

# Learner Autonomy and the Language Technologies that Assist and Empower Learning



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# Overview

- **Learner autonomy**
  - Definition
  - Four perspectives
- **Technology integration**
  - In-class/out-of-class learning
  - Opportunities & constraints
- **Three projects**
  - Findings from research
- **Implications & conclusions**
  - Points of focus for encouraging/enhancing learner autonomy

# Learner Autonomy

- Definition: '*the ability to take charge of one's own learning*' (Holec 1981, p. 3)
- Associated terms
  - Independent learning
  - Flexible learning
  - Student-centred learning
  - Self-regulated learning
- 'As educational ideology and philosophy have been interpreted differently, depending on particular social and political situations, learner autonomy has also been understood and translated into practice in various ways.' (Dang 2010, p.3 )

# Learner Autonomy

- Dang (2012) derives four perspectives:
  - Psychological
    - personal attributes of learners
  - Technical (*\*my focus today*)
    - Attributes in the learning environment – technologies
  - Sociocultural
    - Interactions between learners & environment
  - Political-critical
    - Learners' access, control, power, ideology in their community
- Net result → affordances
  - Opportunities & constraints for learning
- Individual students' potential to learn autonomously

# Technology Integration and Potentials for Autonomous Learning

# The Classroom and the Language Lab



1. Psychology →
2. Linguistics →
3. Pedagogy →

1. Behaviorism
2. Structuralism
3. Audiolingualism

# Technology Integration

## An institutional focus:

- The logical problem (Levy, 1997)

- *What content to provide and how to distribute it*

- The physical problem

- *What technology to buy and where to put it*

- Levy, M. (1997). *Computer-Assisted Language Learning: Context and conceptualisation*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

# More complex learning goals, diverse technologies → No easy solution

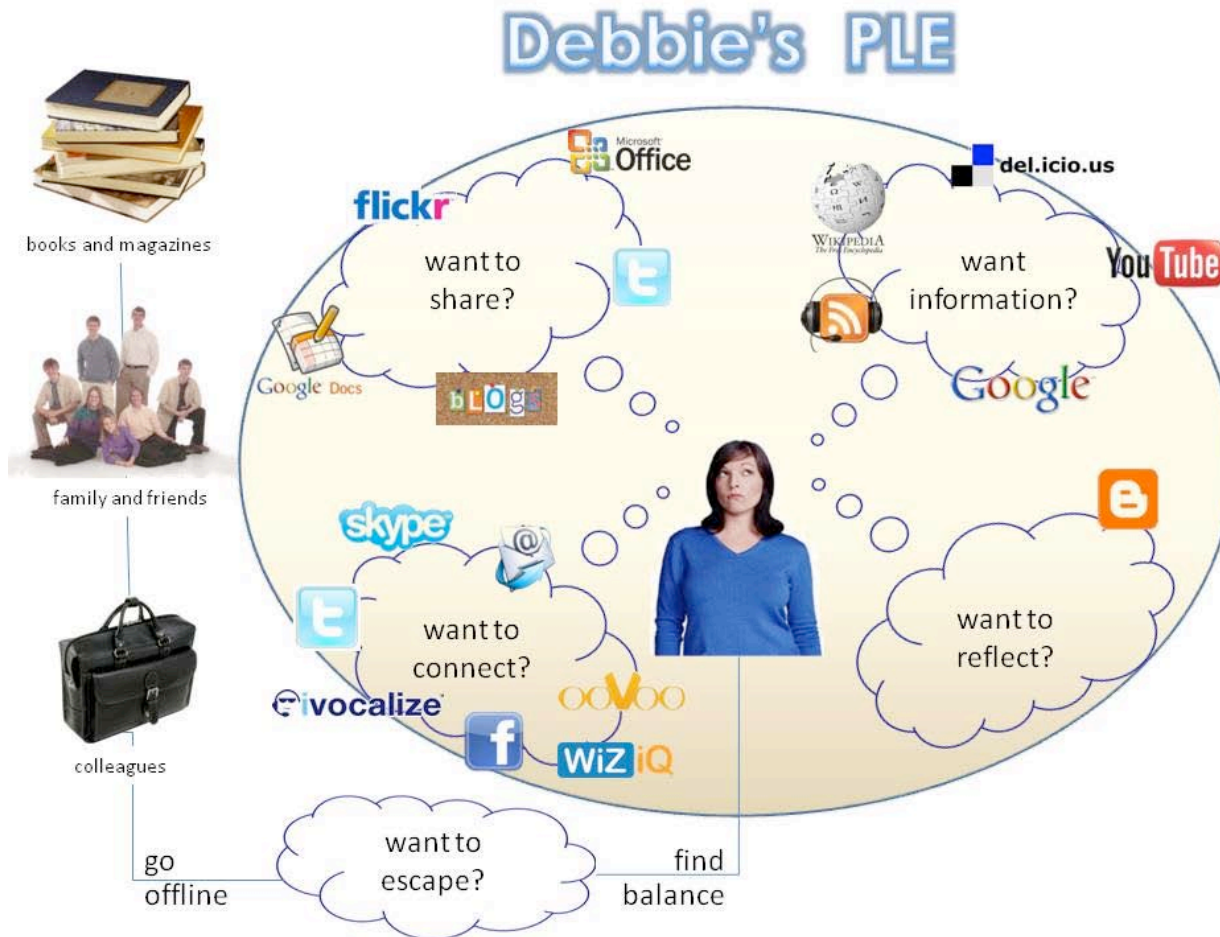


- Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)
- Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)
- Content & Language-integrated Learning

- Institution-based LMSs
- Personal technologies/apps
- PLEs



# PLE: One example



Debbie Kroeker: *Rethinking Learning and Technology: My Personal Learning Environment As I See It (for now)*. Monday December 6, 2010.

