

Jeeves – A Visual Programming Environment for Mobile Experience Sampling

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Abstract—The Experience Sampling Method (ESM) captures participants’ thoughts and feelings in their everyday environments. Mobile and wearable technologies afford us opportunities to reach people using ESM in varying contexts. However, a lack of programming knowledge often hinders researchers in creating ESM applications. In practice, they rely on specialised tools for app creation. Our initial review of these tools indicates that most are expensive commercial services, and none utilise the full potential of sensors for creating context-aware applications. We present “Jeeves”, a visual language to facilitate ESM application creation. Inspired by successful visual languages in literature, our block-based notation enables researchers to visually construct ESM study specifications. We demonstrate its applicability by replicating existing ESM studies found in medical and psychology literature. Our preliminary study with 20 participants demonstrates that both non-programmers and programmers are able to successfully utilise Jeeves. We discuss future work in extending Jeeves with alternative mobile technologies.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Experience Sampling Method (ESM), also defined as Ecological Momentary Assessment (EMA), has long been used by researchers in the fields of psychology and medicine to collect information on study participants or patients “in the field”, that is, outside the constraints of a laboratory setting [1]. By gathering people’s data as they go about their everyday lives, results have a higher ecological validity and eliminate the bias resulting from unfamiliar environments, as well as the recall issues caused by collecting data in retrospect of an important event or situation. Traditionally, ESM studies have been conducted using an external signalling device (such as a pager or pre-programmed electronic watch) coupled with paper-based forms for participants to fill out when the device emits a signal [2]. This cumbersome and unreliable approach has been greatly improved upon in recent years, where researchers have recognised the potential of mobile applications for conducting these types of studies with participants [3], [4], [5]. Along with this, in the field of Human Computer Interaction (HCI) study applications have been developed which allow both the signalling and data collection to take place on a participant’s personal device. MyExperience [6] and EmotionSense [7] are two pertinent examples, which also collect data from mobile phone sensors to enable context-aware ESM applications.

Despite the potential of tools to assist programmers in creating context-aware ESM applications, a lack of programming experience remains a major barrier to researchers in

fields such as psychology and medicine, where these applications would be of greatest use. MyExperience requires researchers to configure applications by providing XML files which may include complex embedded scripts. The researchers behind EmotionSense have provided open-source libraries for facilitating the creation of ESM applications, but utilising these libraries still requires Android programming experience. Instead, non-programmers must invest in commercial software or hardware [3], [4], [5], hire professional developers [8], employ manual methods such as telephoning participants [9] or simply resort to providing paper-based logs [2], [10].

End-user programming is a research area where the focus is on introducing software development into the hands of its prospective users, rather than professional programmers. However, the syntax and semantics of general-purpose, high level programming languages, such as C or Java, can have a steep learning curve. Visual programming is a research topic that addresses this issue, encompassing applications that are implemented through combining graphical components, instead of code. Visual programming environments (VPEs) exist for various end-users and goals, including beginner-level environments for teaching students to program [11], and professional development environments for engineers developing control systems [12]. To our knowledge, no such visual language or environment has been created for researchers who wish to create context-aware mobile applications such as ESM studies. In this paper, we therefore make the following contributions:

- 1) A survey of the current state-of-the-art in ESM study creation applications and tools.
- 2) A presentation of Jeeves, a visual language for facilitating ESM study creation.
- 3) A feasibility study of Jeeves, conducted with 20 participants, with varying programming experience.

II. BACKGROUND REVIEW

To relieve researchers from the difficulty of learning a programming language from scratch, commercial and open-source software has been created that address at least some of the issues faced by researchers in developing their own ESM applications. Typically, this software consists of a web interface that enables the specification of surveys, and timing frameworks for the deployment of these surveys. Specifications are then delivered to customised applications installed

Tool name	UI	Interval trigger	Sensor trigger	Sensor logging	User tailored	Dynamic update	Branch logic	Free	Open
movisensXS	Visual language	✓		✓	✓	✓			
PIEL	Text file	✓				✓	✓		
LifeData	Forms	✓		✓		✓			
mEMA	Forms	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		
iPromptU	Within app	✓					✓		
MetricWire	Forms	✓	L	✓		✓	✓		
Ohmage	XML file		L	✓		✓	✓	✓	
PACO	Forms	✓	A	✓		✓	✓	✓	

TABLE I: Features of ESM-focused apps currently available on the iTunes App Store or Google Play Store in the UK (L=Location-based trigger, A=Trigger based on app usage)

on users’ mobile devices. We selected systems, which have apps that are currently available on the iTunes UK store or the Google Play store, and are thus considered to be the current state-of-the-art for iOS and Android app development. Additionally, numerous applications exist for creating one-off surveys, with no focus on ESM, and were not considered for this comparison. Applications that run on bespoke or outdated hardware were also not considered. In total, eight tools were surveyed and their key properties and features are summarised in Table I.

