



Changing policy and an innovative response: Teaching, learning and assessing Irish using mobile phones

Katrina A. Keogh and Judith Ní Mhurchú



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Abstract

The majority of students at post-primary level in Ireland study Irish. The Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate state examinations include an oral component for Irish. In the case of the Junior Certificate, the oral examination is optional, while for the Leaving Certificate it is compulsory.

In 2007, in a bid to increase the use and knowledge of Irish as a community language, the Minister for Education and Science substantially increased the proportion of marks allocated to the oral language components of the Junior and Leaving Certificate examinations. In response to this announcement, the NCCA initiated a pilot project investigating the use of mobile phones to assist in the teaching, learning and assessment of Irish, in a blended learning environment. The aims of the project included increasing student use of Irish, in and outside of school, improving student competency in Irish and investigating the potential of the technologies for formative and summative oral assessment.

This paper traces the policy change which led to the initiation of the FÓN project. Following two pilot projects, involving nearly 400 students in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, much has been learned about the potential of mobile phones as teaching, learning and assessment tools.

Introduction

Ireland has two official languages under its constitution (1922); Irish is the first official language of Ireland, and English the second. Irish gained recognition as an official language of the EU on 1 January 2007. The most recent census in Ireland (2006) revealed that 40.8% of the population indicated that they could speak Irish. Approximately 3% of Ireland's population use Irish as the main community and household language.

Irish is a compulsory subject in primary and post-primary education. Exemptions from learning Irish are only given on the basis of certain learning disabilities or to students who have lived abroad or do not speak English. Irish is examined through state examinations at two stages during second level schooling – the Junior Certificate examination and the Leaving Certificate examination. Both of these examinations include a written and aural (listening comprehension) component for Irish. The oral component is optional for the Junior Certificate examination and compulsory for the Leaving Certificate examination.

In 2007, the Minister for Education and Science announced an increase in the proportion of marks to be allocated to the oral Irish state examinations. These increases were made in an attempt to promote the communicative use of Irish in schools and to foster oral competence in Irish among students (Department of Education and Science, 2007).

At the same time, the Minister requested that the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) investigate technological solutions which could assist in providing the optional oral Irish Junior Certificate examination to students. In response to this request in 2007, the NCCA embarked on the first phase of work on integrating mobile phones into the teaching, learning and assessment of Irish. This phase of work was referred to as MALL – Mobile-Assisted Language Learning. In 2008, the pilot project was extended to more schools and improvements were made to the underlying technology. This phase of work was referred to the FÓN project. FÓN is the Irish word for ‘telephone’ and stands for Foghlaim Ón Nuatheicneolaíocht or Learning through new Technology.

This article traces the status of Irish in Ireland and examines government initiatives and commitments to preserving and promoting the language. Student learning of Irish through the education system and attitude towards it are examined. Through one of the government’s initiatives to promote Irish and in an attempt to bridge the gap between student interest and motivation for learning Irish, the MALL and FÓN projects were founded. These projects investigated the integration of mobile phones into the teaching, learning and assessment of Irish. The aims, design and findings from these projects are discussed.

Irish language policy and statements

Article 8 of the Constitution of Ireland (1922) places Irish as the national language and the first official language of Ireland. English is recognised as a second official language. Positive adult¹ interest in and motivation toward retaining the language has remained constant over the years (Mac Gréil and Rhatigan, 2009).²

The Irish Education Act (Government of Ireland, 1998) makes provision for education through the medium of Irish, for Irish language textbooks and materials. The act also makes provision for the education system to contribute to the extension of bilingualism in Irish society and for greater use of Irish in the community and at home.

The Official Languages Act was passed in 2003, and makes provision for the delivery of public services through Irish. This provision was put in place to ensure a “better availability and higher standard of public services through Irish” (Department of Gaeltacht and Rural Affairs, 2003: 1). The act specifies certain key public services and documents which should be delivered in Irish or bilingually in English and Irish.