# Technology Integration

A shared institution/individual focus:

- The logical problem
  - *What content to provide and in what form*
- The physical problem
  - *What technology to buy and by whom*
    - *laptop, tablet, e-book, smart phone →*
    - *where/when/how to use it*
    - *class, library, home, in-transit*
    - *learner training*

# The Goal: In-Class/Out-of-Class Learning

- Pusack (1999) stated: '[M]y concept for the design of foreign language instructional software derived from the need to achieve *an optimal mix between in-class and out-of-class learning*.' (p. 26).
- A division of labour:
  - Work in class with the teacher
  - Work out of class without the teacher
- The goal: To increase time on task

# Technology Integration

- Possible solutions: *(what, where, when ,how)*
  - Classwork/Homework
  - Blended learning
  - Flipped learning
  - BYOD (Bring-Your-Own-Device – institutional focus)
  - Mobile learning
- Learner training
- Learner autonomy

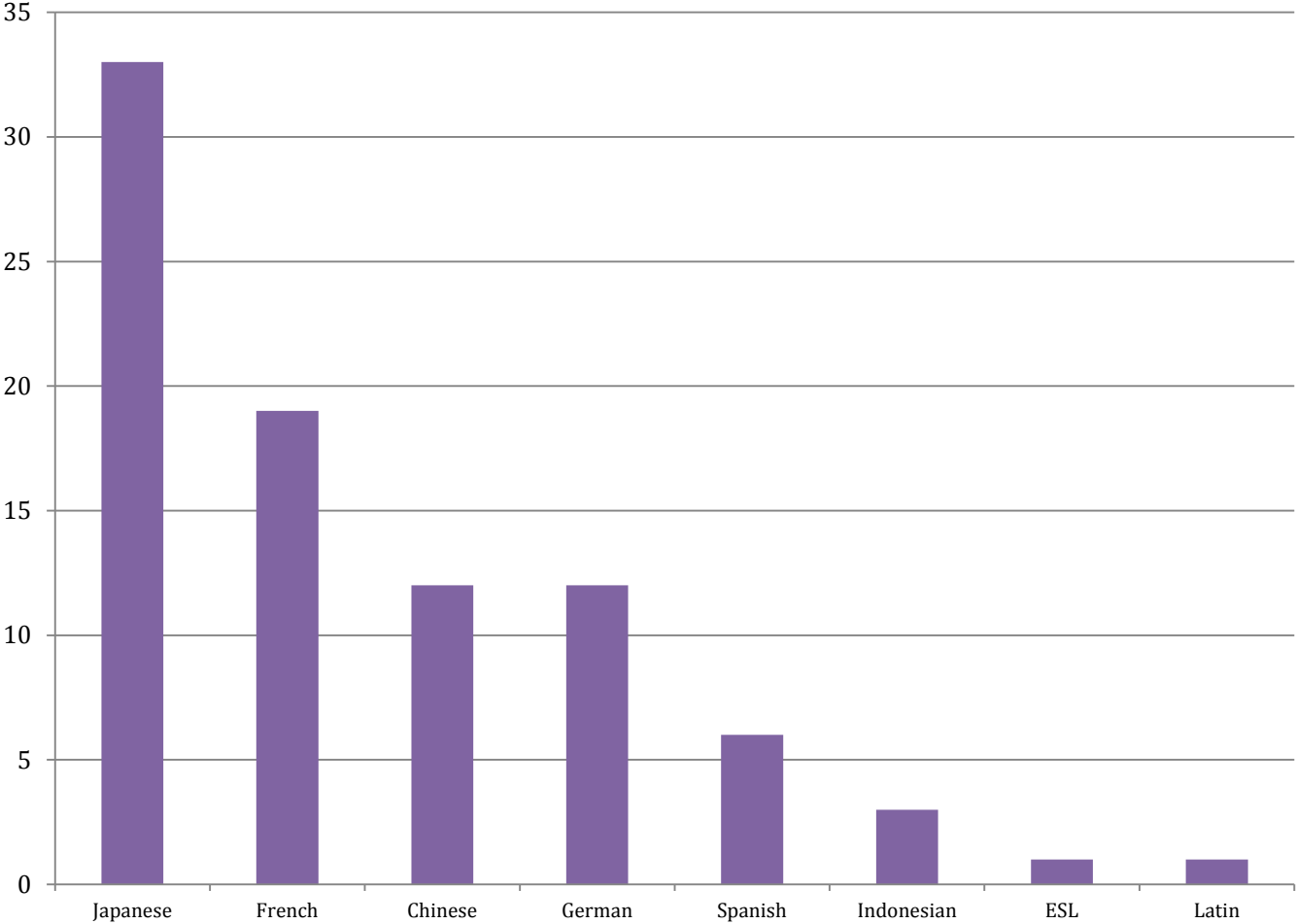
# Language Learning Study Findings

# Research Project I: Independent Schools Queensland

- Research goal:
  - To catalog technologies in use by:
    1. Frequency
    2. Task
- Data collection: Survey
  - 80 language teachers from 57 schools

