

Voulez-vous mlearn French for marketing? Le Marché App

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Abstract: Educators, especially in technologically advanced countries, have begun to take advantage of mobile devices to promote learning and study. Mobiles are recognized as valuable educational tools by many Universities and offered to attract students, according to the Horizon Report (2011). Mobile technology has great potential to develop learning relevant to foreign language (FL) learners of all ages, particularly to informal adult learners. Mobile learning (mlearning) allows lifelong learners immediate access to needed knowledge far from University settings. This instructional design project explores an iPad app as an informal learning tool to allow adult French learners visiting or living abroad access to necessary language in authentic, immediate, and real life situations. Mlearning represents an appropriate vehicle for learning language related to a particular daily activity and cultural event in any country. I created *Le Marché*, a website-based iPad app designed to teach the simple vocabulary and pronunciation necessary to complete a produce purchase in an open-air market in France. Attitudinal Survey results revealed that 79% of the respondents owned or intended to buy an iPad, while about 80% would be willing to use an app for FL study. All of the respondents showed acquisition of French vocabulary and structure through the module. Feedback indicated a desire to learn more French as well as interest in similar apps for learning other languages.

Introduction

The need for immediate, accessible language learning for adult learners is supported by leading researchers in foreign language (FL) and second language (SL) pedagogy. In "Learning cultures on the move, where are we heading?", Kulkulska-Hulme views SL as an increasingly integral part of daily life due to increasing travel and exposure to foreign languages on the internet (2010, p. 5). The purpose of this Instructional Design project was to design and evaluate a mobile web application to teach foreign language to adults for use in informal learning contexts. Current research on informal and mobile learning provided the theoretical foundations for this Instructional Design.

Body of Paper

Although most research and practice centers on Mlearning in classroom situations, learning with a mobile device is particularly suited to language instruction, especially to adult learners engaged in informal language learning for travel purposes. Mobile apps

allow adult learners who do not have access to a classroom to learn the necessary vocabulary and structures needed to communicate in given situations, and potentially, *in situ*. Because mlearning is possible anywhere, and at any time, it is personal and authentic (Traxler, 2009, p.17). Tourists planning to visit foreign countries can look to mlearning that allow them total autonomy and choice in language instruction, while offering only what is needed, when and how the learner wants it or “just in time, just enough, and just for me” (Peters, 2009, p. 14, from Rosenberg, 2003).

Mobile learning is a personal learning tool, and as such, is adaptable to all ages, races, and learning styles. Instruction is available to all individuals, accepting of diversity, and open to all learners on their own terms (Traxler, 2009, p. 17). Mobile technology does require appropriately developed pedagogy in order to be effective, however. In a paper addressing the problem of providing FL/SL learning opportunities to adult learners in Europe’s pluralism, Kukulska-Hulme posited that mlearning language study resources must be “relevant, flexible, learner-oriented, and open-ended so as to encourage the ...individual application of foreign language skills” (2010, p. 20).”

Findings in a European Community-supported project that studied mlearning as a means to engage 512 multinational K-12 students in collaborative, constructivist, and blended learning indicated that the subjects: accessed and contributed to learning material, followed their interests to create individual learning experiences, enjoyed working individually or collaboratively at their own pace, and were allowed more possibilities for authentic, real world experiences (Granic, Cukusic, & Walker, 2009, pp. 180-181). Similarly, a Danish study that explored the potential of geo-tagging in FL/SL pedagogy found that mobile geo-tagging allowed learners autonomy, and the possibility of working independently on projects beyond the classroom by adding photographs, audio, videos, and vocabulary to their tags (Bo-Kristensen, Ole Ankerstjerne, Neutzsky-Wulff, & Schelde, 2009). Thus, mlearning allows learners the autonomy of choice, and the possibility of self-expression.

Mlearning as a particularly useful means of reaching adult informal learners is supported by current research. In "Will mobile learning change language learning?". Kukulska-Hulme argues the need for a spontaneous and immediate resource for learners who can benefit from the option of engaging in learning activities relating to the here and now, at will, in formal and informal learning settings (Kukulska-Hulme, 2009, p. 162; Traxler, 2009; Bo-Kristensen, Ole Ankerstjerne, Neutzsky-Wulff, & Schelde, 2009). Common learner experiences with current mobile devices and autonomy are key attributes that also render mobile learning attractive and relevant to lifelong learners (Kukulska-Hulme, 2011).

Developing an application for learning allows the instructional designer or teacher to tailor instruction to suit a particular audience that can be centered on one FL activity the audience, in this case, adult informal learners, are likely to encounter. Because colorful outdoor markets “*marchés*” are common in France and other Francophone countries, I decided to create a mobile marketing app. *Le marché* allows visitors and temporary

residents access to a cultural activity that will allow them to get to know their host culture. Instruction centers on limited specific and essential language necessary for a purchasing exchange and includes polite expressions, counting, fruit, and vegetables.

