

FÓN Project



An award-winning success

Can mobile phones help in the teaching, learning and assessment of Irish? 'Yes they can!' according to the experiences of teachers and students.

What is FÓN?

FÓN stands for Foghlaim Ón Nuatheicneolaíocht or *learning through new technology*. You might remember reading about the FÓN project in our April 2009 edition of **info@ncca**. We outlined how we used mobile phones in six post-primary schools with 16 teachers and 368 students. The phones were used in three different ways:

1. to schedule vocabulary SMS delivery to students,
2. to facilitate student-to-student chat, which is recorded for the teacher to listen back,
3. to record student responses to (a) a set of teacher's questions or (b) practice sessions, both of which the teacher can access later.

Now we're back to let you know what happened and to share what the teachers and students reported about using mobile phones.

So what did we find out?

Some FÓN facts!

- A total of 15,374 calls were made to the system.
- Students listened to and spoke Irish for a phenomenal 882 hours during 22 weeks.
- On average, each student made 42 calls on their project mobile phones during their active 11 week project time...clocking up about 2.5 hours of Irish talk time. Imagine students speaking Irish for 2.5 hours in an 11-week period!
- The highest user of the system made 272 calls on his project mobile phone, totalling 4 calls per day (that included weekends!).
- The 6th highest user used her own mobile phone, at her own cost, after her active term on the project came to an end. She clocked up 22 calls on her own mobile phone after the project.
- Students made calls to the FÓN system as late as 11pm (and 1am) and as early as 6am.



What the teachers said

“

We're the talk of the school. Everyone's talking about 10J and their phones. (There was) some very positive feedback from parents today. Everyone (was) on last night at 7.00pm and I had them 1st period today and they were still hyper. Great to see the enthusiasm.

Project teacher ”

Competence

The teachers reported that the use of mobile phones had helped to improve student competence. This improvement wasn't confined to speaking and listening, it included increased vocabulary, greater student ability to construct their own sentences and greater use of tenses in Irish. Teachers also found that their students learned different topics faster when using their mobile phones for Irish, as the students had increased opportunities to practise outside of school.

Motivation

Importantly, the attitude of students to speaking and practising their Irish improved. Teachers mentioned

- increased student motivation for learning and speaking Irish.
- the fact that students were having fun.
- that students were fully engaged during class, often speaking Irish for the entire 40 minute session.
- that students were able to take charge of their own learning.
- how their confidence improved.



From the teachers' perspectives, the opportunity to listen back to student recordings

- gave them a greater sense of student progress in Irish.
- helped them to note and address any recurring mistakes that students were making.
- gave them the opportunity to hear every student in their class, especially the quieter ones.

Listening back to students did take some extra teacher time, but they all felt it was worth it.

A living language

Using mobile phones helped to raise the profile of Irish in most schools and helped to bring it out of the classroom and into the community. Students could now speak Irish any time they wished, even if they didn't benefit from having an Irish speaker at home or in the community. Speaking to other project students on their mobile phones moved Irish beyond a school subject and made it a living language – one which was used for meaningful communication between students.

But what did the students think?



I think using mobile phones to teach teenagers Irish is a good idea because most teenagers are always stuck to their phone and they couldn't live without it...



Project student

Confidence

Students reported similar benefits to the teachers. They felt that their competence and confidence in Irish had improved. One student said, "... before the mobile phone project I wasn't good at pronouncing words or speaking and this made me better." They also reported enjoying using mobile phones for learning and practising Irish; they used words like 'fun', 'interesting', 'new' and 'different' when referring to the experience. The enjoyment factor also contributed to student motivation for learning and practising Irish, which in itself showed a marked improvement.

Autonomous learners

Students also indicated that they were becoming more autonomous learners, taking greater charge of their learning. They could speak Irish at any time, and anywhere. They felt it was easier to learn Irish via their mobile phones, and that it was a more enjoyable way to learn than other methods used in the classroom or more traditional homework.

Students felt they had spoken more Irish as a result of the mobile phones being integrated as a learning tool. They also indicated an enhanced ability to self-assess their level of Irish through the FÓN system – they could re-record any of their answers before submitting the answer they were satisfied with and they could gauge their level of Irish against other students they chatted with.

Similar to the teachers, one of the greatest benefits students reported was that Irish was available and facilitated beyond the school gates - "the good thing is you can practise your Irish in your own time in your own house".

FÓN project awarded

While teachers and students reported the benefits of the FÓN system, the project was also recognised with a European Award for Languages – the Language Label. The award is presented in acknowledgment of a project's ability to engage language learners in a manner that is both meaningful and productive, while at the same time promoting a positive attitude towards both the learning and use of the target language.



So, where to next?

We might not make it to the White House, but check in with the FÓN blog to keep up to date with where we might be going to next with mobile phones - <http://foghlaim.edublogs.org>.