MovisensXS [13] has the most advanced specification user interface, with a flowchart-based visual language for customising study schedules. Four of the reviewed applications, LifeData [14], mEMA [15], MetricWire [16] and Paco [17], allow developers to create both the surveys and the distribution schedules in similar forms-based interfaces, and these surveys are then assigned to one or more schedules. Another alternative interface employed by the PIEL [18] and Ohmage [19] tools, is a user-created configuration file. This file contains the surveys and schedules in a textual representation, corresponding to some syntactic rules, similar to the approach used in MyExperience. Finally, iPromptU [20] has the survey and schedule specification interface within the application itself.

While it’s clear from Table I that there are some sophisticated tools and applications for researchers, there are also clear deficiencies which we now detail.

1) *Lack of free and open software:* Applications that offer more sophisticated functionality are commercial software that require considerable financial investment from researchers. This can be an issue if the proposed studies are large or if

the functionality required goes beyond what is provided in cheaper versions of the software.

2) *Lack of sensor utilisation:* MetricWire and Ohmage offer the possibility of triggering based on location, and Paco can trigger surveys contingent on basic application usage. However, none of these applications are making use of the rich variety of sensors and user information available through the current generation of mobile devices. Omitting this functionality is sacrificing valuable contextual information.

3) *Lack of support for collaboration:* Despite claims to support academic research, none of the reviewed applications allow simple sharing of ESM applications between researchers, which would encourage collaboration, enabling simple study replication or improvement on existing studies.

4) *Lack of participant customisation:* Few tools offer a means to tailor apps based on an individual’s characteristics and preferences. For example, it may be desirable to only begin sending surveys after a participant’s pre-defined wake-up time, which would undoubtedly reduce study attrition. Instead, studies deployed to a group tend to be “one-size-fits-all”, and do not take into account individuals’ characteristics. The importance of survey timing depending on participant characteristics was highlighted in additional work by Lathia et al [21]. They showed that a response bias caused by simplistic trigger design gives rise to *contextual dissonance*. They explain that trigger design will “affect the responses that are collected and indeed paint differing pictures of participants’ moods, locations, and social settings”.

From Table I, it would appear that PACO offers a feature-rich application for no monetary investment. However, it is limited to only allowing one survey and one trigger type within an application. Ohmage’s triggering is very limited, and can only be specified from the client-side application, so remote distribution of trigger-based sampling is not possible. In summary, these four areas of deficiency call for further research into providing functionality for creating customised, sensor-augmented studies, without compromising usability.

III. OUR SOLUTION: JEEVES

A number of factors influenced our initial design, including previous successful visual languages, scientific theories of visual notation, and domain-specific features of the Experience Sampling Method. This section summarises the main influences, as well as the current features of the Jeeves environment.

A. Influences

1) *Block-based programming:* Block-based visual programming has been popularised by languages such as Scratch [22] and MIT App Inventor [23]. A key feature of these systems are the construction “blocks”, which fit together like jigsaw puzzle pieces. These blocks can provide different levels of abstraction over concepts that would be considerably more complex within a textual language. Their visual appearance affords correct combinations, and the environment implements constraints such that the language blocks can only be combined in syntactically correct ways. This eliminates issues caused by syntax errors which are a major problem for novice programmers. It makes them an ideal platform for creating

domain-specific languages for ESM applications, where adding functionality to, for example, send a survey every hour between 9am and 5pm, or when the user receives an SMS, could be as simple as fitting two blocks together. This would provide an immediate entry point for researchers into creating potentially highly complex applications, and inspired us to create our visual environment with a similar notation.

2) *Structure of EmotionSense libraries*: The featured components of our language, namely sensors, triggers and actions were directly influenced by the structure of the EmotionSense libraries (see [24] for a full description). These libraries were designed for the purpose of facilitating creation of social sensing applications, and so their functionality is largely based on requirements drawn from ESM literature. The libraries provide a simple API for configuring the sampling intervals and sampling duration of Android smartphone sensors, which can be dynamically updated by periodically downloading a JSON configuration file from a remote server. The libraries implement time and sensor-initiated “triggers”, which allow actions to be taken at given times of the day, or on given values returned from polled sensors. Further constraint-based logic can be imposed on trigger timings through a stored set of user preferences.

3) *Physics of Notations*: Moody defines nine principles for the design of visual notations that are “optimised for human understanding and problem solving”, titled the Physics of Notations [25]. These were developed in response to a lack of an empirical basis for the evaluation of visual languages. Moody’s principles are based on empirical evidence and theory, and serve as both an evaluation framework for existing languages, as well as clear guidelines for developing new languages. One such example is the Principle of Perceptual Discriminability, which states that “Different symbols should be clearly distinguishable from each other”. The other principles are similarly explicit, concise and directly relevant to visual notations such as our environment, which is described in the following section.