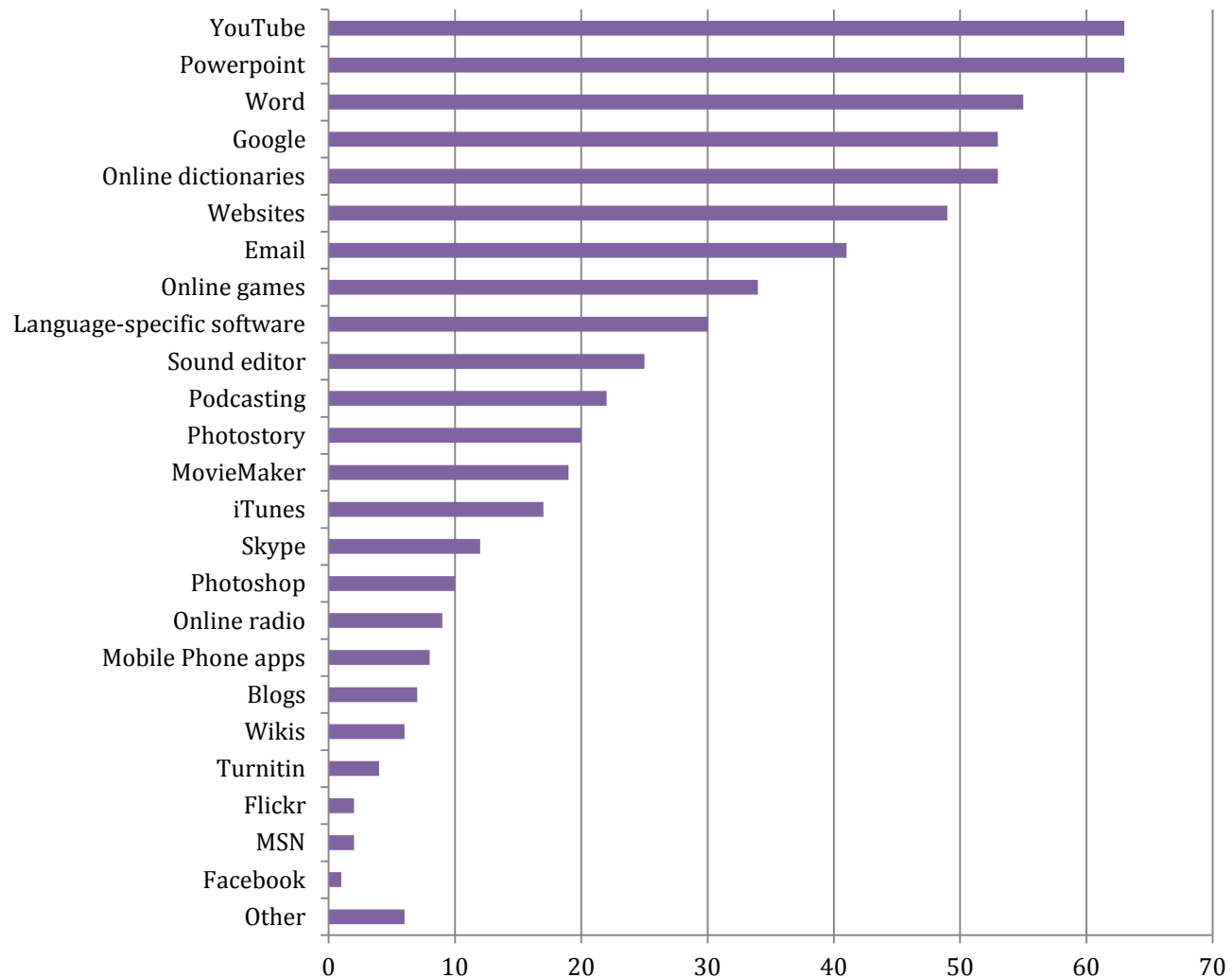
# Language taught across the schools

(n=57)



# Technologies in use

(n= 79)



