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The use of mobile phones in teaching English as a foreign language

Використання мобільних телефонів у навчанні англійської мови як іноземної

Summary. English is considered as the most important foreign language to be taught worldwide. In school, English is taught to children as a foreign language in nearly every foreign country. Because of this matter, English language teaching is of crucial importance nowadays. During different times, different teaching methods were used in language teaching. In recent years, there has been an increasing interest in using mobile phones for teaching English as a foreign language (EFL). Because of the rapid development of technology in recent years, a new era of mobile devices has become popular. These new devices, including smartphones, tablet PCs and MP3 players, are very practical and convenient to use thanks to their wireless nature and easy usage. The mentioned devices are widely used, especially by the younger generation, especially after COVID-19. Mobile-assisted language learning is considered as the new method of language acquisition and teaching. However, teachers and researchers are having an argument about the importance of using mobile technology in language teaching instead of the conventional ways. Mobile technology has many advantages that can be used in a classroom or outside of it. Students can learn anywhere and anytime by using their mobile phones or other devices. Still, many teachers do not pay attention to this fact and they tend to say that technology is only good for entertainment and it does not contribute to the learning process. Many recent studies have been made in the field of using technology in education. The conservative ways of teaching are not necessarily the best ways of helping

students acquire a language. They have different needs in the era of portable devices that have to be acknowledged by the teachers too. The purpose of this paper is to review recent research about the importance of mobile-assisted language learning, and to justify the educational benefits of such technologies in language teaching.

Key words: *English as a foreign language, mobile-assisted language learning, EFL teaching, technology, smartphone, tablet PC.*

Анотація. *Англійська мова вважається найважливішою іноземною мовою для вивчення в усьому світі. Майже в кожній іноземній країні англійську мову викладають дітям у школах як іноземну. Через це викладання англійської мови сьогодні має вирішальне значення. У різний час у викладанні мови використовувалися різні методи навчання. В останні роки зростає інтерес до використання мобільних телефонів для навчання англійської мови як іноземної (EFL). Через швидкий розвиток технологій в останні роки нова ера мобільних пристроїв стала популярною. Ці нові пристрої, включаючи смартфони, планшетні комп'ютери та MP3-плеєри, дуже практичні та зручні у використанні завдяки бездротовій природі та простоті використання. Зазначені пристрої широко використовуються, особливо молодим поколінням, після COVID-19. Вивчення мови за допомогою мобільних пристроїв вважається новим методом навчання мови. Проте вчителі та дослідники сперечаються про важливість використання мобільних технологій у викладанні мови замість звичайних способів. Мобільні технології мають багато переваг, які можна використовувати в класі або поза ним. Студенти можуть навчатися будь-де та будь-коли, використовуючи свої мобільні телефони чи інші пристрої. Проте багато вчителів не звертають на це уваги і стверджують, що технології корисні лише для розваги, а не для процесу навчання. Останнім часом було проведено багато досліджень у сфері використання технологій в освіті. Консервативні способи навчання не обов'язково є найкращими способами допомогти учням оволодіти мовою. У них різні потреби в епоху портативних пристроїв, що також повинні визнати вчителі. Метою цієї статті є огляд останніх досліджень про важливість навчання мови за допомогою мобільних пристроїв і обґрунтування освітніх переваг таких технологій у викладанні мови.*

Ключові слова: *англійська мова як іноземна, мобільне навчання мови, викладання EFL, технології, смартфон, планшетний ПК.*

Introduction. Teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) has undergone various changes in recent years. Numerous studies have pointed out the importance of using different technologies and devices in teaching EFL. The purpose of the current study is to investigate the benefits of using mobile phones in teaching English as a foreign language and to prove that teachers should use them in their courses. New language learning applications, online dictionaries, translation programmes and other software are being developed at a rapid speed. The Internet and the effects of social media are important parts of the lives of students

nowadays. They often acquire knowledge unconsciously with mobile phones, e.g. watching a video, or communicating in English with a foreigner using text message services or voice chat.

