

Chapter 16

M–English Podcast: A Tool for Mobile Devices

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ABSTRACT

At the beginning of the 21st century in a world dominated by technology it is essential to enhance and update the school, creating conditions for the students to succeed, consolidating the role of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) as a key resource for learning and teaching in this new era. In this chapter we will describe a study that was carried out in a Portuguese school. As a means to overcome some of the existing logistical obstacles in the school, where the possibility of carrying out ICT activities without restrictions was still dreamlike, the podcast was implemented as an m-learning tool. Being aware of the fact that nowadays mobile phones and mp3 players are part of our students' lives, we took advantage of this fact and the podcast was used as a tool to support, to enhance and to motivate students to learn English, used thus as a complement to traditional (face-to-face) learning.

INTRODUCTION

The recent technological revolution established a new order in various fields of human action and Education is one of the most privileged areas. In recent years we have been witnessing huge changes in the students' behavior and attitudes. Prensky (2001) calls them “digital natives”. They were born and grew up surrounded by mobile phones, computers, Internet, digital television,

MP3/4 players, among many other digital and mobile devices. These devices are an integral part of their routines. As a consequence of this phenomenon, the way they process information and interact with it is clearly different from their parents' generation.

The educational system was not designed for “digital natives” (Prensky, 2001) and it is now taking its first steps towards Knowledge Society. Today's school must learn to communicate in the language of this new generation and the teachers must be the facilitators of this new language,

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-60960-042-6.ch016

abandoning comfortable and traditional learning methodologies and approaches. In order to meet up this demand, there is the Portuguese Technological Plan for Education, which main objective is to leverage the skills and qualifications of the Portuguese towards the Knowledge Society. The materialization of this objective involves equipping schools with computer and connectivity equipment and to give teachers the necessary skills in ICT. However, the spread of technological resources will not suffice if there are no tools, materials and appropriate content (Resolução do Conselho de Ministros nº 137/2007, p. 6572).

Web 2.0 offers a huge amount and variety of tools and applications that allow us to meet up the addressed objectives in the ministerial resolution. It is urgent to consider the school, particularly considering that we have within it a generation of students influenced by all these technological devices, the Internet, and social networks. Menezes (2008) relates an experiment with the inclusion of a blog in the context of the English class just as a way to create content and materials in a program unit. According to this author, the experience proved to be fruitful for the improvement of levels of motivation and interest of students in activities. This fact was a strategic element in the recovery of students with very little success in English and also in developing expertise in ICT.

Menezes & Moreira (2009) reported the beginning of this study indicating good forecast in what concerns the attitude and the initial results of students in school year 2008/2009. It also confirmed the potential of the podcast as a new paradigm of learning, and as a trigger to develop activities that foster the development of oral and writing skills in the English language.

In this context the purpose of this chapter to analyze the impact of podcast used as a tool for mobile devices in English class. The podcast was used as a learning support tool to complement and to facilitate English learning with 97 7th grade students.

We will evaluate the impact on the acquisition of specific and cross skills, emphasizing the potential of this tool used in an m-learning approach, realizing how this new paradigm can be an advantage for students in the acquisition and improvement of skills.

BACKGROUND

Language Learning: From the Traditional Approach to Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL)

Since early days speaking a foreign language has been considered a way to cross bridges to other banks. In fact, this has always stood as a mobile tool for learning, doing business, politics, tourism, making friendship. In this sense Warschauer (2000) names English as “lingua franca” and places the emphasis on the ability to communicate interacting functionally, rather than “achieving nativelike perfection”.

In the last decades, the Globalization of the economy and the inclusion of ICT in all fronts of human daily life have also brought a deep impact in what concerns English teaching. As Warschauer (2000) also states it is related “to trends in employment”, due to the fact that jobs that used to exist in the industrial era are disappearing and are being replaced by new types of jobs and works which require new skills.

For these reasons several approaches have been used when teaching / learning a foreign language. The adoption of different methodologies and approaches and the introduction of ICT have contributed to the fact that a great part of the world population speaks more than one language thus having a multipurpose mobile tool.

From the Traditional Approach, which lasted until the middle of the 20th century to the Direct Method in the late 19th and early 20th century, or the Systematic Approach of the early twentieth century to the Audio-lingual Method or the Com-

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