

M-learning for foreign language teachers. Introducing the mobile app *Socrative* in the classroom

Katerina Katsika

foreign language teacher, MA, Med

slou2001@yahoo.com

Abstract

The present paper intends to explore the way in which a mobile orientated educational web app called Socrative can be used for real time communication between the teacher and the student outside the foreign language (FL) classroom or as instructor's support during face-to-face traditional lessons.

In the first place, we provide an explanation of the notion of "mobile learning" (m-learning) and then we present how Socrative works. In the second place, emphasis is given to the paradigms of connectivism, self-regulated learning and FL action-based learning that are supported by the usage of Socrative in the classroom. In addition, the present paper proposes a variety of on-line Socrative practices that can be used to the best interest of both learners and teachers of FL.

Key words: foreign language classroom, m-learning, web apps, Socrative

Mobile learning (m-learning)

Over the last two decades, the paradigmatic shift away from teacher-based activity to student-based practice as well as the explosive growth of wireless and mobile technology have inaugurated a new era of a learning procedure that is called mobile learning (Garisson, 2011).

From a technological standpoint, mobile learning is defined as any kind of learning supported by portable devices such as smartphones, tablets, laptops or personal digital assistants (PDA). Quinn (2000) regards mobile learning as "e-learning through mobile computational devices" and, similarly, Trifonova and Ronchetti (2003) underline that "there is common agreement that m-learning is e-learning through mobile computational devices". According to O'Malley et al. (2003), mobile learning is "any sort of learning that happens when the learner is not at a fixed predetermined location or learning that happens when the learner takes advantage of the learning opportunities offered by mobile technologies".

Following the previous literature definitions, we can deduce that mobile learning enhances constant mobility and, consequently, liberates students from the constraint of attending a lesson in a delimiting physical environment. Moreover, it can be argued that mobile learning is the evolution of e-learning practice. Nevertheless, it distinguishes itself from e-learning in the sense that it facilitates instant and real time communication (eg instant messages) rather than asynchronous communication (eg emails).

Socrative

The prominent feature that characterizes web 2.0 learning applications is the notion of “interactivity”. Rather than simply receiving information, the user is able to create, form and share the digital content with other users. Moreover, a lot of these applications (apps) are compatible with a wide range of portable devices.

Socrative is both a web 2.0 quiz engine and a student response system that enables teachers to offer online activities to their class. Users have also the opportunity to view a report of all students’ answers as an excel file can be emailed directly to them. Content is mainly used for real time communication between the teacher and the students outside the classroom or it can be introduced inside the classroom in order to enhance the traditional face-to-face lesson.

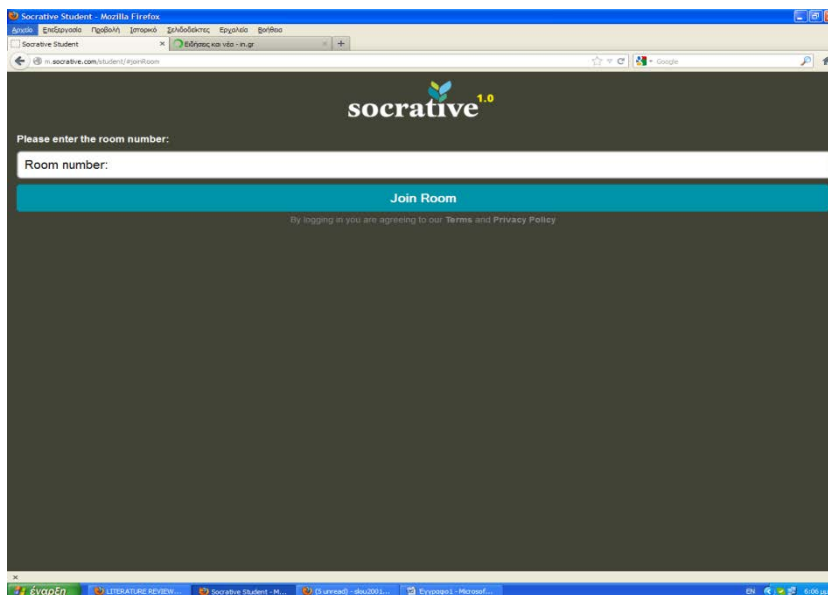


Image 1. Students' Socrative room

This web app runs on multiple devices such as smartphones and tablets and is compatible with various browsers such as Internet Explorer, Firefox and Chrome. The application can be downloaded for free from the online stores of iTunes (<https://itunes.apple.com>) and Google Play (<https://play.google.com>). There are two different apps to be downloaded:

- 1) one for the teacher: <http://m.socrative.com/lecturer/#lecturerLogin> (in order to create the questions) and
- 2) one for the student: <http://m.socrative.com/student/#joinRoom> (in order to respond to the questions).

