

# Improving students' learning with a mobile augmented reality approach – the EduPARK game

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392

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to present a survey study that analyzes mobile learning through students' opinion regarding the use of mobile devices for learning, including their advantages and difficulties, as well as the educational value of a specific mobile learning strategy, reified in the EduPARK game, after an experience of exploring it in formal and non-formal educational contexts.

**Design/methodology/approach** – This paper comprises a survey study where mobile learning is analyzed through the eyes of 244 students attending the second or third cycles of basic education. The acknowledged advantages and difficulties of the use of mobile devices for learning, as well as the educational value and usability of a specific mobile learning strategy, using the EduPARK app and game, were analyzed.

**Findings** – Results revealed that most students owned a mobile device and were able to use them to learn. They had a positive perspective regarding mobile learning and valued the advantages of being easy to find up-to-date information, motivating for learning and easy to carry along. Difficulties are related to the use of mobile devices, such as requiring an internet connection, its slowness and prohibition of mobile devices in schools. The EduPARK game achieved an average educational value scale of 83.8 and an average system usability scale of 80.2, indicating its high educational value and usability for students.

**Originality/value** – This paper presents empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of the integration of mobile game-based augmented reality approaches in basic education to promote students' learning. It also includes an example of excellent cross-subjects educational materials comprising a very useful tool for teachers and students to explore scientific knowledge by accessing appealing information on biological and historical references of a local urban park.

**Keywords** Augmented reality, Authentic learning, Game-based learning, Mobile learning, Basic education, Outdoor activities

**Paper type** Research paper

## 1. Introduction

Mobile devices, such as cell phones and smartphones, are being extensively used by the Portuguese youth in their daily life; however, these devices are seldom used in school activities (Simões *et al.*, 2014), as they are still perceived as disruptors of learning and their use is frequently forbidden during instructional time (Liu *et al.*, 2014). The gap between the use of mobile devices inside and outside schools can lead to students' disengagement with learning activities, thus, negatively impacting their academic success (Reyes *et al.*, 2012).

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Research has shown that mobile learning can promote student learning in non-high education contexts, with few published studies with neutral or negative results (Liu *et al.*, 2014; Chee *et al.*, 2017; Crompton, Burke and Gregory, 2017). Frequently, the literature has reported student gains of increased attention, motivation and development of key competencies, as well as improved classroom climate (Marti and Mon, 2018; Sung *et al.*, 2016). Mobile science learning, with a behaviorist approach to learning, in formal educational contexts, particularly in elementary schools, seem to have been the focus of the educational research community (Chee *et al.*, 2017; Liu *et al.*, 2014).

The EduPARK (<http://edupark.web.ua.pt/>) is a research and development project aiming to generate and implement original, attractive and cross-subjects teaching strategies. The project employed a design-based research approach to create an interactive application with augmented reality (AR) for Android devices, with a set of educational learning games and integrating geocaching principles (Pombo *et al.*, 2017b; Pombo and Marques, 2018). The final version of the EduPARK app is available in the Google Play Store ([edupark.web.ua.pt/app](http://edupark.web.ua.pt/app)) for Android devices, not requiring internet connection after download.

The app was developed for students and teachers from primary to higher education to be explored in a specific informal outdoor learning context, thus promoting an active, contextual and authentic learning (Herrington and Parker, 2013). Besides the educational community, local residents and visiting tourists can also use the app in a lifelong learning approach.

One of the EduPARK's innovative aspects relates with the fact that the promoted learning methodology combines a technology that is familiar to students with locations they see as their own. Thus, this methodology moves learning out of the classrooms and into the spaces of the students' community, such as their local urban park – the *Infante D. Pedro* Park, in Aveiro (Portugal). It is a large green area, with diverse fauna and flora, and even a reasonable-sized lake with mallard ducks and amphibian species that deserve to be explored, to provide community education on valuing conservative modes, to raise awareness about the importance of biodiversity and to promote the need for everyone to adopt more sustainable lifestyles to support healthy ecosystems (Pombo *et al.*, 2017a). This may contribute to associate a type of technological device, which usually is associated to leisure activities, such as listening to music, watching video-clips or social networking, and to high-risk of excessive use (Simões *et al.*, 2014), to healthy activities such as walking, nature observation or face-to-face socialization. Moreover, the intensive use of mobile and other screen devices is associated with several obesity risk factors (Kenney and Gortmaker, 2017), which highlights the importance of using those devices for learning while exercising in a park.