A Statement on the Irish Language (Government of Ireland, 2006) was issued in 2006, in which the Irish government affirmed its support for the preservation and development of the Irish language. As a spoken community language, Irish is unique to Ireland and of importance to the identity of the Irish people. The statement commits to ensuring that as many Irish citizens as possible are bilingual in English and Irish. A 20 year strategy is to be developed based on the 13 objectives and vision set out in the document.

¹ Respondents were aged 18 years or older.

² Mac Gréil carried out similar analyses in Ireland in 1972/3, 1988/9 and 2007/8.

The Language Education Policy Profile for Ireland was completed in 2007 (Council of Europe and Department of Education and Science, 2007). The profile drew together all strands of language education in Ireland. With reference to Irish, the policy referred to the importance attached to Irish and the positive perspective of Irish held by students in Irish-medium schools. This was counteracted by the statement that although Irish is a compulsory school subject, “in all too many cases, it does not lead to a reasonable level of communicative ability in the language” (Council of Europe and Department of Education and Science, 2007: 11), even after an estimated 1500 hours of Irish learning in school. The policy also made reference to the dearth of opportunities available to use the language and the rare use of the spoken language among those who have learnt Irish as a second language. This was confirmed in a recent study, which measured reasonable competence among adults in Irish at 47% but regular use of Irish among this cohort at 23% (Mac Gréil and Rhatigan, 2009). The authors cite the importance of filling the gap between competent speakers and their use of the language as a matter of priority for the “revival and preservation of Irish” (Mac Gréil and Rhatigan, 2009: 3).

In 2007, the Minister for Education and Science announced a change to the proportion of marks which were to be awarded to the oral assessment of Irish in state examinations. The increase in weighting to be attributed to the oral examination was substantial. As mentioned above, the oral examination is optional for the Junior Certificate examination, and compulsory for the Leaving Certificate examination (regardless of the level students are studying – higher, ordinary, foundation or Leaving Certificate Applied).

Table 1: Changes to the marks to be awarded for the oral component of the Irish state examinations

	Current arrangements			Revised arrangements			Take effect
	Oral	Aural	Written	Oral	Aural	Written	
JC Optional Oral	20%	25%	55%	40%	10%	50%	2010
LC Higher Level	25%	16.7%	58.3%	40%	10%	50%	2012
LC Ordinary Level	25%	20%	55%	40%	10%	50%	2012
LC Foundation Level	25%	30%	45%	40%	20%	40%	2012
LC Applied	33%	30%	37%	40%	25%	35%	2011/ 2012

JC: Junior Certificate; LC: Leaving Certificate

The shift in emphasis to the oral component of the examination, has led to a reduction in the emphasis previously placed on the aural component. The marks attributed to the written component have been slightly reduced.

The assessment of receptive skills (including aural skills) is a component of the examination in which students with lower levels of proficiency have generally performed well. The oral assessment component, involves the assessment of more demanding productive language skills. Students with lower levels of proficiency have usually not performed as well in these skills; the change in weighting could impact the examination performance of these students.

While the increased emphasis placed on competence was welcomed, concern was expressed at the ability and readiness schools have to facilitate an oral Irish examination for Junior Certificate.

Heretofore, the uptake of the oral Irish examination for Junior Certificate has been low as teachers are reluctant to examine their own students in a state examination context (the oral examinations for Leaving Certificate are facilitated by external examiners). Issues of equality of access and opportunity were also raised; as more schools are likely to take up the optional oral examination, the gap between schools which do and do not facilitate the examination could widen.

In tandem with the change to marks, the Minister also announced that technological solutions would be investigated by the NCCA, to assist schools in providing the optional Junior Certificate oral Irish examination. In the same speech, the Minister pointed out that students are “most likely to embrace the language and develop enthusiasm for learning language if it is packaged in the context of youth culture and technological communications” (Department of Education and Science, 2007: not paginated).

Irish through the education system

Irish is a compulsory subject in first level (primary school) and second level (post-primary or secondary school) education. As mentioned previously, exemptions can be obtained from Irish in certain circumstances. In 2006, some 11,871 students were exempted from studying Irish across first and second level education.