Instructors log in through their own device and select the type of activity they want to prepare. Students, respectively, type the number of the virtual classroom given to them and interact in real time with the teacher. By introducing Socrative in the FL learning procedure a great range of activities that support mobile learning are revealed:

- Short Answer Questions: The instructor forms open-ended questions and participants respond. Their answers are immediately projected on the screen.
- Quick Quiz: It refers to an activity with multiple choices or short answer questions. Not only results can be viewed question by question but they can also be saved and graded in a file.
- Create a Quiz: The administrator designs his own Quick Quizzes or imports pre-planned activities with an excel template.
- Multiple Choice (MC): It includes multiple choice questions. Students' responses are immediately projected on the screen.

Quiz name:

Sharing
Enable sharing to get a SOC number. Other teachers can import this quiz in the 'Import Quiz' area by entering this SOC number.

☒ Enable Sharing

Share your quiz here.

Choose the type of question to add:

Multiple Choice

Short Answer

Image 2. Creation of a quiz

Moreover, there are two options that are likely to be used as support activities during a conventional face-to-face lesson. The first enhances playful and collaborative learning while the second promotes feedback:

- Space Race: Students form teams represented by images of rockets in order to answer to multiple choice questions. First team to get their rocket across the screen is the winner.
- Exit Tickets: Teachers receive paper-free feedback at the end of the session. Participants evaluate the activities and their answers are saved in a report.

Socrative and learning theories

Connectivism is a learning theory based on the premise that knowledge exists in the world. According to the principal proponents of the theory, Siemens (2005) and Downes (2007), students must participate in activities that will enable them to connect specialized nodes or create links between the information sources. Another prevailing aspect of connectivism is that learning may reside in non-human appliances. As Siemens (2004) states in his site *Elearnspace*, “Technology is altering (rewiring) our brains. The tools we use define and shape our thinking”. Siemens adds that the use of technology promotes individual learning and contributes to knowledge maintenance.

Taking into consideration the previous remarks, it can be deduced that the implementation of Socrative in the FL classroom complies with the principles of connectivism. The participant uses a non-human appliance and learns how to detect connections between ideas, concepts and semantic information that are to be found in a variety of activities. In addition, the maintenance of knowledge is promoted since students can retrieve the history of their answers and have access as many times as they wish to the correct and false answers.

The self-regulated learning refers to a person's ability to control his performance in order to achieve the desired outcome (Zimmerman et al., 2002). A self-regulated person is guided by metacognition, which means that he sets goals, monitors his actions and thinks about thinking (Pintrich, 2000). These kind of learners are considered to be successful as they are aware of their personalized learning styles and preferences.

In this perspective, we can assume that the mobile environment of Socrative supports the notion of personalized learning and, therefore, contributes to the development of self-regulation. Each student using this web app has the opportunity to choose the kind of activity he desires when and where he wants. By using Exit Tickets, the user can evaluate the quality of the presented material and even suggest the design of activities that comply with his own learning style.

Action based approach in FL learning is an approach that puts agency at the centre of the learning process (Puren, 2008; Rosen, 2009). According to the approach, learners must act in order to construct their own knowledge and classroom activities must represent real life situations that demand the students' active participation. The Council's of Europe *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR), a

comprehensive basis for the creation of language syllabuses and the design of teaching material, exemplifies the principles that characterize the action-based approach. The CEFR (2001) underlines that:

- Language is used to perform communicative acts;
- The communicative act occurs in a context that presupposes specific constraints and conditions;
- Communicative competence includes the following components:
 - a) linguistic (grammatical, syntactic and semantic elements),
 - b) socio-linguistic (social norms) and
 - c) pragmatic (functions in the real world).

The introduction of Socrative in the FL classroom follows the action-orientated principles as ever user acts as an agent whenever he participates in Space Race. Students form groups and work for a meaningful outcome which is the win of the game. Participants try to beat their opponents during a game that can take place in the FL classroom. In this regard, students' work is not a meaningless linguistic exercise but the performance of a communicative act that occurs in a specific pragmatic context.

Introducing Socrative in the FL classroom

Socrative can be introduced in various ways in the FL classroom. The following suggestions that we make blend conventional learning and m-learning and, therefore, do not stand as a total substitute for the traditional face-to-face lesson:

- The teacher creates a Socrative room where he publishes activities at the end of every learning unit. Students' answers facilitate formative assessment of linguistic communicative competences (grammar, syntax and semantic notions) and promote peer feedback since every user can comment on the present material.
- The teacher creates a Socrative room where he publishes supplementary activities for students who have missed courses. In that sense, Socrative becomes a tool for make-up classes as it saves time and re-emphasizes troubling content areas.
- FL teachers that come from different schools can create a virtual "meeting point" and explore all the advantages of becoming members of a Socrative room. They can share ideas and design a vast library of activities.