Language pedagogy is greatly affected by the use of mobile phones and other portable devices. In the last decade, there has been a significant change in teaching and learning practices because of the widespread use of mobile phones and the growing availability of wireless devices. Technology-supported learning is arguably one of the greatest inventions in the teaching methodologies of the 21st century. Both the traditional and innovative ways of language teaching should be used to provide the best education for the students of the current generation. Despite the fact of having many advantages, mobile learning might not be capable of changing completely how a language is being taught and learnt. Among many functions it has to offer, a smartphone with Internet connection is the perfect opportunity to find downloadable resources and many websites to help the learners acquire appropriate skills in the target language. Practically, there are a few issues with self-initiated mobile learning that we have to consider [8].

Teachers of EFL face many problems when they want to conduct successful English lessons. For example, it is a common challenge to motivate learners and help them achieve communicative competence in the foreign or second language. With the use of mobile phone technology in EFL classes, teachers are offered an opportunity to make their lessons more interesting for the students and a chance to solve these problems [12].

The general view on the usage of mobile phones in education is beginning to change lately. Most of the teachers used to instruct their students to switch off their mobile phones at the beginning of a lesson. The time has come to use these technologies too in order to make the lessons more interesting and enjoyable. In our digital age, the students are using these electronic devices all over the world. Learners' needs are beginning to change with different times as mobile phones are playing a central role in today's education [14].

Methodology. In order to provide an overview of mobile-assisted language learning, we analysed a considerable amount of scientific literature focused on wireless devices and Web 2.0 tools. Our aim was to emphasize the importance of utilizing technology in language teaching classrooms because teachers have to consider the fact that today's learners have different needs than the learners of the previous decades. Technology plays an important role in their lives, especially smartphones, as they take these wireless devices with them everywhere. We also aimed at providing useful practical considerations and examples on how to use mobile technology in the EFL lessons.

Nowadays, mobile phones can be seen in every hand, especially in the hands of the younger generation. In this way, students are also using them

every day. Most of the students usually have the latest mobile phones. They have become an expert in using and operating different functions of such devices, which are considered as useful and convenient tools for teaching and learning by the students. Therefore, it is a perfect opportunity to learn English outside the classroom.

Results and Discussion. With the development of mobile technology, the opportunity is given to teachers and students to practice their target foreign language nearly anywhere and anytime. “The term ‘mobile technology’ refers to any device that is designed to provide access to information in any location, or while on the move. Specifically, this would include, but not be limited to mobile phones, personal digital assistants (PDA), tablet computers and laptops” [5, p. 214].

The expanding use of computers and the Internet in education has led to the development of educational services not only for computers but for mobile devices also. Mobile technology helps the students and instructors to access these services anywhere and anytime. This is one of the main advantages of the wireless medium. Learners can control their own learning schedule more than ever thanks to the shift from desktop to wireless educational services [7].

Using technology in teaching and studying English is becoming more and more popular. Mobile technology offers a wide variety of opportunities for teachers and learners of EFL. Web 2.0 technology, which enables the users to share their contents with each other, is also commonly used on these devices. There are many user-centred World Wide Web applications which are connected to Web 2.0 technology. It has many advantages, including its low cost access without any limitations in time or place. Users of Web 2.0 can interact and connect to each other if they have Internet access by using social-networking websites (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter), wikis, blogs and other applications [4].

Mobile learning combines the benefits of e-learning with the advantages of portable wireless devices. Learners can access to language learning materials on the go, they can take advantage of their free time more effectively because they carry their devices with them all the time [6].

Using mobile technology to learn languages is more common than ever before. Mobile-assisted language learning is not limited to mobile phones only, it refers to any type of language learning using mobile phones, PDAs, palmtop computers, MP3/MP4 players, portable radios, DVD players, electronic dictionaries and other portable or wireless devices. The mobility is highly important in using these devices besides the informational aspects. MALL is mainly focusing on the most recent technologies that is why it is hard to decide which devices are the most useful in learning a language [9].

Since the invention of mobile phones, they have undergone to great changes. Access to the Internet, voice messaging, video recording, SMS text messaging and other features became essential in mobile devices. With these features, language learning is much easier than it was before the invention of this technology. They enable different types of communicative language practice and provide access to important contents that is necessary for learning languages. Thanks to smartphones, distance language learning has become much more effective in recent years [3].

The majority of MALL activities make use of mobile phones. Vocabulary learning and text messaging via mobile phones are very common. With Internet connection, learners can easily connect to each other and to their teachers as well using mobiles [9].

Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs) are also often connected to m-learning, as these devices are basically pocket-sized computers. They are used mostly as translating tools, but PDAs have numerous useful functions such as Internet access, file-sharing between students and teachers, and handwriting recognition [1].