B. Features and Implementation of Jeeves

Our VPE is entitled “Jeeves” (Java End-User Environment for Visual Experience Sampling). Components of Jeeves are primarily represented by graphical primitives, which can be dragged from menus in a sidebar onto a “canvas” pane. As in other block-based languages, syntax is automatically dealt with by allowing components to be nested within each other, in combinations that adhere to the visual grammar of the language, as illustrated in Fig. 1. By nesting and combining components, an end-user specifies the behaviour of an ESM application, and these combinations of components can additionally be saved to a library of custom combinations for reuse in other applications. The sidebar containing these components is shown in Fig. 2.

1) *Triggers*: Triggers (Fig. 1e) define the condition under which to execute particular Actions. They are broadly divided into “time-based” and “sensor-based” Triggers, with additional domain-specific Triggers based on a participant’s answer to a survey question, or whether a survey itself was completed or ignored. They contain a receiver pane into which Actions can be dropped.

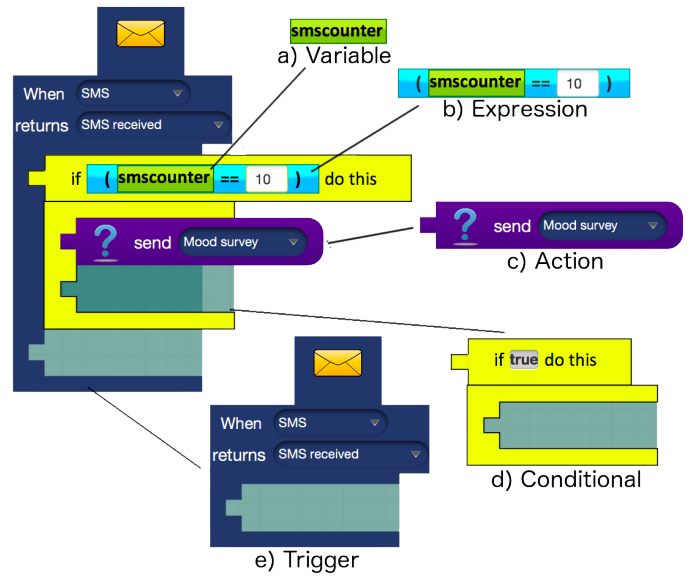


Fig. 1: An example nesting of all different component types, with the labeled type of each component

2) *Actions*: Actions (Fig. 1c) abstract over functions that the application can perform, and are broadly divided into three categories. “Prompting Actions” are those which communicate with a participant, or a participant’s contacts, “App settings Actions” are used to dynamically change the sensing configuration of the application, and “Phone settings Actions” passively update settings on the participant’s device, such as display brightness. These Actions are nested in the receiving panes of Triggers and are executed as a sequence.

3) *Conditionals*: Conditionals (Fig. 1d) are visual components which act like Actions in that they are nested within Triggers, but also contain a receiving pane for nesting additional Actions. The current three Conditionals in Jeeves are analogous to if-then statements, for loops, and do-while loops found in imperative programming languages, and the Actions within them are executed once, multiple times, or never, depending on whether the component’s condition holds true.

4) *Variables and Expressions*: Jeeves supports Boolean and numeric data types, which are represented by “Variable” primitives (Fig. 1a), a means of representing permanent and temporal information about a participant that maps conceptually to variables in imperative textual languages. Expressions (Fig. 1b) also have a data type, which have panes for receiving two Variables, and output either a Boolean or numeric result. For example, a numeric “Add” Expression takes two numeric Variables or values, and outputs a numeric value. Expressions can be nested to create more complex Expressions.

Additional necessary components are not represented as drag-and-drop primitives in the sidebar, but are instead conceptualised as “abstract components”, the representations of which are displayed in separate tabs of the sidebar. Jeeves’s “Sensor” and “Survey” components fall into this category, and are described below.