- Students can participate in inter-school games between countries. For example, Etwinning or Comenius programs can adopt the Socrative platform. Groups of students in different countries log in the same room and play by using the Space Race.
- Students can participate in intra-school games between classes. One class acts as the administrator and logs in teachers' Socrative room. In that way, they design activities that are expected to be answered by the students of another class.

Conclusion

Following the previous remarks, we can conclude that Socrative does not act as a total substitute for the conventional teaching. Its supplementary use suggests that mobile learning has the potential to impact positively on learning environments of FL since it helps teachers to develop children's motivation through innovative services.

The benefits that arise from the implementation include the saving of time for both the teacher and the student, as well as the use of constant feedback that guides future instruction.

Nevertheless, some concerns are raised by the use of mobile apps in teaching. These concerns may refer to ergonomic issues (lack of wireless networks in a wide range), to technical limitations (short battery life) and to the increased cost of acquisition of a portable device. Taking into consideration all the above, we can argue that the use of mobile apps in FL classroom must be promoted according to specific and clear learning needs so as to minimize the disadvantages of their implementation.

References

- Cadre européen commun de référence pour les langues (2001). Last accessed 06/06/2014. www.coe.int/T/DG4/Portfolio/documents/cadrecommun.pdf
- Downes, S. (2007). An introduction to connective knowledge. *Media, Knowledge and Education: Exploring new Spaces, Relations and Dynamics in Digital Media Ecologies*. Proceedings of the International Conference. Last accessed 06/06/2012. <http://www.downes.ca/cgi-bin/page.cgi?post=33034>
- Garrison, D.R. (2011). *E-Learning in the 21st Century: A Framework for Research and Practice*. Marceline MO: Walsworth Publishing Company.
- O'Malley et al., (2003). MOBILEarn. Guidelines for Learning, Teaching and Tutoring in a mobile environment. Last accessed 20/04/2014. <http://www.mobilearn.org>

Pintrich, P. R. (2000). Multiple goals, multiple pathways: The role of goal orientation in learning and achievement. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 92, 544-555.

Puren, C. (2008) Perspective actionnelle et perspective professionnelle: quelques éléments de réponse à quelques questions sur la reforme en cours. Paris: APLV.

Last accessed 30/05/2014.

http://www.aplvlanguesmodernes.org/IMG/pdf/PUREN_lettre_ouverte_liste_interlangue.pdf

Quinn, C. (2000). M-Learning. Mobile, Wireless, In-Your-Pocket Learning. Linezine. Last accessed 15/03/2014. <http://www.linezine.com/2.1/features/cqmmwiyp.htm>.

Rosen, E. (2009) Pesrpective actionnelle et approche par les tâches en classe de langue. *Le français dans le monde. Recherches et applications* 45: 487- 498.

Siemens, G. (2004) Connectivism: A learning theory for the digital age. Elearn Space.

Last accessed 15/03/2014. <http://www.elearnspace.org/Articles/connectivism.htm>

Trifonova, A. & Ronchetti, M. (2003). Where is Mobile Learning Going?. In A. Rossett (Ed.), *Proceedings of World Conference on E-Learning in Corporate, Government, Healthcare, and Higher Education 2003* (pp. 1794-1801). Chesapeake, VA: AACE. Last accessed 15/03/2014. <http://www.editlib.org/p/12226>

Zimmerman, B.J. (1990). Self-regulated learning and academic achievement: An overview. *Educational Psychologist*, 25, 3-17.

Περίληψη

Η παρούσα εργασία έχει ως στόχο να ερευνήσει με ποιον τρόπο η διαδικτυακή εκπαιδευτική εφαρμογή Socrative μπορεί να χρησιμοποιηθεί για συγχρονισμένη επικοινωνία μεταξύ του διδάσκοντα και του εκπαιδευόμενου εκτός της ξενόγλωσσας τάξης ή ως υποστηρικτικό υλικό μέσα στην ξενόγλωσσα τάξη.

Αρχικά, παρέχουμε την ερμηνεία της έννοιας «κινητή ηλεκτρονική μάθηση» και στη συνέχεια παρουσιάζουμε τη λειτουργία του Socrative. Έπειτα, η προσοχή μας στρέφεται στις διδακτικές θεωρίες του κονεκτιβισμού, της αυτορρυθμιζόμενης μάθησης και της μάθησης δράσης οι οποίες μπορούν να αναδειχθούν με την ενσωμάτωση του Socrative μέσα στην εκπαιδευτική διαδικασία. Επιπρόσθετα, η εργασία προτείνει μία σειρά διαδικτυακών πρακτικών Socrative οι οποίες μπορούν να χρησιμοποιηθούν τόσο προς όφελος του μαθητή όσο και προς όφελος του διδάσκοντα.

Λέξεις-κλειδιά: ξενόγλωσσα τάξη, κινητή ηλεκτρονική μάθηση, διαδικτυακές εφαρμογές, Socrative