Handheld computers are being used not only for written, Web-based activities, but for chatting and audio activities like listening to texts as well. Students can communicate directly with each other using these devices. They also offer great multimedia opportunities. One of their drawbacks is that a handheld computer usually has storage limitations, that is why it is advised to connect them with a desktop computer [9].

Tablet PCs are more convenient to use than mobile phones and PDAs because of their larger screen sizes. They have many benefits due to their mobile nature including the opportunity of learning on the go. Using tablet PCs as instructional tools for educational purposes is a relatively new idea, but in our daily lives they are commonly used. Most of the instructors are doubtful about the effectiveness of these devices due to the fact that they are new tools in the field of education and not much research has been conducted in the field of the educational use of such devices [13].

Tablet PCs enable the instructor to write directly on a computer screen or to hold a presentation electronically. They are used as presentation devices acting as modern blackboards. Instructors can make great use of these devices by using them to show graphic and technical material, making the lessons more flexible. Such devices have a few disadvantages: they require technical skills and have some technical drawbacks, including the battery power, while display connectivity or the loss of network connection can also create problems [16].

Portable media players are being used to play digital audio files such as MP3s. These high-quality audio files are usually in a compressed format and they have been used in language teaching for many years. Among

these media players one of the most popular is Apple's iPod. The latest version of it provides video functionality too, with its built-in microphones and speakers. Language learning software are also downloadable for iPods, including translation programmes and electronic phrase books. Their recording and listening capabilities are helpful functions for language learners [2].

Podcasts are audio files created by instructors, usually to help the learners understand what has been covered in class in the way of listening to them. The term is derived from the name of the portable digital audio player ('iPod') and the word 'broadcasting'. Podcasts can be played on MP3 players, or on any other devices which have the function of playing audio files (like smartphones). According to several studies, language learners use desktop computers for listening to podcasts more often than they use mobile devices such as MP3 players for this reason [15].

Podcasting has been used by many instructors in the way of recording class lectures and making them available on the Internet for the students. Students should be encouraged to use their MP3 players not only for listening to music but for listening to language learning materials too [10].

With the ever greater implication of mobile phones and wireless devices in language pedagogy, the development of a new type of curriculum will be necessary. A great variety of content can be added to language teaching, such as recorded audio files, including short dialogues to show students conversational models, audio books, spoken versions of written texts, etc. Other contents to be added might include pictures, illustrations, online dictionaries, translation software, phrase books for travellers, and many other language teaching products which can help the learners [17].

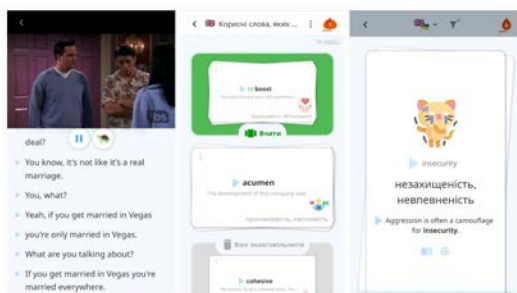
New developments are being made in the field of technology, that is why a good curriculum design for teaching English is needed. Students should be able to submit their responses and to interact with the content on a higher level. The new mobile technologies should be accessible to teachers, librarians and learners too. Learners can interact with others in many ways, including games, conversations, and using the different features of the phones with which they can make projects by taking pictures, writing texts and capturing sound [17].

There are a number of rather simple and practical ideas to use mobile phones in order to help developing the four language skills. The note taking feature can be used to collect information and write down sentences in English. If learners want to read something later, they can use the camera of the mobile phone to take pictures of texts and share them with each other. Spoken material or media samples can be recorded with the voice memo recorder feature, so students can analyse or listen to it later. Even conversations of native speakers can be recorded with this application [11].

Vocabulary knowledge can easily be extended by the use of the text messaging feature. Writing as a mean of communication can encourage students to use the English language as much as possible. Tandem learning is the perfect example of learning a foreign language through writing messages using the target language. In tandem learning, two students who wish to learn each other's native language, communicate with each other using the other's native tongue. Mobile phones can also be used for blogging, online activities, social networking and so on. Games are also being developed for mobile phones, especially language learning games or applications are very effective. The latest mobile devices have a great amount of storage, so data (language learning materials) can be stored on them [11].