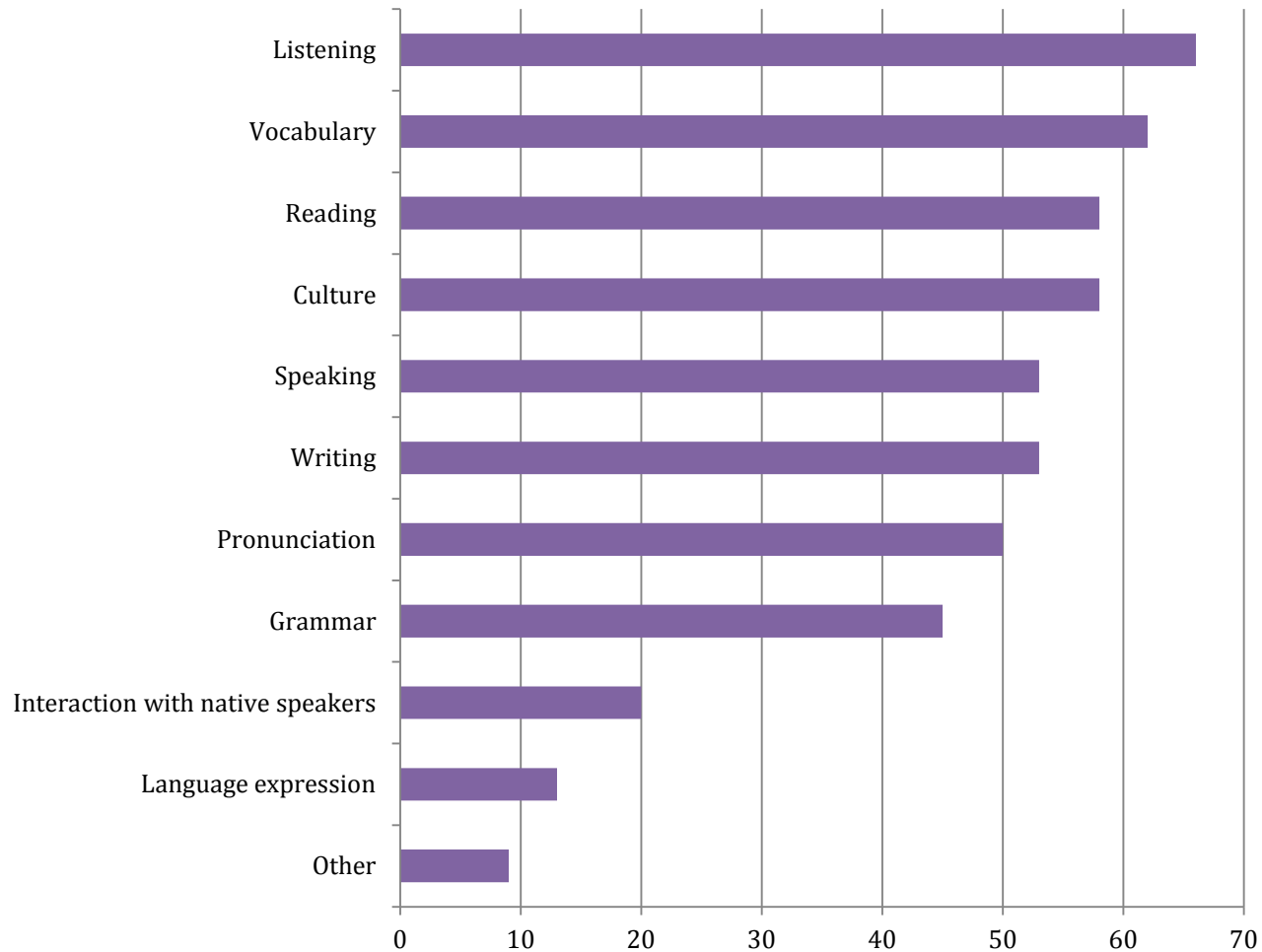


# Materials design & development

- The teacher as designer—too often overlooked or underestimated
  - 59% of teachers *partly* designed their materials for use with the textbook
  - 25% *separate* from the textbook
  - 16% for use *only with* the textbook
- extending the textbook...making up for limitations, gaps

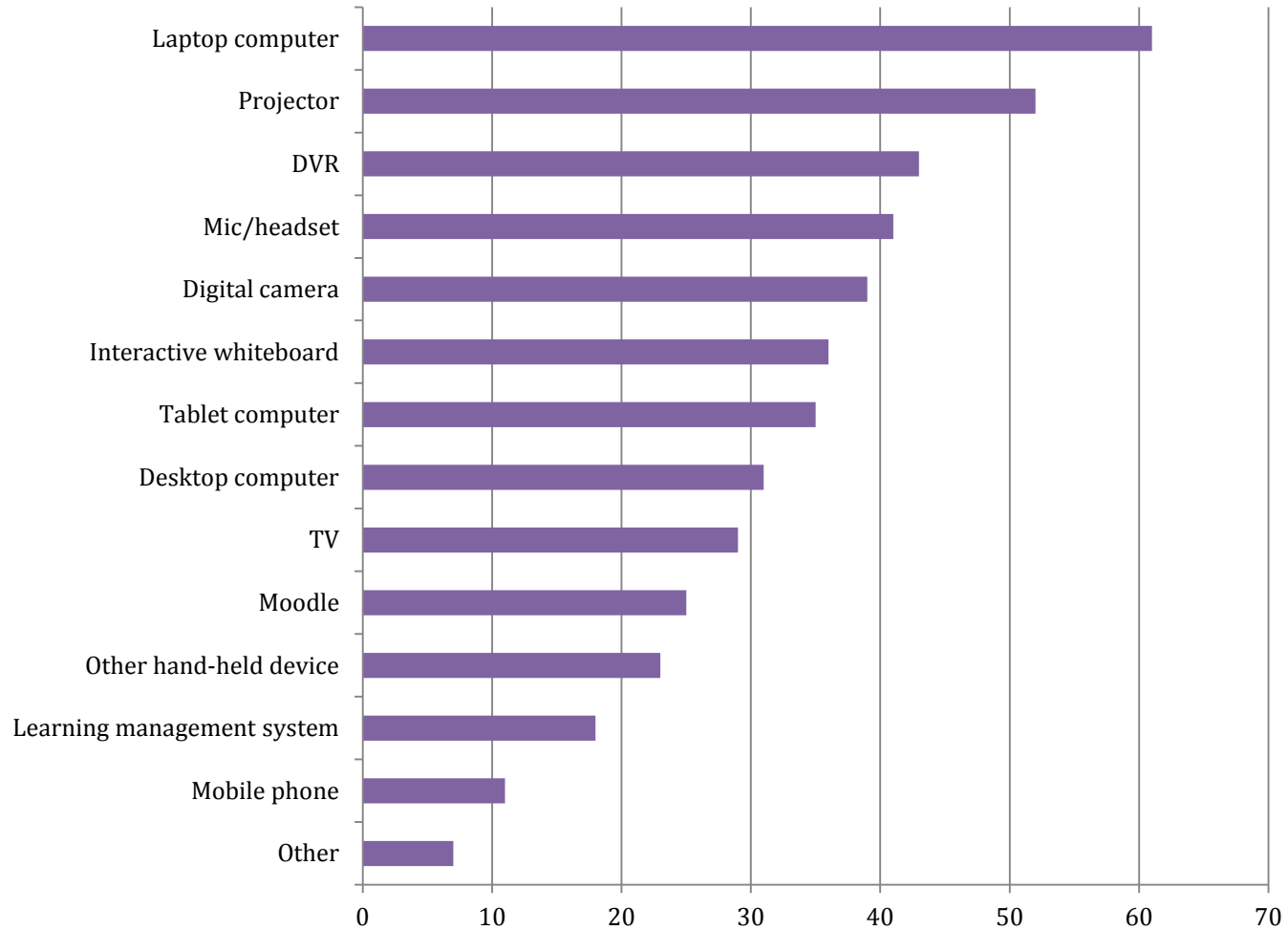
# Language skills and areas where TELL materials have been developed

