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Integration of Mobile Applications in the Language Teaching Process

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ABSTRACT

The choice of the topic is motivated by the consistent use of digital technologies in all walks of life and the need for the transformation of higher education system in the Republic of Georgia with regard to the needs of the digital learners. The purpose of this article is to reveal the effectiveness of using mobile applications in teaching English as a foreign language.

The article underlines the efficiency of the integration of information technology in foreign language teaching and learning process providing few classroom activities in which mobile applications are actively applied. The latter as one of the main information technology systems, were used to determine the efficiency of IT in foreign language teaching. Our aim is to present few apps and activities that can be useful.

Key words:

ELT, Teaching, Smartphone, Apps, University Students, Classroom Activities.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Developments in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) have brought new changes in all fields of our life within the first quarter of the 21st century and had a profound effect on the implemented pedagogies and tools in the English Language teaching and learning process. The introduction of digitally enhanced pedagogies and tools is a pertinent issue in the context of the Georgian higher education system which is undergoing consistent reforms in the last decade following the Bologna targets and aimed at introducing innovations and technology in the classroom. The strong commitment of the higher educational institutions to ensure the linguistic proficiency of university graduates is in line with the top priorities for “enhancing skills” and strengthening the links between higher education, society and the labour market as stated in the *4-Point Government Programme 2016-2020* and the *Georgia 2020 Strategy*. Still, despite the consistent effort of policy makers and educationalists in the country, the introduction of new technologies in higher education (and more specifically in the teaching and learning of foreign languages) is still developing at a slow pace due to existing connectedness issues, lack of the right equipment and devices and insufficient level of digital competence on behalf of the academic staff. What’s more, “there are still missing actions for implementation [of ICT enhanced education] into practice” (Tartarashvili 2017: 6).

The article, therefore, is an attempt to pinpoint the effectiveness of mobile application in the teaching and learning of English as a foreign language at university level and to provide some illustrative examples of how smartphones and online applications could serve this purpose.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The purpose of present-day education is to not just make students literate but to promote critical thinking, creativity and the innovation skills of young people who are considered the main drivers for “[s]mart growth: developing and economy based on knowledge and innovation” (Europe 2020 Strategy 2010:3). The placing of particular focus on those skills is in line with the recent developments of pedagogical frameworks which put forward the idea of developing confident, independent, self-motivated and empowered students who are responsible for their own learning. Research on the use of digital technologies in education (Dermott 2013, Kaplan & Heinlein 2010, Prensky

2011, Bucur & Popa 2017 among others) shows that they are an effective tools for the successful integration of active learning approaches and personalized learning opportunities in the foreign language teaching and learning.

As the conventional teaching method such as the chalk and talk method seems to be outdated, the modern technologies can be used as a supplement to the classroom teaching method to have a lively atmosphere in the classroom. It is the need of the hour to integrate modern technologies to upgrade the level of English teaching.

(Bahadorfar & Omidvar 2014:10)

Before giving some sample practical activities, we will explain why mobile applications are an effective tool to use in the foreign language teaching and learning.

2.1. Why mobile applications?

Mobile applications help to promote the use of critical and creative thinking as they are open-ended. They encourage students to consider the implications of a scenario. The situation feels real and thus leads to a more engaging interaction among the learners. Mobile applications promote concept attainment through experiential practice. They help students to understand the nuances of a concept. Students often find them more deeply engaging than other activities, as they experience the activity firsthand, rather than hearing about it or seeing it.

Traditional and modern methods and techniques are used in foreign language teaching. Many teachers don't want to leave and change their traditional methods. Thus, these teacher-centred traditional methods reduce the motivation of students, discourage them to use the target language effectively and so their levels of interest towards to foreign language learning begin to decrease. Moreover, students are generally passive listeners in lessons in which traditional methods are used, whereas they are active role-takers, autonomous researchers, independent participants and collaborators in foreign language classrooms where student-centred approaches are integrated. Instead of making students learn the grammar rules by heart, lessons should be planned by taking advantage of real life situations, the use of technology, computers, Internet and online or interactive games appealing to students' age and level of mastery of the target language (L2). The development of the four language skills (listening,

speaking, reading and writing) of students are to be built upon the integration of active learning techniques and activities which allow students to approach the foreign language creatively by participating in communicatively oriented interactions.