The focus of the Primary School Curriculum (1999) for Irish is on the communicative use of Irish. The recent Primary Curriculum Review (NCCA, 2008) in which Irish was one of the subjects being reviewed, showed that children’s attitudes to and enjoyment of learning Irish had improved as a result of the increased emphasis placed on the communicative use of Irish through games, song and rhyme in the revised curriculum. Unfortunately, less emphasis on language structure and grammar has resulted in children’s levels of progression in Irish decreasing. These findings were corroborated through the Department of Education and Science’s (DES) review of Irish (DES, 2007).

When students move on into secondary school, the teaching and learning of Irish can be quite examination-orientated. As they progress through their time in secondary school, their perception of the usefulness of learning Irish diminishes (Smyth, Dunne, McCoy and Darmody, 2006). Irish was reported to be one of the least favourite subjects of 32% of students (Smyth et al, 2006). In 2007, the Minister also made reference to students’ acceptance of “the popular notion that learning Irish is boring and that it is a difficult language” (DES, 2007).

It has been reported that the number of native Irish speakers is declining (Ó Giollagáin, Mac Donnacha, Ní Chualáin, Ní Shéaghda & O’Brien, 2007). Consequently, more and more emphasis is being placed on the capacity of the education system to equip students with a communicative competence in Irish.

In line with the government’s drive to promote oral competence in Irish, instil confidence in students in learning Irish and increase its knowledge as a community language, an initiative was needed which would draw students’ interest towards Irish and increase their opportunity for speaking it.

Bridging the gap between student interest and an old language

The Minister has referred to the necessity of capturing students' imagination and attention, and packaging Irish in the "context of youth culture". Students are becoming more and more connected in their personal lives, through online social networks, email and their mobile phones. Through the evaluation process attached to the FÓN project³ (discussed below), it was revealed that 99% of students owned a mobile phone and that a majority (81%) of them use their mobile phones to send text messages, rather than the more expensive alternative of making calls. 96% of these same students had a computer at home (92% with internet access). Students indicated that they mostly used their internet-connected computers at home for music (91%), finding information (86%) and social networking (80%).

While student attitude associated with immersion or Irish-medium education has been shown to be positive, those students learning Irish in English-medium schools have been shown to be less enthusiastic. If we now examine the needs of these students for learning Irish, we have ascertained that they need greater opportunities to speak Irish in more realistic settings, they need to be shown that Irish can be more enjoyable and modern, that Irish can be taken and used beyond the school setting and helped to improve their competence in the language. These student requirements line up with three factors which were outlined as being required to maintain community languages, and preserve linguistic vitality and linguistic diversity. These are (1) the capacity to use a given language, (2) the opportunity to use it and (3) the desire to use it (Grin and Moring, 2002).

Oral language can be difficult for teachers to assess when limited to the confines of a 40 minute class session each day. While many teachers opt to teach Irish through the language itself, as is advised, it can be difficult to create enough opportunities for students to use their own Irish. While it is important to get students chatting, it is equally important for teachers to be able to monitor this process.

So how can the learning and interest needs of the students be met, while also meeting the needs of teachers?

Innovation and novelty: Mobile phones

"I enjoyed using phones, as it made Irish interesting and fun!! For once, I didn't mind doing Irish homework"

(FÓN Project Student)

The MALL project

In 2007, the NCCA embarked on a pilot project to integrate mobile phones into the teaching, learning and assessment of Irish. The initial phase of work was call MALL

³ N=293

(Mobile-Assisted Language Learning). The idea for using mobile phones in this way stemmed from students in the initial project school. When asked how Irish could be made more exciting, they suggested new and novel ways for learning and practising it including the use of their much favoured mobile phones.

NCCA worked in association with the National Centre for Technology in Education (NCTE) to supply the three classes of second year students (the year prior to the year when students sit the Junior Certificate examination) in the one pilot project school, with mobile phones. One class set of networked laptops was also provided. Excluding teacher training time, the project actively ran in the school for five weeks.