The purpose of this paper is to present a survey study that analyzes mobile learning through students' opinion regarding the use of mobile devices for learning, including their advantages and difficulties, as well as the educational value of a specific mobile learning strategy, reified in the EduPARK game, after having an experience of exploring it in formal and non-formal educational contexts. The educational value was analyzed concerning: learning value; intrinsic motivation; engagement; authentic learning; lifelong learning; and conservation and sustainability habits. Additionally, the app's usability is also studied as it can influence the exploration of the game.

The remaining paper presents:

- a theoretical framework of the study;
- a contextualization regarding the EduPARK app and game;
- methodological options;
- results and discussion in the light of literature; and
- main conclusions, including suggestions of future work.

## 2. Theoretical framework

The use of technology to learn is not a new strategy. With the pervasiveness of mobile devices, their use in sustaining learning, either intentionally or not, was unavoidable. So, using, for example, smartphones or tablets to support social and/or content interactions to learn, across physical locations and educational contexts, has been referred to as mobile learning (Crompton *et al.*, 2017). Among its affordances are:

- the small size and light weight of devices that allow carrying them to different places easily (Sung *et al.*, 2016) and extending learning beyond the traditional classroom environment (Liu *et al.*, 2014);
- the interactivity with others and with media content (Burden and Maher, 2014); and
- the panoply of contextual and situated learning activities they can provision, through the proliferation of diverse hardware and applications (Parsons, 2014).

Moreover, mobile learning research has shown that the use of this technology can promote student learning in K-12 educational contexts, with few published studies with neutral or negative results (Liu *et al.*, 2014; Chee *et al.*, 2017; Crompton *et al.*, 2017). The frequently reported student gains are increased attention, motivation, and development of key competencies, as well as improved classroom climate (Swan *et al.*, 2005; Sung *et al.*, 2016; Marti and Mon, 2018). Though, the literature recognizes as limitations for mobile learning:

- the small screen size;
- the processing limitations in connectivity and in computing (Liu *et al.*, 2014); as well as
- the possibility of disruption, cheating, cyberbullying and accessing inappropriate content on the Internet (Pedro *et al.*, 2018).

Additionally, mobile learning may entrench digital divides regarding technology access, technological skills and learning competencies (Parsons, 2014), and it requires high preparation from teachers (Sung *et al.*, 2016).

According to Crompton *et al.* (2017), mobile science learning, with a behaviorist approach to learning in elementary schools and, thus, formal educational contexts, seems to have been the focus of the educational research community so far. Hence, more research is needed regarding authentic, contextualized and cross-subjects learning approaches for mobile learning in outdoor informal learning settings, such as urban parks.

The dissemination of mobile devices has supported the access of the general public to AR technologies. These allow overlapping virtual elements, such as 3D models, with real objects of the physical world, in real-time, producing a new experience (Azuma *et al.*, 2001; Dunleavy and Dede, 2014). Those virtual elements can be triggered by real-world image recognition or by the user's location. AR has potential to increase learning performance, as it can make boring content more enjoyable and can be used to provide immediate feedback and support autonomous learning (Akçayır and Akçayır, 2017).

The literature has a growing number of studies combining mobile technologies and game-based learning (GBL). This approach refers to the promotion of knowledge and skills acquisition through the use of games (Qian and Clark, 2016) and has the potential to increase learner motivation, self-directedness, and social and inquiry skills (Giannakas *et al.*, 2018), particularly if it activates prior knowledge and offers instant feedback (Ketelhut and Schifter, 2011). Mobile educational games can provide opportunities to meaningfully engage the students in the learning of relevant educational content (Liu *et al.*, 2014); however, this teaching methodology requires a careful balance of the play and the learning outcomes

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(Giannakas *et al.*, 2018) or it is not likely to be effective (Sung *et al.*, 2016). The EduPARK is using geocaching principles to enhance the gameplay experience for the app users, by finding hidden treasures to promote curiosity, a powerful intrinsic motivator.