Since modern foreign language teaching adheres to the idea that the target language can be learned successfully through active communication which resembles real-life exchanges of meaningful information, smartphones can be one of the tools for integrating computer-based technologies in the development of students' L2 communicative competence. The reason for this is not only their pocket size, which makes them easy to use at any time and any place, but also their capabilities and multiple functions which make them the “laptop of future generations” (Gromik 2017: 262). In fact, apart from the communication, good camera, video or audio record and many other advantages, this device has almost replaced personal computers and notebooks as it provides similar functions. Through the 4G Internet access, which has over 72% of the world's population coverage in 2016 (ITU 2016), and Wi-Fi, modern mobile devices provide language learners with opportunities to be involved in meaningful real-context interactions, which is mainly rare in traditional learning environment.

Smartphones are a suitable device in foreign language learning since they allow for the implementation of several learning experiences. This corresponds to the evolution in foreign language learning – from an activity limited to the application of one single method in the classroom to an activity which now integrates a spectrum of different methods suited to the learning styles, individual learning needs and capabilities of the L2 students.

The positive effect of the use of mobile devices and applications in the teaching and learning of languages has been established in a number of research studies. For instance, Azar and Nasiri (2014) found that mobile learning enhanced students listening comprehension, while Alemi, Anani and Lari (2012) explored the effect of sending a short message containing foreign words, their meaning and example sentences, on vocabulary learning and retention. Their results revealed that, in the short term, there were no significant differences between learning vocabulary via messages and using a dictionary.

Modern reality reveals that digital technologies which are becoming commonly established in all aspects of human lives and which are gradually arriving in the classroom are helping learning process, even though there might be many controversial points of view. For sure, technology has become an integral part of language learning and teaching all over the world. It is doubtless

there are a lot of teachers applying traditional manner of teaching; however, you can find novice teachers who give students wider opportunities to acquire confidence practice and to learn to rely on themselves in the multitude of formal and informal learning opportunities in which they participate.

Smart phones can be used usefully by students to get more advantage from their mobile phones. It should be admitted that smartphones are the most widely available tools at school or universities (Kafyulilo 2014). Besides their basic functions, smartphones provide farther more access to the various web-based contents, browse in the internet, take online pop quiz, etc. Together with checking social media, emails, reading e-books or downloading the files from the internet, students can use various dictionary apps like oxford, Cambridge, etc. in the language learning process. Moreover, considering the popularity of innovation in education through ICT, smartphone applications support not only the traditional style of teaching, but also: a) transform it into cooperative learning environment (Lang, Sung and Chang 2007); b) brings real-life situations into the classroom (Liu, Lin, Tsai & Pass 2012) and c) allow for language acquisition through as game based learning (Klopfer, Sheldon, Perry & Chen 2011).

Mobile learning relates to many theories. One of them that best corresponds to the underlying ideas of the current article is the Constructivist Learning Theory. According to it learning is a process which requires learners to construct new ideas or concepts based on their current and past knowledge (Bruner 1966). Thus, activities developed on the basis of this concept will make learners link the new knowledge with their prior knowledge and experience. On the other hand, Problem-Based Learning (PBL), which is an integrative part of the approaches implements in the L2 classroom, facilitates the development of learners' critical thinking skills. This comes to suggest that mobile learning contributes to the development of the reflective thinking of learners (Koschmann *et al.* 1996), learning through experimenting with language and the use of discovery techniques and team building skills which find expression in the conversations and other cooperative activities which are part of the learning of a foreign language (Sharples 2002).

3. PRACTICAL IDEAS

In the current part of the article we are not going to present and discuss data of previous research studies on the implementation of mobile technologies

in the process of teaching and learning English as L2 with university students. We are not going to report on the findings from empirical research planned and conducted by us; rather we will suggest some practical activities to illustrate possible approaches of integrating smartphones in the English language teaching.

