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Using mobile devices for listening and speaking practice in languages: The L120 Mobile Project

Valérie Demouy, Annie Eardley, Agnes Kukulska-Hulme and Rhodri Thomas
• Languages at the Open University
  – Distance learning
  – Tutor supported
• Languages and Blended learning
  – Printed material
  – CDs, DVD-ROMs, VLE activities
  – Asynchronous online activities
  – Online and Face-to-face tutorials
L120 French Intermediate

– Printed material
– DVD-ROMs
– Asynchronous online activities
– Online and Face-to-face tutorials
– Assessments (oral & written)
Objectives

• to investigate the context in which students engage in mobile activities
• to evaluate the benefits of providing our students with mobile listening and speaking activities
• to understand better how to integrate interactive activities with mobile technologies into our courses
The project

• 2 groups of 35 students
  - Group 1: iPods or MP3 players (listening)
  - Group 2: mobile phones and Learnosity (interactive speaking activities)
• Over 6 weeks
  - 6 online questionnaires
  - audio feedback on activities for group 2
  - interviews
Group 1

- **Type of activity**
  - a variety of audio clips
  - no question or activity linked
  - reinforcement

- **Participation**
Group 2

- Type of activities: listening, oral presentations, pronunciation or grammar drills and dialogues
- Example
- Participation

![Graph showing participation rate - Group 2 (from questionnaires)]
Group 1
Where did you listen to L120 audio clips using your device? (Tick all that apply)

Group 2
Where did you do the L120 speaking activities using your device?
How often and for how long?

**Group 1**

How often have you used your device to listen to L120 audio clips?

- I have not
- Once
- Twice to 4 times
- More than 4 times

**Group 2**

How often have you used your device to do the speaking activities?

- I have not
- Once
- Twice to 4 times
- More than 4 times
So did Group 1 find it useful?

In relation with your studies on L120, how do you rate the usefulness of listening to L120 audio clips on mobile devices?

- Extremely useful: 42.9%
- Very useful: 42.9%
- Useful: 14.3%
- Not very useful
- Not useful at all
- Don’t know
Which aspect did Group 1 find most useful?

In listening to the audio clips on your device, which aspect did you find most useful? Group 1 week 1

- Practising general listening skills
- Understanding and/or recognising grammatical points
- Improving vocabulary
- Helping towards intonation and pronunciation

The chart shows the results with the following categories:
- Very useful
- Useful
- Fairly useful
- Not useful at all

The chart indicates that Group 1 found Practising general listening skills to be the most useful aspect, followed by Improving vocabulary and Helping towards intonation and pronunciation. Understanding and/or recognising grammatical points received a lower rating.
What problems did Group 2 encounter?

- Lack of sample/model answers in the review mode
- Issues around sound quality, functionality and cost
- The high level of difficulty:
  - relying too much on memory
  - relying too much on course material content
  - hard to understand
- Not knowing how long a task was before starting it

“the reception was a big problem… I had to have my head hanging out the window”
What did Group 2 like?

- Additional practice on pronunciation and grammar, provided prompts/answers were short and it did not rely too much on memory
- The potential to complement the DVD-ROM or the other course materials
- The challenge (being stretched) & the ‘authentic’ aspect

“for me the mobile side of it was good…I spend half my life running round in the car after the children… and on the football pitch”
Reasons for dropping out

- Work/life pressure: 4
- Technical: 2
- Difficulty of content: 3
- Cost: 6
- Didn't meet expectations: 2
- Sound quality: 4
- Didn't receive info: 1
- Study pressure (L120): 7
- Functionality: 3
- No new content: 2
- Dropped out of L120: 2
Possible practical applications

• Promising types of activity
  – Standalone repetition activities (pronunciation/intonation)
  – Follow-up activities (complementing another medium such as DVD-ROM), focusing on practising grammar or oral skills

• Changing learning habits
  – Encouraging the use of iPods and MP3 players for listening practice
  – Approaching listening differently (developing memory and comprehension as well as immediate response)
Lessons learned

• Don’t assume that even basic technology is easy to master
• Match content with the medium and its functionality (including its limitations)
• Educate students to make use of opportunities for learning in their daily life
• Educate students to the potential of approaching listening and speaking skills in a less supported way (lack of visuals can help with listening skills)
More information


• Case Study at [http://www.learnosity.com/case-studies/by-project/ou](http://www.learnosity.com/case-studies/by-project/ou)
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