The mobile phones were used in two ways:

1. to deliver daily vocabulary word and phrase SMSs to students
2. to allow students to dial up to a phone system, which presented them with a series of questions in Irish. Students left their recorded responses to these questions, which were later accessed by their teacher online. Students could revise each answer as often as they wished, before submitting their final response to any one question.

Teachers had the opportunity to listen back to student recordings online and provide feedback on them. This feedback was accessed by students who could podcast the original question, with their recorded answer and any associated teacher feedback.

All content within the phone system, was designed by the teachers involved. It was also differentiated for all levels of learner. As students were all supplied with their own mobile phone for the project, they could access the MALL system during school hours, but also outside of school hours, any time and any place.

Teachers' reflections on MALL

The three teachers' responses to the pilot project were very positive. They felt that students were more confident and had improved self-esteem about their level of Irish – they could confidently leave recorded answers, and knew that only their teacher would hear them. They felt that students also experienced a greater sense of freedom about their Irish learning – they could log in anytime and anywhere, and were enabled to be more autonomous learners. They emphasised that these positive features were particularly beneficial for students with lower competency levels than others.

Teachers also referred to students' improvement in competence – not just oral competence, but also increased vocabulary, improved comprehension and better use of tenses. The MALL system had given students the opportunity to practise as often as they wanted to – leading to more frequent use of the language, in turn leading to improvements in competency. Teachers referred to students' ability to grasp new topics faster when using the MALL system, compared to when they were using more traditional methods in the classroom.

Students were so enthusiastic about the receipt of vocabulary SMSs, that they requested that teachers send them to their personal mobile phones during the school summer holidays.

Teachers also praised the MALL system's ability in allowing them to hear all students' oral production, even those who would usually be shy in class. The teachers themselves were extremely positive about the alternative way of providing electronic feedback to students on their oral production - something which they would usually have had to use a lot of class time to facilitate.

While many benefits were associated with the system, a few challenges were also identified by teachers. Naturally, the more students used the system and recorded themselves, the greater the time teachers needed to invest in listening back and providing feedback on responses. Teachers also suggested a few amendments to the system to speed up the process of providing feedback to students. These suggestions were integrated into the next phase of work – the FÓN project.

Students' reflections on MALL

Students' own reflections were equally positive. They appreciated the any time, any place access to the MALL system to practise their Irish. They also praised the more autonomous opportunity for their learning through this feature. The MALL system provided them with an opportunity to speak Irish outside of school, where the majority of students would not usually have access to an Irish speaker at home. They liked being able to listen back to their answer and revise it before submitting the final production they were satisfied with. The integration of mobile phones into their learning environment proved a very positive shift from more traditional methods used. They felt that it was a more fun, up to date and novel way to teach the language and their levels of enjoyment for speaking and learning Irish improved as a result. Increases in enjoyment levels were also attributed to the variety of questions that students heard through the system, the reduction in pressure of not having to answer in front of their class and the challenge associated with speaking Irish so frequently. The increased emphasis on oral, rather than written Irish, was also welcomed – “the phones were good and helped me speak better Irish, rather than writing it down all the time”.

Students made many references to their increase in competency as a result of using their Irish so frequently. They referred to increases in vocabulary and ease of speaking in Irish, to their enhanced ability to understand Irish and to notice the mistakes that they made. Students' references to their improved fluency were common responses. As students felt that their competency in Irish improved, their levels of enjoyment improved equally.

Students also identified challenges with the MALL system, most of which referred to the quality of the recordings of the questions they were to answer, keeping track of their log-in details and dropped calls. Again – this feedback carried through to improvements made to the system within the FÓN project.

The FÓN project

The FÓN project was initiated in 2008 and drew on the challenges and recommendations gathered from the MALL project. The participating cohort was increased to six schools, three in Northern Ireland and three in the Republic of Ireland, totalling 16 teachers and 368 students. Foras na Gaeilge joined the NCCA and NCTE partnership for this phase

of the pilot project. The project cohort was divided into two user groups. After teacher training, group one worked actively on the project for the initial 11 weeks across 2008/9, and group two worked actively on the project for the second 11 week period in 2009.