Both mobile devices and AR technologies can provide authentic learning experiences. These technologies can situate the learner in a realistic physical and social context and scaffold learning processes (Dunleavy and Dede, 2014). Authentic learning builds on constructivist learning theories, particularly on situated learning, and includes features such as providing an authentic learning context and collaborative construction of knowledge (Herrington and Parker, 2013), giving students an active role in learning as they experience and use information in ways that are grounded in reality, instead on memorizing facts in abstract situations.

Barnes (2015) defines cross-curricular learning as the experience, at a macro level, of using the skills, knowledge and attitudes of a number of different disciplines to address a single experience, problem, question, theme or idea, with the *curriculum* as focus. Cross-curricular methods have been perceived to have motivating, inclusive, sensitizing, enriching and uniting effects (Faultley and Savage, 2012). Although there is some discussion on the most effective way of cross-curricular learning, it has been pointed that subjects' progression and integrity is best ensured by limiting the subjects involved to two or three (Barnes, 2015).

The preservation of the historical and biological heritage from city parks requires educational values from communities, such as conservation attitudes and sustainable lifestyles (Pereira *et al.*, 2006). The use of new interactive technologies may provide an opportunity for students to be physically engaged in task solving (Bacca *et al.*, 2014), experience biodiversity in nature and value the protection of green spaces. This promotes an active participation of students, constructing their knowledge, as well as the development of values enhancing an authentic learning (Herrington and Parker, 2013).

City parks have the potential to provide learning experiences that not only promote the importance of plants, habitats and their conservation, but also influence the values, attitudes and actions of their visitors. To do this effectively, however, a well-designed understanding of the gain of preserving biological and historical patrimonial for the future well-being of the planet is needed. Indeed, the council heads of the Australian botanic gardens claim that raising public awareness of the importance of biodiversity is critical in fostering conservation because it leads to the need to preserve natural habitats, and understanding the threats and consequences of losing biodiversity, emphasizing the key role of adopting counteractive measures (Ballantyne *et al.*, 2008).

These outdoor environments attract students and teachers as well as a wide range of domestic and international tourists and other regular visitors from the local areas (Ballantyne *et al.*, 2008). The *Infante D. Pedro* Park is potentially well-placed to offer community education about conservation; it's a large green area, with diverse fauna and flora (with about 70 native and exotic species of trees and bushes and even a lake with reasonable dimensions [Plomp and Nieveen, 2013]) that deserves to be explored, to provide community education valuing conservative modes, to raise awareness about the importance of biodiversity (Pereira *et al.*, 2006) and to promote the need for everyone to adopt more sustainable lifestyles to support healthy ecosystems.

Skills such as problem solving, digital and communication skills, critical thinking, analytical thinking, creative thinking, collaboration and teamwork are required by organizations when recruiting job candidates. For students to develop such skills, a more active and authentic learning method is needed (Pombo *et al.*, 2011a, 2011b) where learners

take the responsibility for their learning and are engaged participants rather than passive observers (Pombo *et al.*, 2010, 2011a, 2011b).

### 3. The augmented reality EduPARK project, app and game

EduPARK (<http://edupark.web.ua.pt>) integrates a multidisciplinary team that involves researchers from the University of Aveiro (Portugal) comprising three areas: education, biology and computer science. The main relevance is its innovation in terms of outdoor learning strategies, in formal, informal and non-formal contexts, articulating curriculum contents with game challenges and with technology. The partnership with the City Council of Aveiro allowed the installation of 32 plant identification plaques in the *Infante D. Pedro* Park that give access to AR information developed by the project team.

The project organizes regular activities for students and visitors, as well as teacher training, to collect systematic data to better understand the educational value of mobile learning in outdoor settings. With this strategy, learning moves beyond traditional classroom environments to nature spaces that students can physically explore; at the same time, they make connections with curricular contents. To date, EduPARK has involved about 900 students from primary to higher education, 200 teachers and a lot of tourists.