Practical considerations. In this section, we try to give practical examples of using MALL technologies to facilitate the development of learners' language skills.

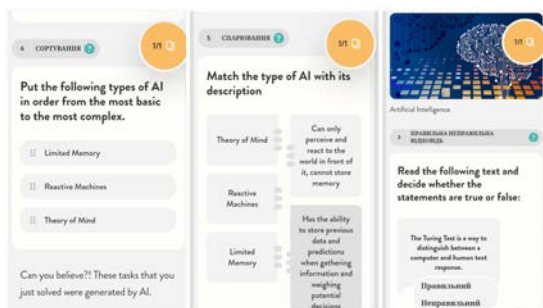
In the case of vocabulary learning, flashcards are very effective. This technique involves the writing down of the new word and its meaning on the different sides of the card. Using online tools, teachers can add visual cues like pictures or audio cues like short sound files to the flashcards that are related to the word written on them. One example of flashcard applications is DuoCards. Learners can acquire new vocabulary items, learn the meaning of words, and they can even listen to short segments from famous series (e.g. Friends) to see the usage of the newly learnt words in practice.



In addition, online dictionaries provide learners with the opportunity to translate words, listen to native speakers' pronunciation, or search for antonyms and synonyms easily. Mobile dictionaries are extremely popular among college and high school students nowadays. An assignment idea for teachers would be to make their learners compare how different online mobile dictionaries can translate the same words or expressions, which dictionary offers more synonyms or better pronunciation examples, etc.

Listening to English audiobooks or watching YouTube videos in English can unconsciously improve the students' foreign language skills. Teachers have many opportunities to send audio-visual and listening materials to the learners: through e-mail, or with the help of Google Classroom, or just simply making the lessons more interesting by showing videos connected to the topic of the lesson (preferably with subtitles).

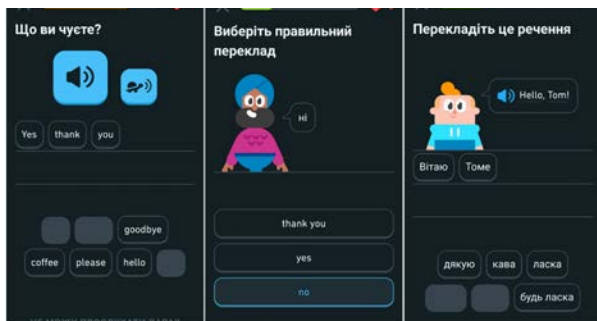
In the case of reading comprehension, the basic problem is the small screen sizes of wireless devices. Naturally, smartphones have functions which enable zooming in on texts or pictures, and mobile devices are not so small as they used to be a few years ago. Teachers are able to send short texts or stories to their learners online, and they can perform various activities with the help of an online questionnaire or testing platform (e.g. Google Forms, Redmenta). Do not forget to set time limits for the completion of online tests.



Grammar can also be taught through MALL. Online worksheets are available on the Internet, or teachers can make their own interactive grammar quizzes with multiple-choice tasks, true or false exercises, matching games, and fill in the blanks tasks. Online grammar tests and exercises are beneficial for many reasons: the testing software automatically checks the answers for correctness (in case of closed-ended questions); teachers do not have to waste paper and print out the tests; it is easier to read the handwriting of students; online quizzes are more interesting and can be reused many times.

One of the examples of mobile-assisted grammar applications is called Grammar Clinic. The program asks students to identify and correct sentence-level errors. It also shows if their answer was correct or not, so the feedback is immediately provided to the user. The application includes a grammar handbook with which learners can improve their knowledge easily. Common grammatical errors (word order, punctuation errors, use of different parts of speech, sentence fragments) are identified in Grammar Clinic. Students first have to identify the problem by choosing from different choices, then they have to correct the mistake.

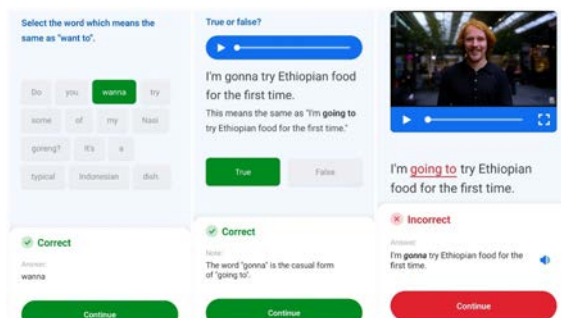
There are a great varieties of mobile applications with a language learning purpose. One of the most commonly referred program is Duolingo, in which learners need to complete different levels of learning words and sentences, so that they can progress to the next section, which is getting harder each time.