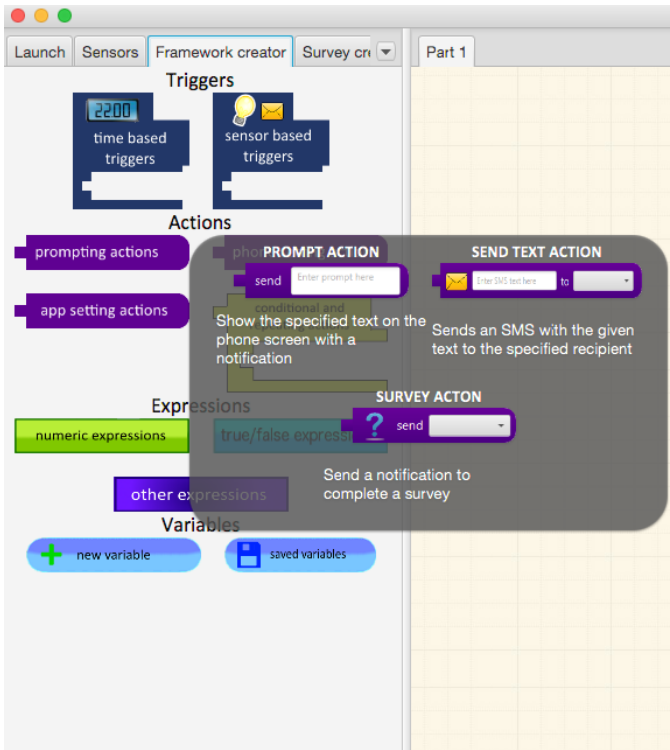


Fig. 2: The “Framework creator” sidebar of Jeeves, showing the expanded submenu of the “prompting actions” group

5) *Sensors*: A mobile sensor is visualised as an information pane containing a representative image, its enabled/disabled status, and its sampling duration and interval where relevant. The sensing configuration of an application can be adjusted directly from these panes as shown in Fig. 3, allowing an end-user to collect all necessary information, while minimising drain on the battery.

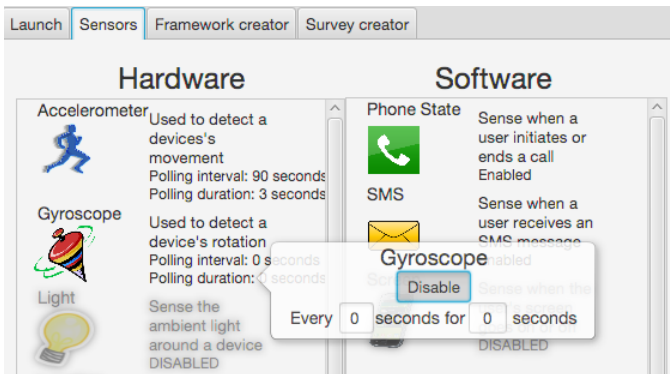


Fig. 3: Screenshot of the “Sensors” pane, with the user adjusting the Gyroscope sensor configuration

6) *Surveys*: Surveys are a key feature of ESM studies and can be created in the Jeeves environment. Guided by ESM literature, response types can be open-ended, multiple choice, or along a numeric Likert-like scale. Additionally, basic conditional logic allows a question to be presented if a previous question was given a particular answer.

C. Architecture/Implementation

We briefly touch on the system architecture to justify the choice of languages and frameworks used.

1) *JavaFX*: The end-user interface is implemented in Java using the JavaFX API. This provides a number of graphical features to support similar appearance and functionality of other block-based programming languages. Open libraries such as Blockly [26] exist for this purpose, but restrict the potential for graphical customisation. Instead, we opted to implement the Jeeves language from the ground up, to allow flexibility as the language develops.

2) *JSON/MongoDB*: Each component of the language has a JSON representation. This allows entire applications to be stored as JSON objects, independent of the client-side application that runs them. All saved applications and user-defined component combinations are stored in a MongoDB database. MongoDB allows simple, flexible storage of JSON objects, and a key advantage of storing this information in a central repository is that other applications, surveys or complex components can be shared, recycled and augmented by other users with similar requirements for their own ESM studies. This idea has been inspired by Scratch’s highly successful online community, in which end-users can share their work with each other.

3) *EmotionSense Libraries*: The current version of Jeeves includes a front-end client application, which is programmed in Android and makes use of the EmotionSense libraries. The libraries distinguish between “pull” sensors (those that can be sampled at any time) and “push” sensors (those that only return values on events, such as an SMS being received). The Sensor, Trigger and Action configurations of an application are acquired from the JSON application specification created in Jeeves, which is periodically downloaded from our remote server.

IV. USE CASE

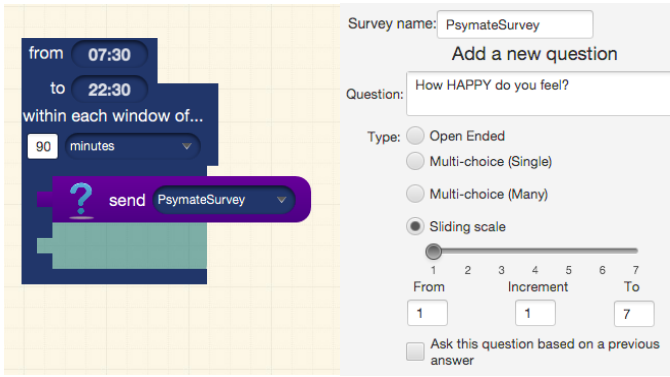
To demonstrate the Jeeves language’s utility as a proof-of-concept, we recreated experience sampling applications from both psychology and medical research journals. Kramer et. al [5] describe their ESM study as follows:

PsyMate was programmed to emit a beep 10 times per day at random intervals in each of ten 90-min time blocks between 7.30 and 22.30.