The EduPARK app (Figure 1) development fits a design-based research methodology with four cycles of development involving user testing and evaluation (Pombo and Marques, 2018). The app was progressively refined according to the users' feedback in each cycle and the stable version of the EduPARK app is now available in the Google Play Store ([edupark.web.ua.pt/app](http://edupark.web.ua.pt/app)) for Android devices, not requiring internet connection after download. The app can be used autonomously, and at any time, promoting authentic learning so that visitors can enjoy a healthy walk while learning. The mobile app was developed using Unity 5, a popular cross-platform game engine, since Vuforia is currently the most widely adopted platform for AR technology (Unity Technologies, 2017).

The EduPARK app has two main modes:

- (1) explore freely mode, with no specific game or associated trajectory; and
- (2) game mode that includes cross-subjects educational guides, or quiz games developed for specific audiences, from basic to higher education, but also for tourists/public in general in a lifelong learning perspective.



**Notes:** (a) initial screen with language options (Portuguese or English), profile setting and different modes of app use; (b) multiple-choice question; (c) treasure hunt challenge; (d) final screen with game results

**Figure 1.**  
EduPARK app

The last one is available both in Portuguese and in English to reach also foreign visitors. The school-level guides were developed in articulation with the curriculum directives for specific audience and include subjects such as Biology, Math and History. Therefore, to develop these guides, it was important to carefully analyze the national curriculum to identify multidisciplinary issues (e.g. integrating Biology and History or Biology and Math) that might be explored in the selected park. The EduPARK app is, thus, a resource with potential impact in schools, local community and tourism sector. An app with educational potential for so diverse target publics and in formal (school visits to the park), non-formal (e.g. in environmental education sessions promoted by the local City Council) or informal learning contexts (e.g. a family visiting the park explores it through one of the EduPARK games) is unique in the literature (Laine, 2018).

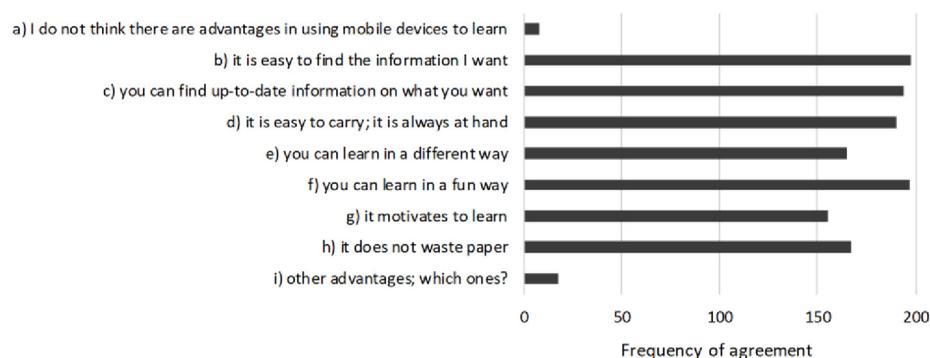
The AR markers are:

- in plaques, installed in the park for that purpose [see Plate 1(a)]; or
- in tiles [see Plate 1(b)], already existing in the park.

The AR information overlays on top of a real-time camera feed of a feature within the park, augmenting the reality, and it can include images, audios, videos, schemes, or 3D models, such as 3D plant leaves. The AR integrated in the plaques includes information about plant species, such as leaf, flower, fruit, origin, ecology and curiosities about the species; the AR integrated on tiles is about historical and regional issues with interest for the general public (Plate 1). For example, pointing the camera into a tile of the Tea House, one can appreciate the original architectural project of the house that is overlaid on the real Tea House or visualize the current use of *moliceiro* boat, once used to collect *molicho* (vascular algae).

EduPARK game features integrate a set of aims/principles, as addressed by Pombo *et al.* (2019), which are as follows:

- contextualized learning in the park, e.g. related with the botanical species or with the historical monuments in the park;
- cross-subjects learning, e.g. using flowers to address issues about symmetry axis;
- recommendation to play in small teams, although it is perfectly playable individually as well, as generally research suggests that collaboration is more effective than competition for reaching achievements, as the app's educational challenges can promote collaborative discussion of ideas;



**Figure 2.**  
Students' opinion  
about advantages in  
using mobile devices  
to learn

- Context is successful either in formal (e.g. school visits to the park), non-formal (e.g. in environmental education sessions of app use promoted by the local City Council) or informal learning contexts (e.g. a family visiting the park explores it through one of its games/educational guides); and
- user-friendly, so users, even children in primary education, can use it without support of the EduPARK team.