(n=79)



# Technologies in use

(n=74)



# Access to technology

- Over 80% of respondents recorded sufficient access, a very positive result.
- Further improvement:
  - Availability of labs for language learning
  - Policies on which technologies (e.g., mobile phones) or software (e.g., Skype) may or may not be used by teachers and students with a clear rationale
  - Development of technology infrastructure from the outset

# Support for TELL

- Sufficient time allowance for teachers was easily the most common request.
- Time is required for teachers to develop their personal abilities and pedagogies, to practice, to design materials, and to attend PD sessions.
- It should be recognised that TELL materials development and use is a key role of the modern language teacher and should be supported accordingly.

# Reasons for use

- In priority order, TELL materials were used because they:
  - provided a rich resource
  - were an inevitable and integral part of 21st century life
  - engaged and motivated students
  - catered for different learning styles
  - provided a change of pace
  - were required as a result of school policy, and
  - increased time on task.

# Research Project II: “The Students’ Voice”

- **Participants**

- From the Brisbane Universities Language Alliance (BULA)
- Language learners from UQ, Griffith & QUT

- **Research design: Survey**

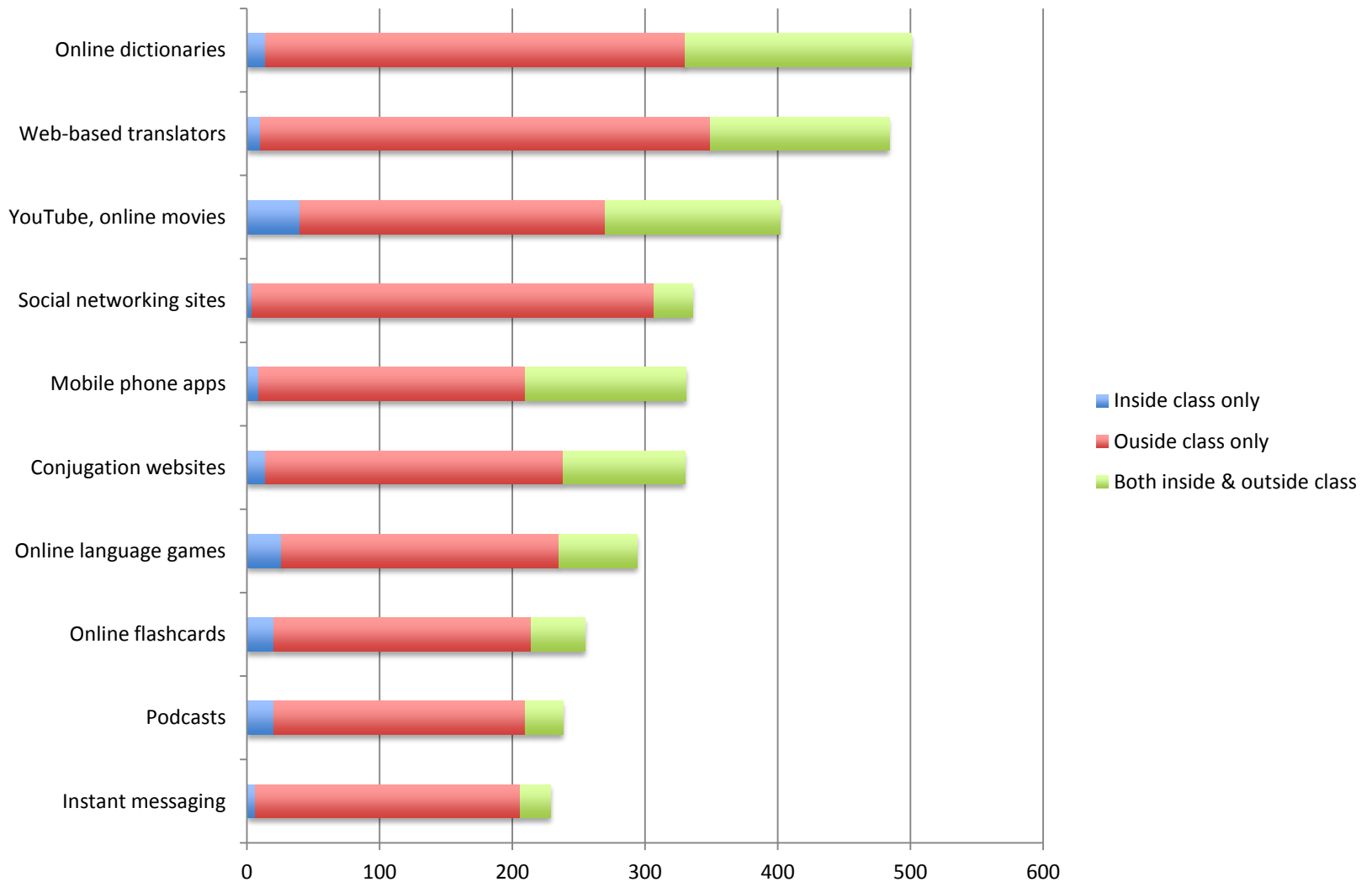
- Questionnaire

- Student motivations, barriers, enablers, esp. concerning transition from school to university
- Student factors for success, preferences, expectations, TELL
- UQ: 587 students (base sample n=2114)

- Focus groups

# Students' use of technologies

## Top 10





# Some key messages from students

## Students:

- Valued their contact time & want more of it
- Wanted more opportunities to practice with native speakers inside & outside of class with & without technologies
- Wanted more exposure to culture
- Displayed many personal preferences about how & when they wanted to study & what technologies they believed should be included in class time.
- Wanted to enjoy studying languages. They wanted it to be fun, engaging and entertaining.
- Quite a number wanted smaller classes.

# Implications

- Diversity is key
- Students are developing their own PLEs for language learning inside and outside of class
- Students are seeking guidance on how to use their technologies to support out-of-class learning
- Do we need to shift our focus from institutionally provisioned technologies to those that students are carrying around in their pockets?

# Research Project III: Applied Linguistics Course

## Principles of Computer-Assisted Language Learning

- Research goal:
  - To catalog technologies in use by:
    1. Frequency
    2. Task
- Data collection: Class survey
- Model paper:
  - Conole, G. (2008). Listening to the learner voice: The ever-changing landscape of technology use for language students. *ReCALL* 20(2): 124-140.