Methods

The subjects of the present instructional module are adult, volunteer learners who are beginners in conversational French. Their ages, levels of education, nationalities, ethnicities, social backgrounds, and learning styles vary. Most of the subjects are familiar with Apple mobile devices, although their experience levels vary. Not many of them have used apps for FL learning previously. The instructional module was presented through a web-based mobile application, intended for iPad users.

Although I had planned to develop a native app, I chose a web app primarily because it is easier and more practical than creating an app through X-Code. After struggling with X-Code, I discovered that I could use iBuild.com to create an app based on a website. Teachers who wish develop instruction should not have to struggle with applications that require months of learning or that are costly. For the site, I chose Weebly.com, which allows users to create attractive sites that can be adapted to mobile view as a free service. Due to increased screen size, the iPad view is easily legible and attractive in either the website or app mode. *Le Marché* can be used on an iPhone or iPod as well. All of the software used for development, surveys, and charts can be obtained online for free.

The content was developed for simplicity and clarity, with the idea in mind that informal learners would not be interested in knowing all possible rules and ways of expressing their needs. French instruction was tailored to the traveler-on-the-go who desires to accomplish his/her mission clearly, politely and effectively. As a long-time teacher of informal conversational classes in French, I limited myself to the bare bones of language learners would need, avoiding unnecessary explanations and content that would require them.

As the language-teaching module was developed, it was continually evaluated to aid in the revision process through: online written comments and/or questions from learners as they used the learning application, peer-evaluation by one or more French language teachers, formative/summative feedback from individuals as they tested and used the instruction online, and surveys of the target population including open-ended questions for qualitative/quantitative data. Participants were questioned on their attitudes before and after the module. All data was collected anonymously online through Survey Monkey surveys consisting of a variety of formats, including Likert and open-ended questions. In addition, they were asked to provide comments and suggestions for the designer. The module was posted by 2/17/12 and open through 2/26/12. Nine respondents completed the module.

Results

The data collected provided: written and anonymous comments and advice on particular items in the module, information about the possibilities of FL through mlearning in informal situations, general comments about the instructional value of the module, and information relating to the suitability of mlearning for adults in informal situations. The initial and Final Attitudinal Surveys in Figure 1 (below) indicate how many respondents thought they could learn a foreign language from a mobile app rather than from a teacher. Of the respondents who thought they could not learn from an app, some felt they would learn more effectively in a classroom situation, or by going abroad and learning. The social aspect of learning in a class where there is moral support and a community of learners appeals to some learners more than the opportunities of individual learning. In the Final Attitudinal Survey, only 12.50% did not think they could learn FL from an app, and preferred learning in a classroom situation, compared to 27.30% in the initial survey. Considering that 72.20% of respondents were open to mobile FL learning before completing the module, the rise to 87.50% in the final survey represents increased confidence in mobile learning of about 15%.

Figure 2 (below) presents the corresponding pre-test and post test questions. Questions do not need to be worded identically, but I found that it is better to have corresponding questions for each item in the pre- and post tests so it will be easier to align the data.

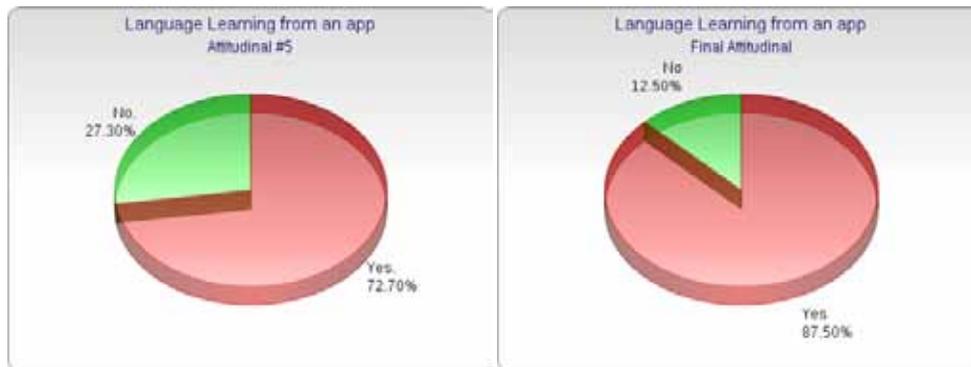


Figure 1. Initial and Final Attitudinal Surveys

Pre-test	Post Test
1. Le marché is...	What is le marché?
2. How do the French say Good Morning politely?	What is the most common polite greeting in the morning in French?
3. Je voudrais un kilo de tomates means...	(no corresponding question)
4. Translate: Two kilos of bananas, please.	Translate: Two bananas, please.
5. Je voudrais un kilo d'oranges means...	Je voudrais un kilo d'oranges means...
6. Je voudrais un ananas means...	Je voudrais un ananas means...
7. After a purchase is completed, one should say...	After a purchase is completed, one should say...