There are a set of features that make the EduPARK game particularly effective in promoting learning. In what concerns pedagogical affordances, the game is grounded in the constructivist theories of authentic and contextualized learning. As such, it takes advantage of the context as the facilitator of learning, as it prompts the players to observe several park elements to answer correctly the questions. For instance, the game invites the players to observe their surroundings and identify the musical instrument represented at the top of the park bandstand. It is also a game premise to have the learner assuming an active role in his/her learning process of interacting with the game resources, close environment and other team members. Additionally, as mentioned above, the EduPARK team purposely developed the game to promote cross-subjects learning, so it includes questions that, e.g. prompt the players to interpret the “not drinking water” signal and answer in English, which is a foreign language for Portuguese children. The game also includes questions that prompt the players to acknowledge and respect the biodiversity, such as the one that suggests listening to the sound of a bird that inhabits the park.

The EduPARK game also presents gaming affordances, such as a diverse gameplay experience. The players are asked to find specific locations in the park, to analyze the app contents (both AR triggered by plaques and by historical tiles, videos, audios, images or even the park map), and to answer quiz-questions with no time constrains. Additionally, players are also prompting to look for hidden virtual caches or treasures, but with a time limit, thus, sustaining a different game experience. Moreover, the popular treasure hunt (Laine, 2018) reifies the geocaching principles. Players are presented with challenges and riddles that require knowledge about the park [Figure 1(c)] to find a specific virtual chest with bananas [Plate 1(c)], having five minutes to find it. The longer the time players need to find each treasure, the less bananas they collect. Looking for hidden treasures can arouse curiosity, which is an intrinsic motivator and keeps the player engaged in learning during the game, hence, curiosity can result in improved learning and performance (Laine, 2018). The accumulated bananas can be used for help with the following quiz-questions.

**Plate 1.**

The EduPARK app triggering AR content: (A) about plant species, using identifying plaques with AR image markers; (B) about regional issues, using historical tiles as markers; (C) virtual treasure displaying on the mobile screen



#### 4. Methodology

The EduPARK project aims to study how playing a game, supported by an interactive mobile AR app in an outdoor context may promote learning and motivation for learning, among other affective gains. The present paper gives continuity to previous works (Pombo *et al.*, 2019) and reports a survey focused on the opinion of students attending the second and third cycles of basic education (CBE) in what concerns the use of mobile devices for learning, including their advantages and difficulties, as well as the EduPARK app educational value and usability.

Empirical data were gathered throughout the first year of app use in 15 outreach activities organized by the project involving schools and other educational entities. Students were organized in teams of three to five members to collaboratively play with the EduPARK app in the *Infante D. Pedro* Park (Aveiro, Portugal). A total of 244 students attending second and third CBE participated in groups, both in formal and non-formal educational contexts, played with the app and participated in this study.

Data collection involved a questionnaire survey, automatic app-logging mechanisms regarding the score attained, number of correct and incorrect answers, etc. Data were collected anonymously and research ethics principles were respected.

The questionnaire survey was applied right after the game activity. It was similar to the one used in the previous study for primary education children (Pombo and Marques, 2019), which comprises four sections, with multi-choice closed questions in a Likert scale (where 1 corresponds to “strongly disagree” and 5 to “strongly agree”). One section collected basic demographic data, as age and gender, students’ profile as mobile devices users and their opinion on mobile learning advantages and disadvantages. Other section is about the interest regarding the activity of playing the EduPARK game in the park. Another section refers to the educational value scale (EVS), and the last one is based on the System Usability Scale (SUS) (Brooke, 1996; Martins *et al.*, 2015).

The app logging mechanisms were automatically and anonymously collected information from finished games such as:

- number of questions answered correctly and incorrectly;
- number of hunted geocaching treasures;
- number of bananas collected in the treasures;
- final score, including the points gained through the collected bananas; and
- time of gameplay.

As to data analysis, individual SUS scores and EVS score were computed according to Brooke (1996), with values varying from 0 to 100. In the present study, SUS scores were interpreted according to Sauro (2011) and Bangor *et al.* (2009). The remaining data were analyzed through descriptive statistics. These sets of data were triangulated to provide a more comprehensive knowledge of students’ opinion regarding mobile learning. This analysis will be presented in the next section.