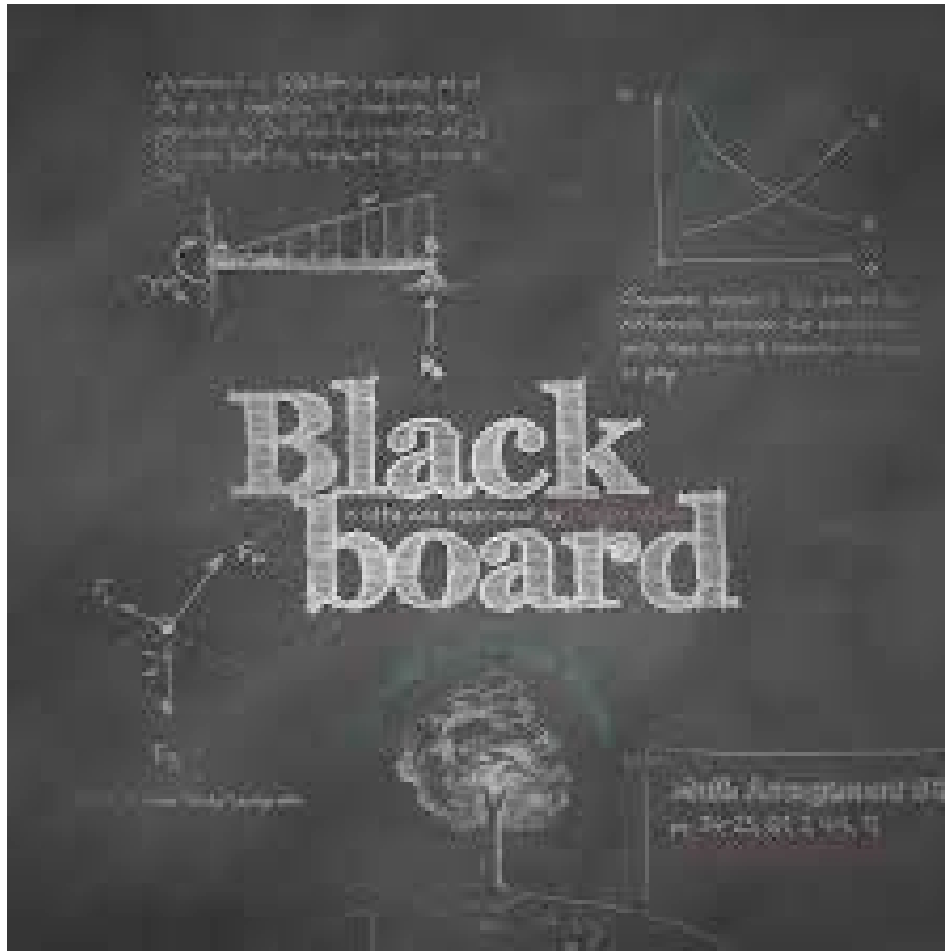
# Profiles: Left to their own devices

N=39	Not used %	Phone (Mobile) %	Tablet (e.g., iPad) %	Laptop %	Desktop %	E-Reader (e.g., Kindle) %	Trad. %
Read news		59	26	90	26		18
Read magazines	21	4	21	46	13		33
Read books		31	31	59	18	10	62
Read/Write emails		74	26	95	26		
Write essays			8	92	36		8
Watch videos/movies		33	23	97	28		26
Access online dictionary		79	21	92	15		3
Access BlackBoard		33	21	95	23		
Twitter	77	21	5	8			
Access Internet		95	31	97	28		
FaceBook	18	69	15	82	18		
Social networking	21	56	15	67	10		
Online shopping	15	36	18	79	13		
Online banking		64	18	100	21		

# Some Observations concerning Institutional Approaches to Technology

# One Suit Fits All

*...but isn't technology meant to be emancipatory?*