A Jeeves specification for such a study is shown in Fig. 4. The left side of this figure shows the canvas with a “Random Trigger” set to fire a survey within every 90-minute window from 7.30 to 22.30. Also, the right side of the figure shows a snapshot of the Survey creator pane. Kramer et. al explained that their survey assessed various affects of the participant on a Likert scale of 1 to 7. The state of this pane shows how such a question can be specified in Jeeves.

A more complex example is described in a study by Steptoe and Wardle [2]:

Affect measures were obtained at four time points over the course of the day: on waking, 30 min after waking, at 7:00 PM, and at bedtime.



(a) Random survey triggering (b) Likert scale survey question

Fig. 4: Replication of the ESM study from Kramer et. al [5] (left) as a visual specification and an example question in the “Survey creator” pane (right)

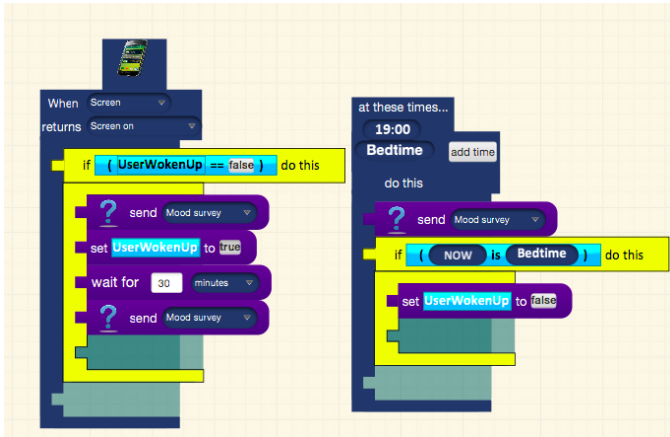


Fig. 5: Example specification for the ESM study in Steptoe and Wardle [2]

The specification for this study is shown in Fig. 5. The left Trigger is fired when the screen is activated. The context of whether a participant is meant to be asleep or not is stored in the Boolean Variable “UserWokenUp”. The idea behind this is that a unique participant variable can be set based on a sensor value. In this case, the participant has “woken up” when the smartphone’s screen is interacted with.

V. EVALUATION

In order to evaluate the usability of the Jeeves environment, and the feasibility of developing it further for use by non-programmers, we conducted a preliminary user study. Our aim was to acquire qualitative usability feedback, and to quantitatively test three hypotheses:

- H1: There would be no significant difference in the usability scores of programmers and non-programmers.
- H2: Non-programmers would not make significantly more errors than programmers in performing the tasks.
- H3: Non-programmers would not take significantly more time than programmers in completing the tasks.

A. Pilot study

A pilot study was conducted with three HCI researchers in the computer science department, to highlight any flaws in the original study script. This proved valuable as our initial script consisted of three step-by-step guides, and it was pointed out that this script, even if fully completed, only assessed the usability of the environment and not the understandability or readability of the language itself. The script was subsequently adapted and will be described fully in this section.

B. Participants

We recruited 20 student participants from the university by convenience sampling (age range 19-34). 11 had prior experience of programming, with self-assessed confidence varying from beginner to advanced. All programming participants had at least basic experience with imperative languages such as Java, Python and MATLAB. The other nine participants had no prior programming experience. Participants studied a wide range of subjects, including computer science, physics, chemistry, history, English, management and international relations.

C. Procedure

Participants first completed an introductory questionnaire to obtain demographic information, programming experience and general usage of technology. They were then given an introduction booklet explaining the components of the language, and allowed a maximum of 10 minutes to read through this and familiarise themselves with the user interface. They were then issued a script explaining four tasks described in the next section. Participants were given a maximum of 30 minutes to work through this script. Finally, participants completed the System Usability Scale questionnaire, and additional feedback was acquired through the audio recording of informal discussion. All participants were then debriefed and compensated with a £5 Amazon voucher for their participation.

D. Tasks

The tasks presented to the participants were as follows:

Task 1, Step-by-step guide – The purpose of this task was to familiarise participants with the layout of the environment, while isolating issues associated with the control and navigation, thus no issues in language comprehension were highlighted. Instead the task was designed to ensure coverage of all testable features of the environment.

Task 2, Reading and explaining – This task was to assess the readability and comprehensibility of the Jeeves language itself, irrespective of the environment. Being able to read and comprehend a program is necessary to promote collaboration between researchers wishing to replicate or refine studies created by others, and was a primary motivating factor in choosing a visual language representation. In this task, participants loaded a pre-created application and wrote down what they thought its function was.

