

Using mobile phones in English reading class

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Abstract

This study focuses on the use of cell-phones in a reading class targeting pre-intermediate learners of English. The good use of ICT devices in class enables language teachers to teach reading more interactively and spontaneously. This study will demonstrate some efficient ways of (1) timed reading, (2) grammar translation, and (3) extensive reading activities by incorporating new dimensional aspects into regular reading classroom activities.

Keywords

Moodle, mobile phones, extensive reading

Introduction

The number of present mobile phone users in Japan has exceeded Japan's population. According to the survey conducted by the Cabinet Office (2011), about 96% of high school students have their own mobile phones. From my personal observations, recent university students have at least one or two phones with them. Inexpensive wi-fi music players and computer tablets are also available in the market. Moodle among other e-learning tools is already mobile-accessible. This makes it easier to use these devices in the average classroom, despite probable criticism from some educators. In fact, most students in Japan are told not to use their cell-phone during regular class hours. However, this can be very educational, if used wisely and properly.

Firstly, this ongoing study focuses on the use of cell-phones in reading classes targeting pre-intermediate learners of English. Some reading activities can be very demotivating because reading comprehension requires cognitive workload. Therefore, a wide variety of learning activities and strategic plans are necessary. The good use of ICT devices in class enables language teachers to teach reading more interactively and spontaneously. This study will demonstrate some efficient ways of (1) timed reading, (2) grammar translation, and (3)

extensive reading (ER) activities by incorporating new dimensional aspects into regular reading classroom activities.

Secondly, the study will seek to assess the use of mobile phones in a regular classroom. We will present how we overcame technical difficulties and review students' both positive and negative perceptions toward this issue by conducting a survey.

1 Getting started

Once you have installed Moodle, it is very easy for you to make it mobile-accessible. Your task is just to follow the instructions available on the following website, making some changes to a couple of php files. If the setting is successful, mobile phone icons will appear, as shown in Figure 1.

http://docs.moodle.org/19/en/Moodle_for_Mobiles_installation



Figure 1: Mobile-accessible Moodle

Language teachers will find its feedback module useful, so we strongly suggest that you enable its feedback module. After that, you will be able to conduct a survey by using various formats (as in figure 2). Tsutsui et al. (2009) usefully use this module as a self-reflection tool or a diagnostic tool that tells learner characteristics.

In my teaching experience, one out of every 30 students cannot have access to Moodle for mobiles

for unknown reasons. Moreover, some students don't have contract with flat fee for packet communication, so they don't like to rely heavily on mobile phones in a classroom. Therefore, I bring several tablet PCs so that I can lend them. Also, I am always prepared myself to provide paper-based alternatives to these students.

2 Teaching Reading

When teaching freshmen in Japan, we realize they don't get used to reading rapidly or extensively. Sometimes, they have to understand every word written in the text and they become very reliant on translation procedures. ICT-based activities can help meet the needs of these students. The following sections demonstrate some examples.

2.1 Timed reading

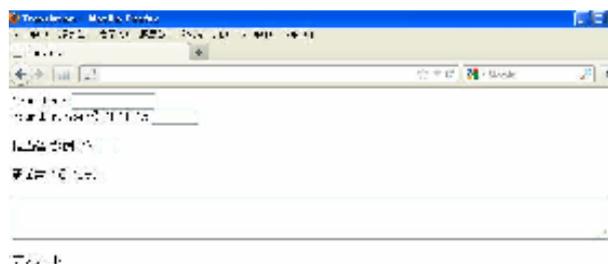
One good feature of Moodle is that it can count down for you. Language teachers monitor learners' reading fluency by looking at how many words in a minute they can read. Language learners check their WPM, and they can be aware of balancing accuracy and fluency. Comprehension quizzes and instantaneous feedback can be given to students, which can save us some time checking every answer available in the textbook. Instead, we can spend more time for good quality of learning and training.

2.2 Grammar translation

After the vocabulary training and timed reading, translation tasks are possible through mobile phones. Moodle also makes this possible, too. Like the following, language teachers number the sentences of the text and assign individual students to translate one sentence.

- 01: Sentence A
- 02: Sentence B
- :
- 26: Sentence Z

Then, on the following website, students fill out their assigned number and its corresponding translation. In my case, in order to monitor the task difficulty, students are asked a few multiple choice questions about how difficult the task was.



As soon as all the students have finished the task, the responses should be sorted by number. Then, we can start discussing how to nicely translate these sentences into Japanese.

2.3 Extensive reading

Thomas N Robb has started a wonderful ER project, by using Moodle. He provides more than 1,500 comprehension quizzes for a great collection of graded readers and other books. If signed up, anyone is allowed to use his contents without any charge.

ER has to be enjoyable and motivating, so some language teachers may not like to have students answer comprehension quizzes after the reading. I personally use rather open-ended questions to monitor learners' comprehension (figure 2). Various other ER tasks are available in Bamford and Day (2004). Students may like a paper-and-pencil approach, but you can easily collect and analyze data by making use of Moodle.

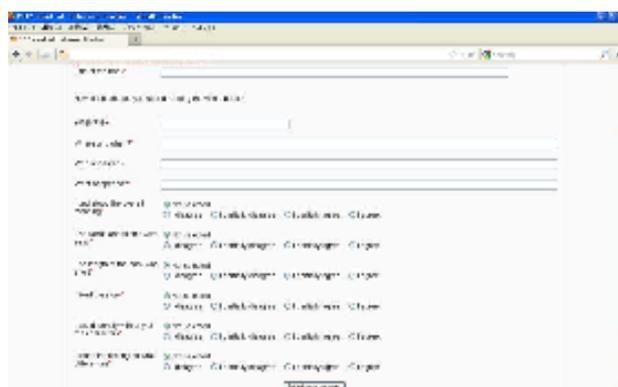


Figure 2: Feedback module format

3 Discussion

Not all students are highly motivated to learn English, and sometimes they forget to bring their own dictionary. Some ICT devices can provide an alternative method of learning English and they can save time and effort to look up individual words in the dictionary. They are useful, but there seems to be something satisfying about the "analog" way of learning English. In the conference site, we will more deeply explore students' both positive and negative perceptions toward the use of mobile phones in class.

4 Selected References

- Bamford, J., and Day, R. R. (2004). *Extensive reading activities for teaching language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Robb, T.N. (n.d.). *The Moodle Reader Module*. Retrieved June 30, 2012, from <http://moodlereader.org/>