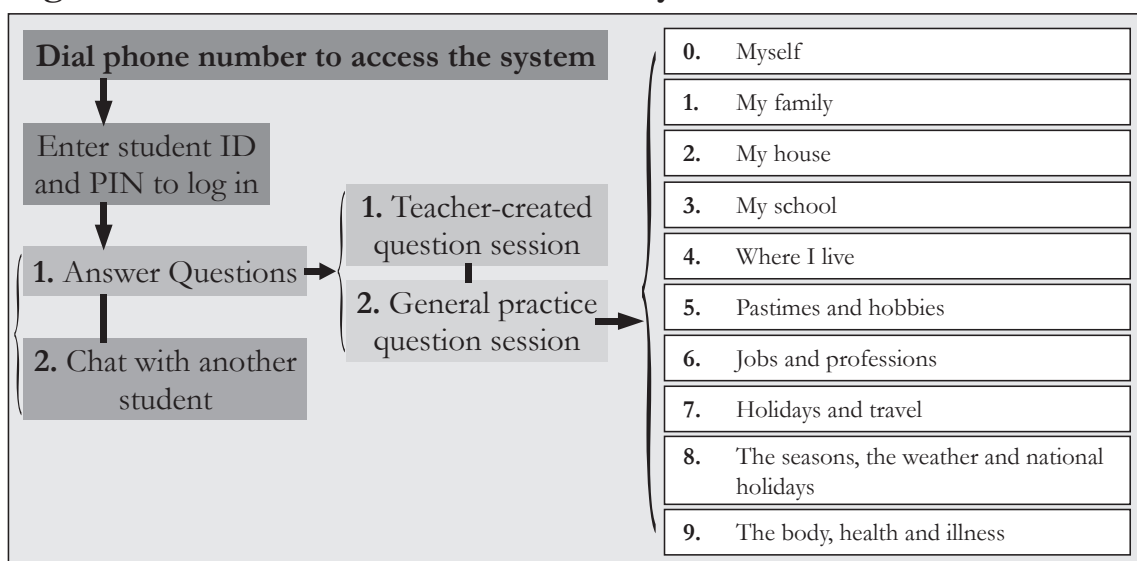
Two substantial changes were made to the phone system:

1. A third use of mobile phones was added – students could now access the system and talk with other students participating in the project. Again, all work carried out over the phone was recorded for later access by the teacher. When students were connected to chat with one another they received a recorded prompt from their teacher which acted as the discussion topic. This replicated a role-play scenario where each student took up a role to play in the conversation.
2. More content and questions were made available through the system. Teachers could also customise the questions their students received by pulling a custom session together from the system content and/or recording their own questions for addition to the system. This meant that teachers could customise content for all levels of student and also draw together custom exam/test sessions for students to complete.

The FÓN project also saw the addition of extra features to the teachers' online interface and a new student online interface. Here, students could access all of the questions they had answered over the phone, listen back to their answers, listen back to conversations they had with other students, access any teacher feedback on their recordings and see a listing of all of the vocabulary words and phrases they received to their mobile phones by SMS. The questions were recorded in a recording studio to ensure the volume and quality of the recordings was as high as possible. National celebrities volunteered their time to read out the questions for recording. This facet added an additional novelty factor.

Figure 1 below outlines how students accessed the appropriate element of the FÓN system when they dialled up using their mobile phones. Where a number precedes an option in the figure, it indicates where the student presses the relevant number to make a selection. The themes listed to the right reflect the contents of the Irish syllabus for Junior Certificate and are also relevant to the Northern Ireland GCSE examination.

Figure 1: Phone interface of the FÓN system



The FÓN project was more rigorously evaluated than the MALL project. Specifically, teacher and student pre- and post-project questionnaires, teacher reflective diaries and observation during site visits were adopted. It was not possible to gauge students' competency before the project. Consequently, reported improvements are those which were perceived by teachers and students. The positive findings reported from the MALL project, were also present for the FÓN project. Fewer challenges were reported.

The sample size and response rates for the teacher and student questionnaires are indicated below.

