

Chapter 78

LingoBee: Engaging Mobile Language Learners through Crowd–Sourcing

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes three case studies, where language learners were invited to use “LingoBee” as a means of supporting their language learning. LingoBee is a mobile app that provides user-generated language content in a cloud-based shared repository. Assuming that today’s students are mobile savvy and “Digital Natives” able to engage in language learning autonomously using technology, initial studies were conducted with little or no intervention by the language teachers. However, the support and guidance provided within a teacher-led context can impact positively on learner engagement and use of LingoBee. The authors discuss this hypothesis using three case studies conducted in three European countries, within the EU LLP project SIMOLA, Situated Mobile Language Learning. This paper answers the research question: Does the level of the support and guidance, pedagogical approach and prior learning impact on learners’ engagement and use of LingoBee? An earlier version of this paper was presented at the IADIS Mobile Learning 2013 conference.

INTRODUCTION

Mobile learning has been perceived as learning on the go, where learners may engage in activities that enhance their knowledge as they go about their daily lives. The early views of

mobile learning focused on technology that is mobile, e.g. (Quinn, 2000), have evolved to learning anytime, anywhere and anyhow (Sharples, 2006), fostering a new culture of thinking and learning. Mobile Learning is undergoing an evolution “from a position of where ‘delivery’

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of learning was paramount, to current thinking which encompasses a learner-generated content perspective” (Agnes Kukulska-Hulme, 2009). The term Flexible Learning has been used by Collis and Moonen where the key idea is the learner’s choice; where flexibility applies to several aspects such as the time and place where learning takes place, in the interactions and the learning materials (Collis & Moonen, 2002). One of the models for successful flexible learning is the participation model, where the focus of learning activities is on becoming a member of a community and learning from the community and also contributing to it (Collis & Moonen, 2006). New technologies and technological trends continue to influence mobile learning. For example, Cloud Computing is seen as an economic solution to provide students and teachers free and low cost alternative storage and computing power (Branon, Wolfenstein, & Raasch, 2012). Clouds have been described as “a classroom without walls, instructions or curricula” (Koulopoulos). Examples of a few applications that connect Mobile Learning to the Cloud are available in the literature; Revu4u (Review for You), is designed to help students prepare for Advanced Placement (AP) tests, which enable high-school students to acquire college credit in various subjects (Branon, et al., 2012). A model of Mobile Learning based on cloud computing is proposed in (Li, 2010), where cloud computing is considered a “bridge between teachers and learners”, teachers producing and publishing learning material. Another technological development that has been considered in the context of mobile computing is crowd-sourcing, e.g. (Satyanarayanan, 2011). While these technological trends have been discussed in the literature as influences on Mobile Learning, little has been reported on approaches that were not teacher-led (Agnes Kukulska-Hulme, 2009). There is little or no evidence of learner-centred mobile learning activities, particularly based on learner-generated content.

Cloudbank, a mobile (Android) app is designed to enable advanced language learners to collect and

describe multimedia language and culture-related content they came across in everyday life within their target language culture (Pemberton, Winter, & Fallahkhair, 2009). Cloudbank used crowd sourcing to collect language related content in a shared repository “in the cloud”. Developed from Cloudbank, LingoBee is a crowd-sourced mobile app to support situated mobile language learning and to help the learners with linguistic and cultural diversity (SIMOLA, 2012). Ideally, technologies such as LingoBee should be complementary to the activities in formal language learning classes. We envisaged that activities around LingoBee in the informal learning arena and the content generated would bring the learners’ interests into the classroom, thus bridging the formal and informal learning arenas and enhancing the learning support for the language learners. The main research question for this paper is: Does the level of the support and guidance, pedagogical approach and prior learning, impact on learners’ engagement and use of LingoBee? In this paper, we describe three case studies conducted in three European countries, where language learners were invited to use “LingoBee” as a means of supporting their language learning.

An earlier version of this paper was presented at the IADIS Mobile Learning conference (Petersen, Procter-Legg, & Cacchione, 2013b). This paper extends the descriptions of the case studies presented in the earlier paper and presents an evaluation of the results by studying in detail, the level of participation of the learners in language learning activities using LingoBee.

This paper is organized as follows: Section 2 provides a brief description of LingoBee; Section 3 describes the three case studies; Section 4 describes the data used for the evaluations presented in this paper, Section 5 outlines results of the case studies; Section 6 discusses how the teacher-led activities can motivate learners and Section 7 summarises the paper.

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