#### 5. Results and discussion

This section starts with a brief characterization of the study’s participants, followed by an analysis of the participant students’ opinion regarding the use of mobile devices for learning, the educational value of a specific mobile learning strategy, reified in the EduPARK app, and its usability as well.

The 244 students that participated in the study were second and third CBE children, who played with the support of the EduPARK app in loco, that is, in the *Infante D. Pedro* Park, under an activity organized by the project during the first year of public implementation.

Students' age ranged from 10 to 16 years old, of which, 48.4 per cent were boys and 51.6 per cent were girls. At the time of the activity, children were attending grade five to nine in the Portuguese Education System: 63.2 per cent in grade five; 5.4 per cent in grade six; 2.2 per cent in grade seven; 27.4 per cent in grade eight and 1.8 per cent in grade nine. Grade 5 and grade 8 were considered particularly suitable for learning in an urban park. This tendency can be associated with the national curriculum for these years, as it prescribes learning related to the environment protection, ecosystems, biodiversity, etc.

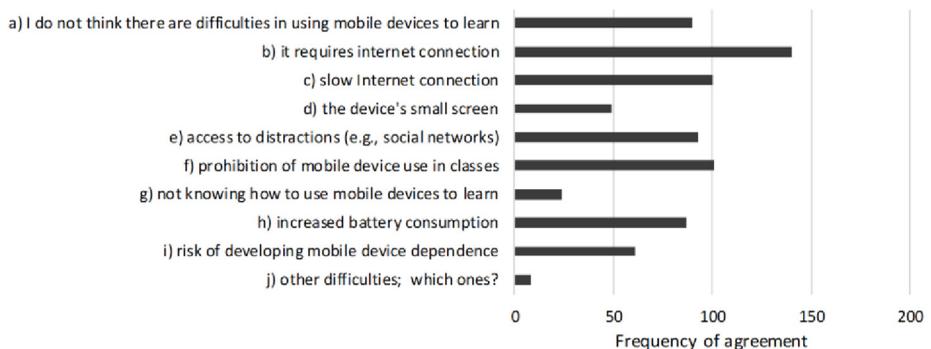
Most students (85.8 per cent) preferred owning an Android mobile device, smartphone or tablet, and claimed they use mobile devices to learn either frequently (18.8 per cent) or sometimes (67.8 per cent). The remaining students (13.4 per cent) mentioned they do not use mobile devices to learn at all. Most children were already quite familiar with mobile devices and considered they were able to employ these technologies for learning. These results seem to support the literature that highlights the mobile devices proliferation (Chee *et al.*, 2017), especially in what concerns school-aged children.

More than two-thirds of the participant students were, at least, able to use mobile devices for learning. This is an indicator that they probably have a positive perspective regarding mobile learning, and Figure 2 shows the agreement with each advantage sentence.

All sentences achieved a frequency of at least 150. Only 3.3 per cent students did not recognize any advantage in mobile learning. Among the most acknowledged advantages are "it is easy to find the information I want" (81.1 per cent), "you can learn in a fun way" (80.7 per cent), and "you can find up-to-date information on what you want" (79.5 per cent). Moreover, 7.4 per cent students added new advantages, such as the shortened time of information search when compared with other methods, not polluting the environment with the printers' tonners, the fun they have when using mobile devices or even not being bored studying with the books.

Regarding the difficulties of mobile learning, Figure 3 shows that 36.9 per cent students did not recognize any difficulties in the use of mobile devices to learn. The most mentioned difficulties are the requirement of internet connection (57.4 per cent) and its slowness (41.0 per cent) and the prohibition of using mobile devices in schools (41.4 per cent). The EduPARK project approach contributes to reduce all these constrains, as:

- the game supporting app was conceived for offline use, not requiring internet connection, so its slowness is not an issue;
- it promotes teachers' support in the use of mobile devices to learn; and
- it reduces students' use of other mobile devices software, as they are engaged with the game in the park (Pombo *et al.*, 2017b).