Task 3, Modification – This task asked participants to augment the Task 2 application with two additional features from high-level descriptions. This also assessed Jeeves’s feasibility for real-world usage: given that a researcher has specific design goals in mind, how simple is it for them to implement these goals using Jeeves? This task took into account the usability

of both the environment and the language.

Task 4, Design – This task asked participants to design and create an application from scratch, based on a paragraph describing a use-case scenario. This task also assessed the ease in which a design goal could be implemented using the language and its environment, but with a more abstract description, and no prior implementation given.

VI. RESULTS

In order to test our hypotheses and the general usability of Jeeves, we performed quantitative and qualitative analysis.

A. Quantitative results

We collected errors made, time taken, and System Usability Scale scores, to test each of our three hypotheses, performing independent t-tests between programming participants and non-programming participants with the SPSS statistical analysis software package. Task 4 (the design task) was not included in the analysis of time taken or errors made, as some participants did not complete this task in the allotted study time.

1) *Usability*: The System Usability Scale (SUS) is often called a “quick and dirty” means of evaluating a product, and consists of a simple 10-item Likert scale questionnaire, which has been shown to be reliable in hundreds of usability studies [27]. See Table II for the ten questions. In our study, programmers and non-programmers reported numerically similar scores ($M = 71.8, SD = 10.7$ for programmers, and $M = 67.2, SD = 13.9$ for non-programmers). An independent samples t-test also showed that there was no significant difference in usability between the two groups, $t(18) = 0.838, p = 0.413$, so we can accept our first hypothesis. Given that a previous survey computed the mean SUS score across over 2000 studies to be 69.7 [28], and an acceptable usability score is considered to be 70 or above, this result suggests that the system is of average usability to even those with no programming knowledge. Results are shown in Fig. 6. In calculating the overall score out of 100, each answer is converted to a score from 0-4 as shown in the chart, where a higher score indicates greater usability.

Research by Lewis and Sauro [29], has shown that the SUS can also be used to separately evaluate “learnability”. As the steep learning curve of high level programming languages was another motivation for our design, the ease with which researchers can learn to use Jeeves is critical to its adoption. Learnability scores were computed as a score out of 100 based on answers to Question 4 and Question 10 (see Table II) as was demonstrated in [29]. The mean learnability was 77.3 ($SD = 13.5$) for programmers and 66.7 ($SD = 21.7$) for non-programmers, suggesting it is acceptably learnable by users of all experiences.

2) *Errors made*: Errors were divided into three categories. *Presentation errors* were all mistakes that were caused by the presentation of information to the participant, including instances where a participant misinterpreted a button’s function or omitted a step in completing a survey. *Navigation errors* were all attempts to find a component in the wrong menu, or a navigation to the incorrect sidebar tab. (A sequence of incorrect menu activations was counted as one error.) *Control errors*

System Usability Scale (SUS) Questions

- Q1. I think that I would like to use this system frequently
 Q2. I found the system unnecessarily complex
 Q3. I thought the system was easy to use
 Q4. I think that I would need the support of a technical person to be able to use this system
 Q5. I found the various functions in this system were well integrated
 Q6. I thought there was too much inconsistency in this system
 Q7. I would imagine that most people would learn to use this system very quickly
 Q8. I found the system very cumbersome to use
 Q9. I felt very confident using the system
 Q10. I needed to learn a lot of things before I could get going with this system

TABLE II: SUS questions

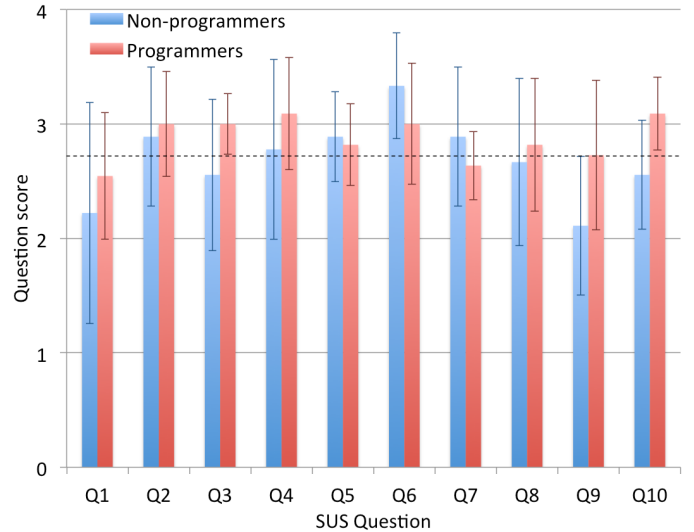


Fig. 6: SUS score for each question and 95% confidence intervals. The dashed line highlights mean SUS score as calculated in [28]

were any mistakes in direct manipulation of components, such as dragging immovable buttons, or accidentally removing components from their nested location.