FunEasyLearn is another MALL application used to learn different languages with interactive tasks. Users can learn words and sentences by completing various exercises, including listening tasks, matching pairs together, translation, filling in blank spaces, reordering words in sentences, etc. Learners get points for every completed task which motivates them to continue learning English. Another useful function is that words and sentences are organized topically, which makes it easier to acquire new vocabulary and learn to use sentences in practice.



Busuu enables learners to memorize words and sentence structures with different activities like flashcards, translations, writing tasks, filling in blank spaces by listening to dialogues, and true or false exercises.



Teachers are encouraged to incorporate these MALL applications and classroom ideas into their teaching strategies to make their lessons more interesting and engaging for the 21st century learners.

Creative MALL exercises in the EFL classroom. Incorporating mobile phones into English language classroom exercises can make learning more engaging and practical. Here are some classroom exercises with descriptions and tasks involving mobile phones to help students learn English.

Exercise 1. Vocabulary Scavenger Hunt.

Description: Students use their phones to take pictures of objects in the classroom or around the school. They then label the objects with their English names.

Task: Learners work in pairs or small groups to identify and label as many objects as possible within a time limit. They must communicate in English while doing this.

Exercise 2. Video Storytelling.

Description: Students create short video stories on their phones. They can use apps like TikTok or iMovie.

Task: In the videos, students should narrate a story in English, using proper grammar and vocabulary. This exercise focuses on speaking and storytelling skills.

Exercise 3. Grammar Check and Correct.

Description: Students receive a text message with intentional grammar errors.

Task: They must identify and correct the errors, then respond to the message using proper grammar. This exercise helps reinforce grammar rules.

Exercise 4. Social Media Analysis.

Description: Learners choose a post from a social media platform (e.g. Instagram, Facebook) and analyse it.

Task: They should summarize the post in English, identify its purpose, and discuss the use of language and persuasive techniques.

Exercise 5. Virtual Field Trip.

Description: Organize a virtual field trip or scavenger hunt using mobile apps like Google Earth.

Task: Students must navigate and describe their virtual journey in English, providing details about what they have seen and learned during the trip.

Exercise 6. Mobile Dictionary Challenge.

Description: Provide a list of words or phrases in English for which students need to find definitions and example sentences.

Task: Students use online dictionaries or dictionary apps to research and present their findings in class.

Exercise 7. Storytelling Through Emojis.

Description: Learners create short stories or summaries using emojis and send them to their peers.

Task: The receiving students must interpret the stories and share their understanding of the content, promoting both reading and writing skills.

Exercise 8. English Language Podcast Creation.

Description: In groups, students create short English-language podcasts or audio recordings on topics of their choice.

Task: They should write scripts, practice pronunciation, and record their podcasts, focusing on speaking and listening skills.

Exercise 9. Word of the Day Challenge.

Description: Assign a “word of the day” that students have to incorporate into their text messages or conversations with their peers.

Task: Encourage learners to use the word naturally in their conversations and discuss its meaning and usage.

Conclusions. Teaching EFL has been changed in many aspects because of the rapid technological development in the past years. The usage of Information Technology and wireless devices has increased in language teaching. Such devices have many advantages which can help both learners and teachers of a foreign language. Learning anywhere and anytime is now an existing phenomenon thanks to the wireless nature of mobile devices.

Mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) has been investigated by a number of researchers in recent years. Teachers often do not consider the advantages of technology as an important factor in teaching. However, it was proved that using mobile phones, different applications and other tools can increase students’ motivation towards language learning, can provide more information to the learners about the new material, and can be used in improving all the different language skills. There is also a

growing interest from the students towards new educational activities in language acquisition.

In general, therefore, it seems that the educational benefits of MALL have to be acknowledged by teachers of English, and they also have to encourage their learners to use technology as an aid for their studies. Future work will need to be done to identify more ways of language acquisition through MALL or other technologies. We presented a number of useful classroom ideas and beneficial mobile applications which should be introduced to the students in order to improve their language skills and make them more motivated to learn English.

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