**Figure 3.** Students' opinion about difficulties in using mobile devices to learn

Finally, 3.3 per cent students added new difficulties, such as one cannot always find what one is looking for, not understanding the vocabulary, or even the risk of dropping the mobile device and losing it. Almost all students (94.3 per cent) considered the EduPARK activity interesting (27.9 per cent) or very interesting (66.4 per cent).

Figure 4 summarizes children’s opinion regarding the educational value of the EduPARK game. Their perception was positive, as, e.g. 90.2 per cent students (strongly) agreed with the statement “This app shows real-world information that helps you learn” and 86.9 per cent (strongly) disagreed with the statement “I do not feel like using this app to learn”. EVS score values ranged from 37.5 to 100, with an average of 83.8, which seems to be a high value, although more studies are needed to sustain that claim. The results seem to reveal that the EduPARK game has educational value for 2nd and 3rd CBE students.

Regarding the indicators of learning value, 80.7 per cent students (strongly) disagreed with the statement “This app shows information in a confusing way” that assesses negatively the app’s learning value. Similarly, opposite results can be found regarding the positive value attribution sentence. Similar results can be found for the remaining indicators. Figure 5 summarizes children’s opinion regarding the usability of the EduPARK app.

Students’ perception was positive, as, e.g. 82.8 per cent students agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “This app was easy to use” and 65.6 per cent disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement “This app should not be so difficult to use”. SUS score values ranged from 30.0 to 100, with an average of 80.2, which is a higher value than the average SUS value (68) computed by Sauro (2011). Moreover, according to the classification of Bangor *et al.* (2009), the EduPARK app achieved a good-excellent usability for second and third CBE students.

Students organized in 62 teams, completed the second and third CBE game during the activities organized by the EduPARK, so the data collected by the app was automatically and anonymously generated from these completed games. These data are presented in Table I. In 31 quiz-like questions, the students answered correctly an average of 25.5 questions, with a maximum of 31 correct answers and a minimum of 17. These results reveal that most of the gamers were able to select the right answer of the quiz questions, either because they already knew the answer or because of the adequacy of the app’s supporting information. By discovering a maximum of four treasures, players can earn a maximum of

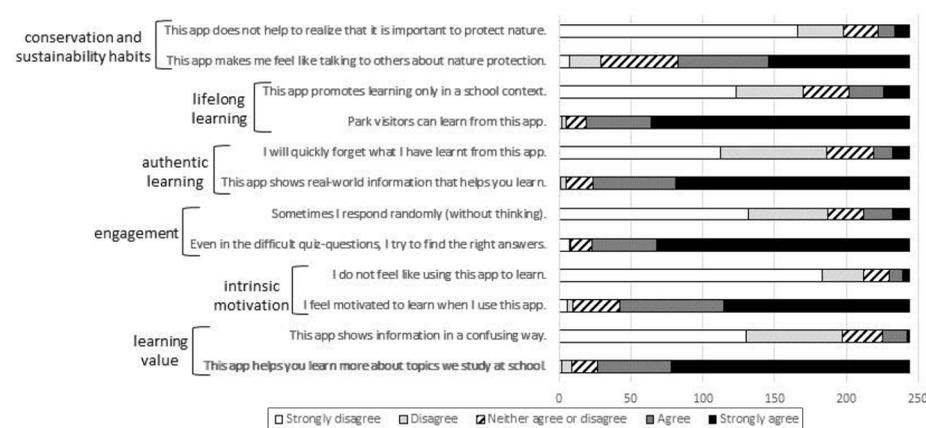


Figure 4. Second and third CBE students’ opinion regarding the educational value of the EduPARK app

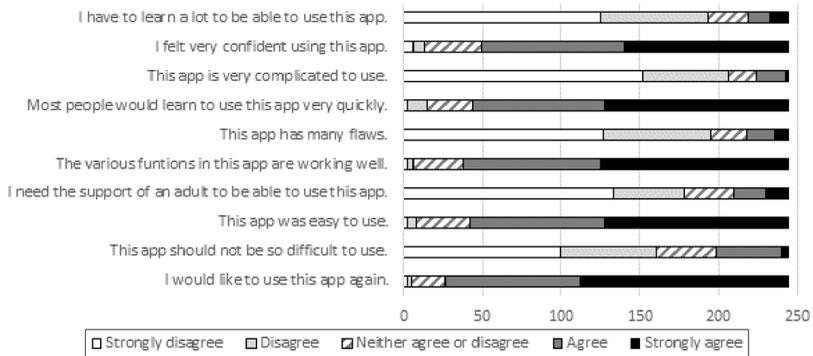
20 bananas (five per treasure), according to how quickly they found them. Data reveal that most players found all the treasures and earned an average of 15.2 bananas, so the treasure hunt tasks were quite accessible to most players. The number of earned bananas, of correctly answered questions and of AR contents accessed are all considered to compute the game final score; data revealed that final scores reached an average of 279.9, maximum of 361 and minimum of 192. Thus, the results about the children's performance in the game support their views regarding the high educational value of the EduPARK app.

