Chapter 12
Socrative: Using Mobile Devices to Promote Language Learning

Sandra Vieira Vasconcelos
Polytechnic Institute of Viana do Castelo, Portugal

Ana Balula
University of Aveiro, Portugal

ABSTRACT

Focusing on the use mobile devices to promote language learning, this chapter documents the use of the student response system Socrative in two German courses taking place at two different Portuguese higher education institutions. It is divided into three different sections. After establishing the project’s theoretical framework, the authors analyse its implementation and present findings, based on users’ perceptions and test results. Aiming at understanding the role mobile devices can play in promoting students’ long-term content retention, this research achieved promising results, not only by confirming students’ expectations towards mlearning, but also by suggesting that mobile initiatives can have a positive effect in motivating students and promoting engagement, change and innovation. Overall, students achieved positive results, with data providing educators with indicators and insights on learner’s learning strategies and progress.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-2122-8.ch012

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INTRODUCTION

In 2007 Traxler predicted that “mobile education, however innovative, technically feasible, and pedagogically sound, may have no chance of sustained, wide-scale institutional deployment in higher education in the foreseeable future” (Traxler, 2007, p. 20). Referring to the pivotal role of structure and institutional organization, Traxler also noted that despite its potential, mobile learning (mlearning) was still emerging, and its implementation faced many obstacles, lacking support and sound research. However, since then, much has changed, and mlearning has become a pivotal area in education.

The expansion of mobile and wireless technologies and their growing ubiquity and pervasiveness have turned mobile devices into valuable teaching/learning tools, appealing not only to students but also to institutions. With recent studies suggesting that “students prefer courses with some online components” (Dahlstrom, 2012, p. 7), the education system, and particularly higher education institutions are challenged to “cater for the new generations of learners who use mobile technology for a variety of activities including accessing just in time information and interacting with peers” (Palalas, 2013, p. 2). As a result, there is a growing emphasis on giving students the possibility to study anytime, anyplace and at their own convenience through their mobile devices.

These changes have had a significant and widespread impact in different areas, including language learning. Over the last decade there has been a growing interest surrounding Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL), which has resulted in different studies and projects involving mobile technologies. Mobile devices and apps are reshaping the way people learn foreign languages. This change has happened at many different levels, not only in self-study and independent courses, but also in traditional classroom settings. In this chapter we describe a project that combines the use of a digital platform and mobile devices to promote foreign language teaching within a higher education context.

Focusing on two beginner courses of German as a Foreign Language taking place at two different Portuguese higher education institutions and working with the interactive, real time, web-based response system tool Socrative, we set out to document and analyze the role these devices can play in enhancing students’ experiences by empowering them and influencing their learning.

Socrative is a free web 2.0 tool that gives instructors the possibility to promote both formal and informal engagement in the classroom by using students’ mobile devices. After registering and creating a “teacher account,” the instructor can create multiple quizzes that can be accessed by students in class, using any mobile device with a web browser and Internet access. The platform’s different settings make it possible to create multiple choice and true/false exercises as well as short
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