Table 2: Response rates and sample size

	Pre-project		Post-project	
	Response rate	Sample size	Response rate	Sample size
Teachers	75%	N=12	50%	N=8
Students	80%	N=293	72%	N=265

Teachers' reflections on FÓN

The majority of teachers were positive about the integration of the FÓN technologies into their classrooms and students' learning environment. They referred to students' improved competence as they had had the opportunity to practise topics often and sequentially. This led to improvements in fluency, vocabulary, recognition of different Irish dialects and accents, and increased use of tenses and verbs. The progress that students made across their recordings from the start of the project to the end of the project was substantial. Students progressed from providing short, stilted answers, to more fluent and complex answers to the questions posed.

Between the teachers' pre- and post- project questionnaires, teachers' perceptions of their students' competency improved. They changed from 27% *very good* at speaking and 36% *good* before the project, to 75% *very good* at speaking and 25% *good* at speaking. The improvement to teachers' perceptions of students' listening ability also improved. They changed from 9% *very good*, 18% *good* and 64% *ok*, to 50% *very good* and 50% *good*. Interestingly, reading and writing also showed marked improvements from the pre-project questionnaire to the post-project questionnaire.

Teachers also referred to students' enhanced ability to take charge of their own learning through the FÓN system. The system eased the balance between the teacher's and student's role in teaching and learning, with the teachers becoming facilitators and the students taking more responsibility for their learning.

Teachers noted students' growing enthusiasm and enjoyment for Irish through their use of the FÓN system. Students were noted to be accessing the FÓN system multiple times per day and late into the evening and night. Motivation levels rose on par with enjoyment; one teacher said that the motivation levels in his class had "gone through the roof!" Teachers referred to students' improved levels of engagement with Irish and how it was easier to hold their attention on one task for an entire class using the FÓN technologies compared to the more traditional methods previously utilised. Improvements in confidence came from the increased opportunity for students to practise and become more comfortable

with speaking Irish (away from the peer pressures of the classroom).

Again, teachers perceived an improvement in students' levels of enjoyment of Irish between the pre- and post-project questionnaire. The figures changed from 14% *really enjoy learning Irish*, 36% *enjoy learning Irish* and 43% *think Irish is ok*, to 13% *really enjoy learning Irish* and 88% *enjoy learning Irish* after the project. One of the teachers involved referred to his class being more enthusiastic when they came into Irish class and always asking whether they were using the phones that day. All teachers stated that their classes were more motivated to learn and speak Irish as a result of using the FÓN technologies and that they felt that they had enjoyed learning Irish more.

Teachers made reference to students' familiarity with mobile phones and how their use for Irish added a novelty factor. While teachers often needed to refer to their log-in details from a notebook, students were able to input theirs and work through the phone interface without any reference point needed.

Teachers noted how the FÓN system enabled Irish to travel beyond the classroom and raised the profile of the language in students' homes. Irish became a living language rather than a subject taught in school. It was through student to student conversations and the opportunity for meaningful interaction in Irish that the latter benefit became most evident. 100% of the teachers stated that students used more Irish through the integration of the FÓN technologies than they had before.

In terms of assessment, teachers welcomed the opportunity to monitor student oral production and check-in on oral work completed outside of the Irish class. Teachers were able to monitor students over time and hear the progression in the quality of their answers. Reference was also made to students' ability to self-assess their level of Irish through re-recording their answers until they were happy with them and through comparing their level of Irish with the students they were paired up to chat with.

Teachers reported that the FÓN system provided great opportunities for students to speak and practise Irish. They felt it could suitably facilitate an oral examination for all of the class at one time, which the teachers could access and work through at a later stage. They did feel that some of the cues and interaction which a student and examiner would have in a face-to-face scenario would be lost through using the FÓN system. However, they felt that this might prove more beneficial for shyer students or students with less competency, especially if they had been using the system to practise previously.

63% of teachers felt that the FÓN technologies had impacted on the way they assess their students. They found it effective not only for monitoring oral progression, but also for monitoring grammar, syntax and vocabulary.