Additionally, the time in game varied from nearly 43 min to 1 h and 55 min, with an average of 1 h and 16 min. This factor did not have an impact on the players' scores. The gameplay time showed that students were able to stay committed with the game for long periods having a positive performance in the tasks proposed in the app.

**6. Conclusion**

The EduPARK project developed an innovative interactive mobile AR game to promote authentic cross-subjects learning in a specific urban park being a resource with potential impact in schools, local community and tourism sector. This work reports the results of the EduPARK app and game implementation with 244 basic education students in outdoor activities organized by the project. The focus is students' opinion regarding mobile learning, as well as the educational value and usability of the app and game.

The results point to students' positive perspective regarding mobile learning in a population that owns personal mobile devices and claim to be able to use them for learning. Moreover, students valued mobile devices advantages of being easy to find up-to-date information, being motivating for learning and being easy to carry. Nevertheless, students acknowledged difficulties in the use of mobile devices to learn, such as needing an internet connection, its slowness, not being allowed to use mobile devices in schools and the fact that they give access to distractions.



**Figure 5.** Second and third CBE students' opinion regarding the usability of the EduPARK app

**Table I.**

Automatic app loggings regarding 62 teams who completed the second and third CBE game	No. of correct answers (out of 31)	No. of incorrect answers (out of 31)	No. of treasures (out of 4)	Bananas (out of 20)	Final score	Gameplay time
Average	25.5	5.4	3.8	15.2	284.9	01:16:18
Maximum	31	14	4	20	361	01:55:14
Minimum	17	0	2	4	192	00:43:39

The EduPARK game achieved an average EVS of 83.8, indicating its high educational value, which is supported by the data collected through the app logging mechanisms, as the groups of students achieved a good performance, overall. Additionally, the app achieved an average SUS of 80.2, which comprises a good-excellent usability (Bangor *et al.*, 2009), indicating that it is easy to use and promotes authentic learning in this target-public. Resources that combine this set of innovative features, such as being mobile, designed for outdoor use (namely in urban parks), with contextualized contents, supporting game-based geocaching activities and with AR contents, can be easy to use and may promote learning, both at a cognitive level and at an affective one (such as increased motivation for learning). These features (Radu, 2012; Burden and Maher, 2014; Qian and Clark, 2016; Sung *et al.*, 2016; Akçayır and Akçayır, 2017; Laine, 2018; Martí and Mon, 2018) can be successfully integrated in methodologies to teach, in an authentic way, cross-subjects and contextualized issues to basic education students in informal settings, such as urban parks.

One of this study limitations is the level of excitement related with the timing and set where one of the data collection tools, the questionnaires, were applied (just after playing the game and in the park), as it may have hindered students' concentration during the questionnaire filling. Nevertheless, to reduce the impact of this factor, children were supported by the adults, who accompanied each group, to assure they understood the questions and answer options, whenever needed. Teams' constitution may also have influenced the results, as each student's level of participation in the game decreases as the number of team members increases. This factor may have an impact on how the activity is perceived by the app players. However, this variation in teams' constitution could not be addressed, particularly with activities with a higher number of participants, as it was related with the human resources available to accompany each group of children in each session.

This paper is a contribution to the literature on mobile game-based AR learning, as it includes empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of the integration of new technologies in second and third CBE to promote students learning. It also bears the report of an example of excellent cross-subjects educational materials—the learning game—that comprises a very useful tool for teachers and students to explore scientific knowledge by accessing appealing information on biological and historical references of a local urban park.

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**Further reading**

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406

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