For Tasks 1, 2 and 3, programmers made an average of 8.9, 0.2 and 7.0 errors respectively, giving a mean total of 16.1 errors ($SD = 4.3$). Non-programmers made an average of 10.2, 1.0 and 7.9 errors respectively, giving a mean total of 19.1 errors ($SD = 8.7$). An independent samples t-test showed no significant difference between the two groups, $t(11.174) = -0.952, p = 0.351$. This means that we can accept our second hypothesis. Results are shown in Fig. 7.

3) *Task Time*: For Tasks 1, 2 and 3, programmers took an average of 576.2s, 208.1s and 276.3s respectively, for a mean total of 1060.6s ($SD = 176.8$). Non-programmers took an

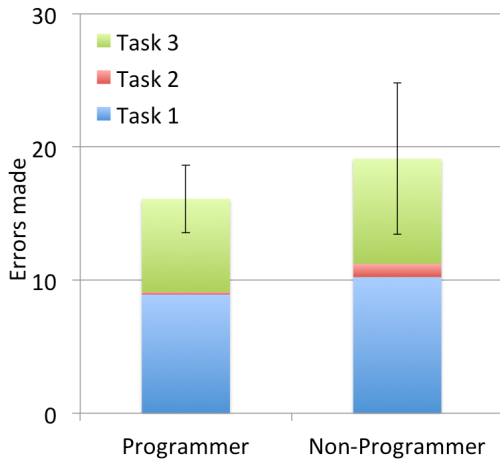


Fig. 7: Mean errors and 95% confidence interval

average of 713.4s, 239.2s and 427.4s respectively, for a mean total of 1380.0s ($SD = 315.7s$). In this case, the independent samples t-test showed a significant difference in time taken, $t(12.002) = -2.709, p = 0.019$, meaning we reject our third hypothesis. Results are shown in Fig. 8.

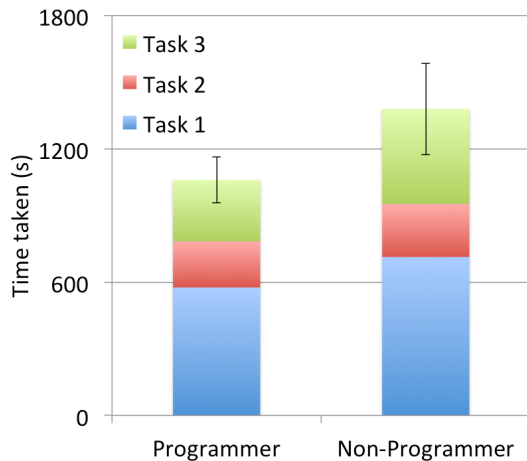


Fig. 8: Mean time taken and 95% confidence interval

B. Qualitative results and Analysis

We analysed screen recordings and triangulated our insights with participants’ quantitative results and verbal feedback. We used a basic grounded theory approach, organising participant responses based on common concepts. Five main concepts were identified, and representative participant comments [30] phrased both positively and negatively towards each concept, are presented in Table III. We now list additional insights obtained from these recordings.

1) *Task 4 designs*: Participants who had enough time to generate a partial solution tended to use a “programming by bricolage” process, building from the ground up and deleting erroneous components as necessary, identical to participants in an analysis of Scratch user habits by Meerbaum-Salant et. al [31]. Notable exceptions were the three participants who considered themselves to be “advanced” programmers. All

three appeared to have a pre-conceived design, and constructed their solutions without using any unnecessary components.

2) *Copying/Pasting*: It was interesting to note that use of the copy/paste feature was exclusive to programmers. 10 of the 11 programmers used copy/paste during their task, but no non-programmers did so. This may suggest a disinclination for non-programmers to experiment with unfamiliar features. One explanation is provided by a study on opportunistic programming by Brandt et. al [32]. They suggest that programmers endeavour to engage in “rule-based performance”. A programmer’s mental rule, on identifying a high-level goal, is to look for code that performs that goal, and modify it to their specific needs. Our results suggest that non-programmers lack this rule, and revert to “knowledge-based performance”, where more conscious thought is required.

3) *Hesitation*: From the quantitative results, programmers were significantly faster than non-programmers, but with a similar number of errors. Before reviewing the screen recordings again, we hypothesised that this was due to programmers having a greater recall of required components (each sequence of incorrect menu navigations was one “navigation error”, so this suggested that programmers’ sequences of wrong menus were shorter). We reviewed the recordings and counted “incorrect navigations” – entering a menu then exiting immediately – and divided this by the time taken to give a rate of incorrect clicks. Surprisingly, programmers’ average rate of incorrect clicks was 1.06/min, and non-programmers’ average rate was 0.95/min, with no statistically significant difference. From observation it was notable that non-programmers would often hover over menu buttons, whereas programmers would not hesitate in their search and exploration process.