100% of teachers felt that the FÓN technologies offer possibilities for practising for an oral examination, while 75% feel it could be used to facilitate an oral examination. The only negative extension to the latter response was that it may be a little impersonal for students to take an oral examination through the FÓN technologies.

Students' reflections on FÓN

Students reported that they were more at ease and comfortable speaking Irish than they had been before taking part in the FÓN project. They referred to their increased competency – in the same areas as teachers had noticed. Students added that using the FÓN technologies had helped them to effectively prepare for their term tests.

The same improvements in perceived competence reported by teachers were also reported by the students. Students' perceptions of their competence across the four skills improved between the pre- and post- project questionnaires. Students' perceptions of their speaking skills improved from 8% *very good* in the pre-project questionnaires, to 22% *very good* in the post-project questionnaires. There was a similar increase in the proportion of students who perceived their listening skills to be better after the project. 73% of students reported that they felt their Irish had improved more as a result of participating in the project.

Students reported finding that the FÓN technologies made Irish more fun, enjoyable and interesting. They preferred this new, more up to date way of learning Irish compared to more traditional methods. They felt that it was easier to complete homework assignments using their phones rather than needing to carry books home or complete written assignments. They made reference to how practising Irish through the FÓN system “feels less like work”. They also made reference to their ability to access the FÓN system at any time and from anywhere.

88% of students said that they had enjoyed using the FÓN technologies for learning and practising Irish. The reasons given were that it was something different to what they usually did (27%), it was exciting and interesting (27%) and that they had learnt more Irish or improved a particular skill during the activity (17%). When asked to describe a learning activity that they had particularly enjoyed, 58% of students referred to the FÓN project. The reasons provided were that it was fun, something different to more traditional methods, that they had learnt more than usual and that they were able to talk to other people. The second most frequently cited activity was the use of games such as word searches or crosswords (17%).

78% of students reported speaking and using more Irish than they had before participating in the project. Their reasons included: their ability to use their mobile phones from home to speak Irish, the learning emphasis being moved from writing to speaking and the feeling that their ability had improved and they were therefore more likely to use their Irish. Some of the students' responses included “it was enjoyable to do so I looked forward to doing it in the evenings” and “we had a full conversation and I could understand”.

The highlight of the FÓN system for students was the function which allowed them to talk to other students. Students frequently referred to this as allowing them to speak Irish outside of school, chat with their friends in Irish and make new friends.

Students referred positively to the feature which allowed them to listen back to their answers and re-record them. This indicates that the students attributed a level of quality to their Irish production, and self-assessed whether it was necessary to re-record their answers – “I can hear my mistakes and try to do better”. Students made reference to being able to

use the FÓN system to reinforce what had been learnt in class, and make sure that they had fully grasped the topic. They felt that the FÓN system had helped them to prepare for an oral examination as well as improve their overall competence. As mentioned above, students gauged their level of Irish against other students they chatted with through the system.

The instructions for navigating the phone interface outlined in Figure 1 above were delivered through Irish. While this presented somewhat of a barrier to students to begin with, they were soon able to work their way to their desired activity quickly.

72% of students indicated that they would like to continue using the FÓN technologies, and 94% would recommend that other students should be given the opportunity to work with the FÓN technologies.

Conclusions

There is a lot of support for maintaining Irish as a living and spoken language. However, it is the next generation which this task will fall to in years to come so it is essential that their enthusiasm for and competence in Irish is nurtured. The majority of Irish citizens learn Irish through the education system. It is important that the enjoyment experienced by primary school children learning Irish carries through to students' post-primary school experience. Building progression in students' communicative competence across the levels is also key.

A change in policy can be the trigger for new and effective initiatives. It is evident that matching a popular tool to an unpopular subject can have a positive effect on students' perceptions of the subject. In the case of the MALL and FÓN projects, the introduction of mobile phones into the teaching, learning and assessment of Irish led to improvements in student competency, attitude and motivation.

The technologies provided opportunities for students to practise their oral Irish and converse with other students. The potential to use these technologies to facilitate a state examination has yet to be tested, but the evidence suggests that those students and teachers who have experienced the potential of the technologies for Irish, are eager to continue using them.

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