# Opportunities...

Oh yes, we can...



# And Constraints...

Oh no, you can't...





# Mobile technologies ??



Tablet Good

Mobile Bad



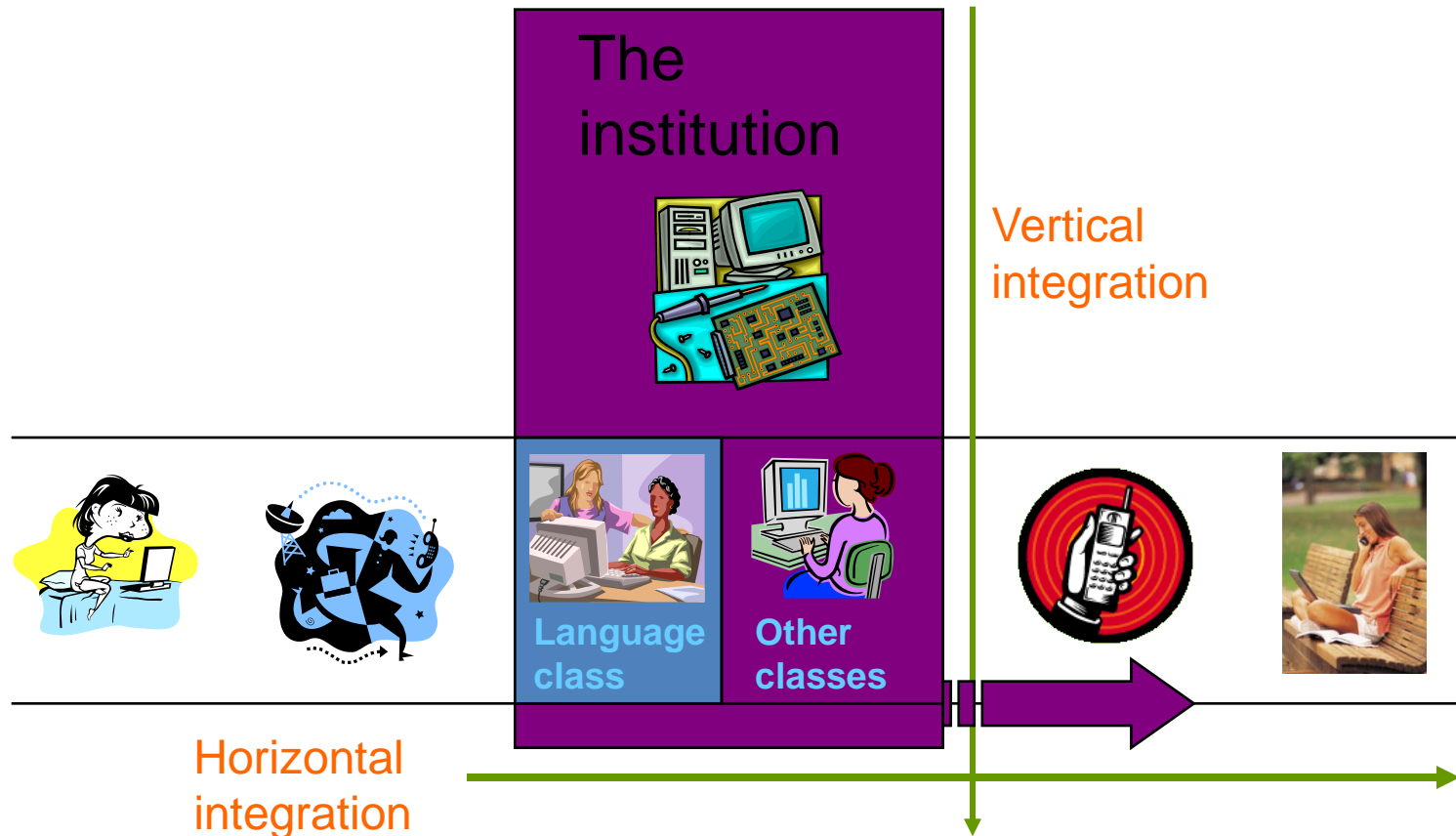
# Implications & Conclusions

# Points of Focus for Encouraging/Enhancing Learner Autonomy *(Institution → Teacher → Student)*

- Greater integration of the institutional world with the wider world
- Language-specific and generic technologies
- Provision of materials on multiple/alternative/mobile platforms
- ‘Autonomy-promoting teaching practices’ (Dang, 2010)
- Learner training
- Greater understanding of students’ own Personal Learning Environments (PLEs), given local setting