4) *Subject mentality*: Our non-programming participants came from both scientific subjects such as physics and geology, and subjects in the humanities such as English and history. With the exception of one outlier, the three humanities students took the most time and made the most errors. This may suggest that having a scientific background makes potentially unfamiliar programming concepts more intuitive, in line with previous studies, which have shown that student programming performance is correlated with performance in science subjects [33]. Given that researchers of our target demographic are in scientific fields, this is an encouraging result in terms of Jeeves’s learnability, but may have implications for VPEs intended for non-scientists.

VII. LIMITATIONS

We recruited students as participants rather than our target demographic of researchers outside the field of computer science, which could be interpreted as a threat to the validity of this study. Our first reason for doing so was that students were a much more accessible group than external researchers, and given that this was an initial proof-of-concept and usability study, the ability to acquire larger numbers of participants from more diverse subject backgrounds and exposure to programming was considered to be of paramount importance. It allowed us to collect a variety of feedback ranging from those with no programming experience and limited computer use, to HCI students who have studied interface usability as part of their undergraduate or postgraduate work.

Concept	Positive Comments	Negative Comments	Participant quote
Visual appeal	7	2	“I like that there are different colours, that’s quite important” (NP17); “It’s clearly laid out” (P15) “It’s really boxy and...I don’t find the aesthetics particularly pleasing” (P4)
Real-world usage	4	2	“I think it’s something my sister could use...also for me, I guess. Like, I don’t wanna worry about making an app, right?” (P13); “I would love to have something like this just to do your own app” (NP19) “I’m a programmer, I’d rather just...write a loop myself” (P2)
Learnability	10	3	“You start feeling a bit more confident in it and like you can work it” (NP7); “Once I read the instructions and familiarised myself it was really good” (NP11) “Would I need the support of a technical person? Like for me, no, but for other people, probably” (P15)
Control	4	11	“It’s quite easy to use so I quite like that” (NP19); “It was easy to kind of like build the trigger” (NP12) “I notice that you need to click and then drag. I always try to just click and click and then...expecting something to happen” (P16); “If you kind of like drag it and drop it like here it won’t register you have to get it exactly” (NP12); “It didn’t handle the mouse action very well sometimes” (P5)
Likeability	7	3	“It was quite interesting cause I haven’t done anything like this before” (NP8); “I think it’s lots of fun” (P18) “The reordering didn’t work as I wanted it to” (P16); “It’s a little annoying” (P6)

TABLE III: Selected comments related to the five main concepts (positive comments in green, negative comments in red, programmer=P(x), non-programmer=NP(x)). Participant comments will be available at [30] subject to this paper’s publication

It could also be argued that students in general will have little interest in the ESM, so that by asking students to create ESM applications, this would not represent Jeeves’s real-world use, and would render the study invalid. To prevent this, we reconsidered how Jeeves could function for non-researchers, and instead introduced it to our participants as an application to create self-reminder and data collection apps. Given that only one participant explicitly stated that they would not use it in their daily lives, four explicitly stated that they would like to use Jeeves in real life, and the average score for Question 1 of the SUS (“I think that I would like to use this system frequently”) was 3.4 out of 5, it is apparent that participants in general could imagine themselves as potential end-users.

VIII. DISCUSSION/FUTURE WORK

Through our experimental method we were able to empirically test our three hypotheses, with screen capture analyses and participant comments revealing specific insights and issues. Participants, particularly non-programmers, gave positive verbal feedback on the environment, reflecting the ease with which they were able to generate specifications, and the majority of issues reported were minor annoyances in the drag-and-drop manipulation, rather than struggles with understanding the Jeeves language itself.

A potential line of future research is to extend this language beyond smartphones into other mobile technologies. There is a growing prevalence of wearable technology through which ESM studies could be administered. The JSON study specification is agnostic to the client device, and study replication

could be performed with heterogeneous devices through the programming of client-side applications such as our Android frontend, which is still under development.

IX. CONCLUSION

We have described Jeeves, a visual language and environment for the specification of Experience Sampling Method applications for Android smartphones. We have also demonstrated its utility by recreating ESM applications from the literature, and conducted a study to determine usability by end-users of varying programming knowledge, in which we show that the language and environment can be feasibly used by participants with no programming experience. In the more general domain of end-user development, this initial evaluation has shown that visual programming is a feasible direction of research for enabling technology-supported studies by end-users from various backgrounds.

The next phase in our research, following a second iteration of the visual language’s design cycle based on feedback, is to refine the Android front-end to allow robust ESM applications to be run, and to test usability and satisfaction with end-users specific to the fields of psychology and medicine.

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