Crowd-Sourcing with the LingoBee App: A Study in Facilitating Pollination across Language and Culture in Self-Directed Learning

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ABSTRACT

Many practitioners are currently involved in the exploration of the added value of using M-Learning in language acquisition both inside and outside the formal classroom. The EU-funded SIMOLA consortium, a Lifelong Learning initiative, has developed the LingoBee app from the seeded JISC-funded project Cloudbank in response to both the perceived need and desire for a learner-centered, crowd-sourced repository of language and cultural items which learners are exposed to in-situ, and also for more trials in the context of informal learning as commented on by Frohberg (2006) and Wright and Parchoma (2011). The functionality of the app has been designed around Web 2.0 features. Current field trials are examining the use of the app in both formal and informal settings. Data are being collected through both quantitative and qualitative methods with reference to perceptions of M-Learning, effects on learners and teachers, and a linguistic analysis of language items captured during the field trials. One of the key aims of the project is to explore whether LingoBee makes a demonstrable difference to learners’ awareness and understanding of both the target language and culture.

Keywords: M-Learning, Mobile Language Learning, Motivation, Non-Formal Learning, Language and Culture, Learner-Centered, Teacher-Led, Scaffolding

INTRODUCTION

This article details the initial results of two related UK-based trials in 2011/2012, using the LingoBee app for Android phones. This description can be found on the project website: LingoBee is the collaborative language learning application developed by the SIMOLA project. It consists of a mobile app, a web site and a range of cloud services to collect, edit, browse and share language- and culture-related content found in everyday life. Besides offering a platform for in-situ language learning, LingoBee also supports learner communities through user profiles, user groups, content ratings and

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other social networking functionality that help to make language learning more collaborative and help to overcome isolation in a foreign country (SIMOLA, 2012b).

LingoBee has also been simultaneously trialed in other countries including Norway, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands and Hungary, but data from these trials are not included here. This article focuses on two parallel trials each conducted with six students, studying at two different centres within Study Group, a worldwide private educational provider. One trial took place at Bellerbys College, Oxford, with a selection of pre university Foundation students studying at Level 3 Framework for Higher Education Qualifications) FHEQ (Further Education Qualifications Framework). The second was based at Sussex University International Study Centre with Pre Masters Business students from China, studying at Level 6, in preparation for their Masters programme.

The following questions, taken from a larger list which formed the basis of inquiry for both Study Group trials, will be the focus of this article:

**Main**

Can using LingoBee positively impact upon, and deepen learners’ understanding of English language and British culture, and culture generally?

**Secondary**

Is ownership of device (or non-ownership) a key factor in determining the level of participation?

Can LingoBee help foster integration for certain nationalities (such as Chinese students, specifically), who may tend to resist immersing themselves in the local culture and language?

Does crowd-sourcing work differently depending on the level of support and guidance given?

This article will examine student response to the app and consider both intrinsic and extrinsic motivating factors. This will take into consideration data, including outcomes. In this paper, ‘outcomes’ are defined as what the participants contributed using the LingoBee app, what they said, and what they appeared to ‘learn’ through the app.

LingoBee was developed as part of an EU LLP project called SIMOLA, with partners from six different countries, (SIMOLA, 2012b). LingoBee grew out of the JISC funded project Cloudbank (Pemberton, Winter, & Fallahkair, 2010). At the time LingoBee was designed to encapsulate “current thinking which encompasses a learner-generated content perspective” on mobile learning (Kukulska-Hulme, 2009). Through Cloudbank several useful insights were gained which helped to inform the design of the LingoBee app. For example, the need for scaffolding (Vygotsky, 1978; Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976) was identified, and in response it was noted that ‘the application (LingoBee) need[ed] to be directed to advanced learners or to intermediate learners supported by a teacher,’ and that ‘seeding the system with model entries might be helpful to learners’ (Pemberton & Winter, 2011). In addition, the idea of learners’ devices being very much an extension of their identity (Traxler, 2010) proved relevant; if participants did not own the device and become familiar with it, they were unlikely to (be able to) fully engage with its functionality, and by association an app running on it. Consequently, in the LingoBee trials, the users were given HTC Desire or Galaxy smart phones for the duration of the trial, and encouraged to use them as their sole device.

LingoBee, and both UK trials, can be situated within the context of informal learning, which Trinder et al define broadly as:

Learning which is not provided by a formal educational or training institution and typically does not lead to certification… result[ing] from daily, social life activities related to education, work, socialising with others or pursuit of leisure activities and hobbies… [it] may be structured or non-structured in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support … [and] may be intentional or non-intentional (incidental) from the learner’s perspective. (Trinder et al., 2008, p. 13)
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