The techniques used for the purpose of this article are a reflection of the modern methods in L2 teaching with a specific emphasis on the use of mobile applications. In the suggested activities below (which are suitable for B1 and B2 level of English language learners but which can be used with some adaptations with A1 or A2 learners) we provide some ideas on how different smartphone applications can be integrated in one and the same lesson stage.

These activities have been tried with a group of 10 second year university students at the Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University (Autonomous Republic of Adjara) during the 2016/2017 academic year as part of their general English language classes. The level of students was B2 according to the levels of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (2004).

Activity 1: Guess the topic through the photos

Topic: Civil right movement in the USA

Aim: to develop students' speaking skills (describing people, places and feelings) through recycling and practising relevant vocabulary

Materials: photos of moments of the Civil rights movement in the USA on the smartphones.

Procedure:

Stage 1: Lead-in

Procedure:

1. The teacher divides the students in 4 groups of 4 learners. The teacher asks students whether they know anything about the civil rights movement of people around the world. Groups discuss ideas. If they have no idea of such movements, the teacher allows them to browse the internet using their smartphones for civil right movements.
2. When ready spokespersons of the groups report their findings to the other groups.

Interaction pattern: group work

| **Time:** 5 – 7 minutes

Stage 2: Recycling vocabulary

Procedure:

1. The teacher asks groups to brainstorm vocabulary related to describing people, feelings and places. When ready groups compare their vocabulary lists and add up the missing words.
2. If necessary, the teacher helps L2 learners by eliciting relevant vocabulary through the use of pictures, other visual clues or ready descriptions presented on the board. Students copy the words in their notebooks.

Interaction pattern: group work | **Time:** 10 minutes

Stage 3: Describing photos

Procedure:

1. The teacher asks groups to search for a photo / photos on their smart phones related to the topic. Each person in each group should describe his/her photo to his/her peers using the revised adjectives.
2. The students in the other groups have to verify the presented information in their phones by finding the same photo. If they find any discrepancies between the photo and the presented information, they have to make the necessary corrections.

Interaction pattern: group work | **Time:** 25 minutes

Activity 2: Memory game

Topic: Stereotypes

Aims:

- to revise and practise adjectives related to stereotypes
- to develop students' sensitivity to applying error correction in the L2 classroom.

Materials: smartphones

Procedure:

1. The teacher asks students to write the stereotyped personality adjectives they remember using the application *Poll Everywhere* (<https://www.polleverywhere.com>), which students have already installed on their smartphone.
2. Students write individually the adjectives using their smartphones and everyone can see each other's answers. The teacher monitors the process and in case of missing any adjectives gives hints, students guess and write.
3. The teacher divides the students into groups (3 or 4 depending on the number of the students) and asks groups to make a logical sentence using the stereotyped personality adjectives, given on the screen, time limit one minute.
4. Groups present the sentences. Students are encouraged to correct the answers of their peers if some of the vocabulary or grammar structures are not used correctly.
5. The groups recall sentences and vote for the best one.

Interaction pattern: individual and group work | **Time:** 20 minutes

Activity 3: Check the content

Topic: Stereotypes

Aim: to develop students skills for reading for gist using the *Goose chase* application

Materials: smartphones

Procedure:

1. The teacher divides students into groups (3 or 4 depending on the number of students in the group).
2. T writes the title of the task and asks students to open the *Goose Chase* (<https://www.goosechase.com/>) application (or register and open if they haven't used it before) and find it.
3. Students individually start answering the questions in writing on their smart phone screens.
4. The Teacher monitors the answers that appear on the screen of her computer.

5. All answers appear on the screen and the leader group is identified.
6. The teacher checks the accuracy of the answers.

Interaction pattern: individual and group work | **Time:** 20 minutes

Conclusion

From the above, we can make out that the Information and communication technology has made many innovations in the field of teaching and also made a drastic change from the old paradigm of teaching and learning. In the new paradigm of learning, the role of student is more important than teachers. We need to have interactive teaching and this changing role of education is inevitable with the introduction of multimedia technology and the spawning of a technologically-savvy generation of youths. The use of smartphones may be very well practiced in the environment where the use of such technology is highly possible, but there must be some sort of innovation which can also be practiced in an environment where such use of technology is on its way to growth.

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