# Integration:

## *Horizontal & Vertical*





# Content Development/Distribution

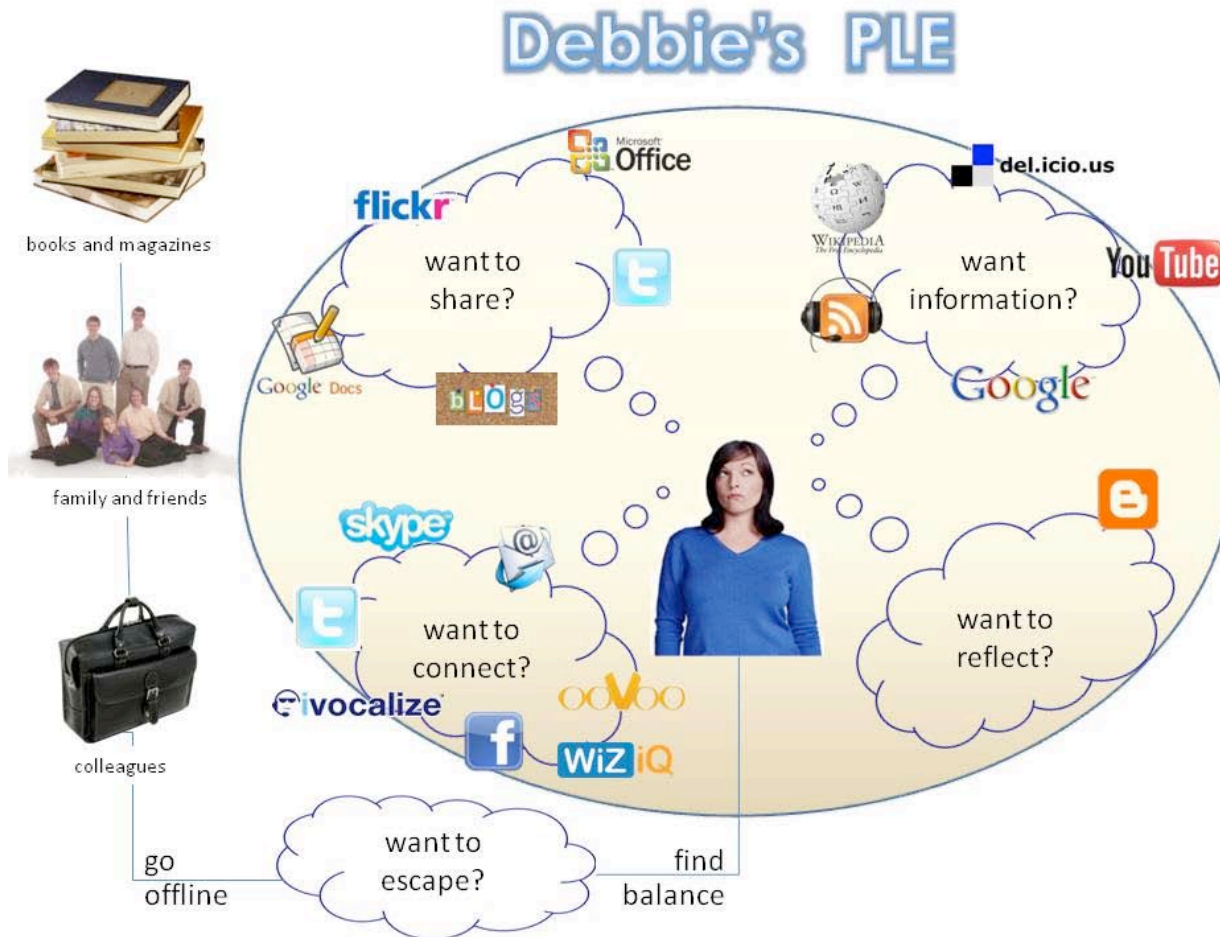
*Computer, tablet, smart phone*



# The pivotal role of the language teacher

- [I]t is not the technology itself that is key, but the creativity and imagination of the language teacher (and learner) in their understanding of what these applications can do to serve language learning.
- It is the role and influence of the informed language teacher that makes the difference.

# PLE: One example



Debbie Kroeker: *Rethinking Learning and Technology: My Personal Learning Environment As I See It (for now)*. Monday December 6, 2010.



# Learner Training: Approaches

- Why is the app motivating? (or not?)
- What languages and learner levels?
- What pedagogical approach is used or could be used?
- What learner strategies would you use?
- What are the affordances & constraints?
- How would you rate the app overall out of 5?



# Conclusions - challenges

- Knowing the resources
  - Material, technological
- Knowing/learning how to use them
  - Teachers/students
- **Enhancing the learning environment**
  - Providing structure
  - Supporting learner autonomy for individual use of personal technologies
  - Resolving in-class/out-of-class content
  - Resolving learning strategies that are effective
  - Learner training

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