Figure 2. Corresponding questions from the pre-test and the post test

The pre-test and post test comparison depicted in Figure 3 (below) reveals language acquisition gains, except for question #3, in which, the French word “banane” was too easily recognized as “banana” in the pre-test. Instructional gains cannot be measured if the initial items are too easy for anyone to miss. Questions #1 and #6 show the successful acquisition of completely new material. The chart does indicate a need for further adjustment of the learning material in the module concerning questions #5, and #6. Curiously, question #5 reveals that some respondents answered correctly in the pre-test, while regressing and answering the post test incorrectly.

Finally, Figure 4 (below) reveals that respondents were encouraging in answer to the Final Attitudinal Survey question, “Would you be interested in trying an iPad app of the finished product?”. Almost 56% said they would definitely be interested, while 22% said “maybe” and 11.10% said Not sure” or “No, I don’t think so.” No one said “Never”.

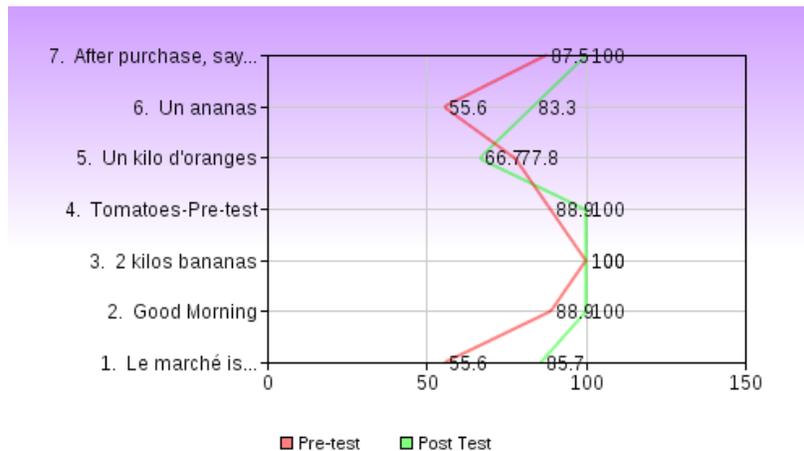


Figure 3. Pre- and Post test comparison

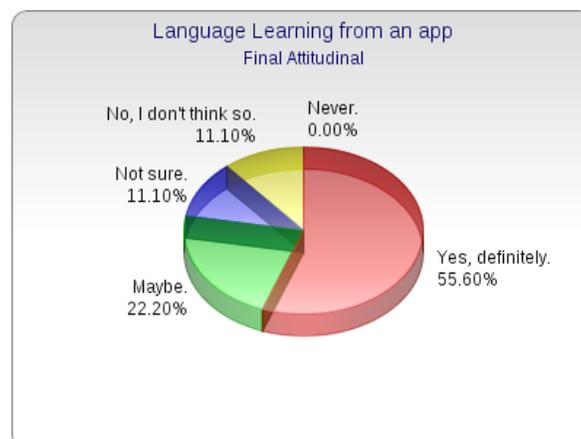


Figure 4. Final Attitudinal question

Implications

For teachers, self-development of mobile applications with free software will offer a means of personalizing learning for their students, while instructional designers can create apps for FL learning for specific purposes for larger groups adult learners and other populations. Mobile learning will require pedagogical adaptations and careful instructional design to be effective. Learning is not limited to the classroom, and lifelong learners will profit from the creation of learning materials specifically suited to their experience, interests, needs, and learning styles. Mlearning offers users on the go the possibility of learning at any time, and in any place, and does not tie them to a classroom, where authentic cultural situations are absent. Although learning with a mobile device may not attract all learners, my findings indicate that most people are willing to try it.

Conclusion

The data resulting from the trial period of the module was used to inform revisions of the instructional design and will have implications for future development in the design of this app. During the testing period, several problematical design problems surfaced. Incompatible instruction, a small error in one of the survey questions, and a couple of functional web problems had to be resolved. Testing allows instructional designers to adjust both instruction and technology as problems arise. As a result of the testing, I was able to correct, change, and improve instruction, while repairing technological glitches. The lesson learned is that no matter how well you know your material, unforeseen aspects or problems will cause you to rethink your design. Ideally, a module would be tested by numerous users before drawing conclusions; in the course of this project, I had to be satisfied with those who were willing to try the module.

This mobile design represents only the seed of the final app. Instruction will need to be modified and developed so that the app will be more satisfying and attractive to users. Vocabulary for fruits and vegetables will be increased. Other features such as flashcards, and quizzes in the instruction would be added before the app could be market-ready. In view of the future development of mobile language applications for specific purposes, the findings from this instructional design are encouraging. If the application is easy to use, fun, attractive, informative, and practical, I expect the learners to feel confident about using it to learn French or other FL through apps. As the classroom is almost never where informal learners are when they need to know something, the instruction will be valuable during their visit to France.

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