Title of case study
Using mobiles for learner-centred listening lessons

Staff Lead
Alex Wood

Contact
alexwood@liverpool.ac.uk

School/ Department
English Language Centre

Faculty
Student Engagement & Enhancement

Name of course and module (if applicable) case study took place within
Activate (General) English Course and Summer Pre-sessional English Course

Please briefly describe the activity undertaken for the case study
One of the needs for language learners at the English Language Centre (ELC) is to improve their listening ability. Part of our provision therefore involves listening skills lessons. These lessons involve a range of activities but are generally centred around classes of 10-16 students listening to audio files played from the teacher's computer. Afterwards (in most cases) students answer some form of questions on paper. I have developed activities aimed at utilising mobile devices to make some of these listening stages more learner-centred and learner-directed. These 'mobile listening' lessons have been used with various classes of general English students on the ELC's Activate English Courses as well as with one class of academic English students on the ELC's Summer Pre-sessional Course.

How was the activity implemented?
Listening lessons take place at least once per week. The mobile listening technique has not replaced these lessons, nor has it involved changing course materials or scheduling. It has been used as an alternative practice in lessons where the particular content or exercises seemed best suited to it. As a result, it has been used perhaps once in every two to four listening lessons.

Mobile listening involves using QR codes to share the lesson's audio/video file(s) with the students so that, at whichever lesson stage is appropriate, they can individually take control of the listening on their mobiles. At these times, students listen on their headphones or lower the volume and hold the device to their ear. Different amounts of mobile listening are used depending on the content and particular aims of lessons. For instance, some

lessons feature listening activities initially controlled at the teacher's computer, and only some amount of student-controlled mobile listening at a later stage. In other lessons, students might do all listening activities on their mobile devices. In all lessons, having completed the activities, students are given an answer key and further time to re-listen on their mobiles and to attempt to self-diagnose what may have caused any of their errors.

Has this activity improved programme provision and student experience, if so how?

The mobile listening technique appears to improve provision and student experience in a few ways.

Normal, teacher-controlled listening activities can sometimes not be sufficiently personalised for each student in the room. For instance, in many lessons, having listened to the whole audio perhaps once or twice, the teacher might re-play and discuss sections of the audio that appear to have been particularly challenging to most students. However, in many instances it is possible that a few students did not find the re-played section challenging. Mobile listening allows students to focus in on the aspects of a listening that they find challenging and to work at their own pace. If provided with an answer key towards the end of a lesson, it also allows them to attempt to self-diagnose problems in their listening. Again, this self-diagnosis can occur at each student's own pace on their mobiles.

Mobile listening can also encourage students to be more responsible and active in their listening lessons. Listening can still of course be seen as a passive or receptive activity, but, with their mobiles, students are pushed to make decisions about which parts of an audio they need to listen to and how much they need to listen to it. This appears to elicit more focus and motivation from students while they're listening. Informal feedback from students has supported this conclusion.

From a teaching perspective, mobile listening can potentially facilitate more effective diagnosis of student listening problems and needs. In a listening lesson, such diagnosis generally involves a discussion with students after the activity and it relies on student reports of where and why they encountered problems. As noted above, mobile listening allows students to spend more time focusing on what they found individually challenging, as well as on attempting to self-diagnose their problems. While student reports of their problems may still be imprecise or potentially inaccurate, I have found that in these diagnostic discussions following a mobile listening activity, students appear to be more forthcoming with opinions/hypotheses about what challenged them, and these reports are also often more specific. For instance, rather than a student saying "that part of the audio was hard to follow because of the speaker's pronunciation", they might say something like "that part of the audio was hard to follow because I misunderstood the speaker's pronunciation of X" (where "X" is a key word from the audio). This extra volume and detail of reports allows the teacher to make more informed decisions about what aspects of listening skills to address in future lessons.

Did you experience any challenges in implementation, if so how did you overcome these?

The main challenges have been technical but minor. For instance, some students' mobiles might be flat, might not read the QR code successfully or might not have a strong enough signal to stream the audio/video file. Students have always been happy to share a phone with a classmate in all such instances that I have encountered.

Which Liverpool University Hallmarks and Attributes does this case study relate to (tick all boxes that apply)

Research-connected Teaching
Active Learning   **X**
Authentic Assessment
Confidence
Digital Fluency   **X**
Global Citizenship

How does this case study relate to the Hallmarks and Attributes you have selected?

Active Learning

Mobile listening can encourage active learning at various stages of a lesson. While initially listening, students think about not only the content of the audio/video, but also which parts of it were more challenging and therefore which parts they want to re-listen to. They then make decisions about re-playing particular sections and reflect further on their success and progress with those re-plays. They are pushed through similar thinking and decision-making processes again when they are asked to self-correct with an answer key and when they're encouraged to attempt to self-diagnose why they encountered problems.

Digital Fluency

Mobile listening requires that students use QR codes to access the audio files. While many students are familiar with this, in every class I have worked with this has been new to as least some segment of the group. With QR codes becoming more widely used, this is a potentially useful and important aspect of digital literacy for students to pick up.

More generally, this technique also serves to raise student awareness of the utility and importance of mobile devices in education. By engaging with this technique, students can become more accustomed to the idea of their mobile as a tool for both classroom learning and self-study.

How could this case study be transferred to other disciplines?

The original rationale for this technique is fairly specific to language learning settings. However, it could conceivably be utilised in any lesson/seminar/lecture where a video/audio file is to be played from the teacher's computer, and the teacher is interested in allowing students to focus on aspects of the file that are of particular interest to them individually. It

could also be used to allow particular groups within a lesson/seminar/lecture to focus on distinct parts of the same audio/video file. It may also be of use in short bursts to boost motivation and encourage small group discussions around a specific topic. Mobile listening could also be of benefit in supporting international students in any discipline where they may need additional time/support to access audio-visual materials.

If someone else were to implement the activity within your case study what advice would you give them?

Allow extra time in the first lesson to get everyone up and running with reading the QR codes and expect that something will go wrong with students' mobiles. With larger groups, I would be aware of the potential for students to become distracted by other apps on their phones. This might require a bit of discussion before beginning the activity.

References

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