked some new words from the app and then I used them in Babbel Intensive and if you use them, then, it is very likely that these words get stuck in your brain (I_04, Pos. 113-114)

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