MOBILE TECHNOLOGIES FOR OPTIMIZING FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING AT UNIVERSITY

Abstract. The article analyses the methodological potential of applying mobile technologies for optimizing foreign language teaching at a technical university. The authors specify the term “mobile learning”, analyze various mobile technologies used in foreign language teaching, indicate their advantages, and identify the language skills (reading, listening, speaking, or writing) of the undergraduates, which can be developed by using mobile technologies in foreign language learning. The study reveals the opportunities for applying these technologies for creating a personalized learning environment for students that will help transform them into active and engaged learners.

Keywords: mobile learning, mobile technology, mobile application, foreign language teaching.

Introduction. The integration of Ukraine into the world community requires future professionals’ proficiency in foreign languages. However, the classroom hours for learning a foreign language in non-linguistic universities are not enough for developing the foreign language communicative competence of students. Therefore, there is a vital need to improve the methods, tools and technologies for foreign language learning to meet new requirements for future professionals and satisfy students’ needs.

The beginning of the 21st century is represented by the intensive introduction of modern information and communication technologies (ICT) in foreign language teaching and the creation of new innovative forms of learning and teaching. Today
we are observing the modernization of the education system, the main trends of which are as follows: computerization, informatization, internationalization, activation, intensification, personalization, accessibility of education, and openness of the educational space. Technology is bringing the world into the classroom and the language teachers should be very enthusiastic and creative to prevent their students from losing their motivation and desire to learn [1]. A teacher’s role is to provide their students with optimal learning opportunities by using technology so that it supports effective learning. But it is crucial not to overwhelm the classes with technology since students will not be able to recognize the benefits of the particular technology for language learning. In addition, using specific technological tools in the classroom cannot automatically result in increasing students’ engagement in learning. Thus, the teacher should thoroughly think of the ways how to implement this technology in the educational process properly.

The informatization of education, access to world knowledge through the Internet are implemented on the basis of a wide use of ICT [2]. Applying tablet PCs, smartphones, iPads, iPhones and other devices for educational purposes has resulted in developing a new trend of e-learning – mobile learning, or m-learning. The future of mobile learning will be related to the ubiquity of mobile communications, the emergence of a large number of educational applications, programs and new technologies able to expand the opportunities and the quality of education.

The purpose of this article is to reveal the main trends in teaching foreign languages at a technical university by using mobile technologies and analyze the effectiveness of their use for developing four basic language skills.

**Main part.** The special features of mobile learning were revealed in the studies of the Ukrainian and foreign scientists as V. Bykov, A. Hlybovets, Yu. Semerikov, I. Teplytskyi, M. Kislova, R. Martinsen, A. Miller, N. Frolova, A. Andreev, etc. But the analysis of these studies has shown that the problem of optimizing foreign language teaching is still under investigation and needs improving. In the current world with the ubiquitous Internet technologies, the use of mobile technologies can be one of the solutions to the problem mentioned above.
In methodical literature, there are several definitions of mobile learning based on the technological features of mobile devices and on the didactic capabilities provided by these technologies. According to O. Korotun, mobile learning is the use of convenient handheld mobile devices and wireless, always available technologies to facilitate, support, optimize and expand learning and educational processes [3]. N. Frolova regards it as an activity, performed on a regular basis through compact, portable mobile devices and technologies, which allows students to become more productive by communicating, receiving or creating information [4]. S. Titova adds that the “mobile” as a part of this term characterizes mainly two main components of the pedagogical process: access to the means of learning and the forms of realizing the educational interaction [5, c. 20]. A student today can have access to learning materials, the syllabus and learning resources, as well as get quick feedback from the teacher and communicate whenever and wherever they desire.

J. Traxler believes that mobile learning drastically transforms the whole educational process: not only do the content, forms and methods change, but also student’s psychology, behaviour and mentality. The study becomes “just-in-time, just enough, and just-for-me” [6, c. 8].

So, Ukrainian and foreign researchers [1; 2; 3; 5; 6] agree that the uniqueness of mobile learning in comparison with traditional teaching methods and with e-learning and blended learning lies in the fact that students are primarily not tied to the specific time and place, but always have access to learning materials at any convenient time.

Mobile devices (phones, smartphones, tablet PCs) have a significant advantage over traditional teaching methods including the intensification of self-study, individualization of learning, increasing cognitive activity and motivation for learning. They offer wide opportunities for organizing foreign language classes. Using smartphones and tablets in the classroom gives the opportunity to work with authentic materials and encourages students to be creative, mobile, and flexible in thinking [7]. The tasks involving the use of mobile devices promote the development of communicative, intercultural, informational, cognitive, and social competencies.
These devices combine work and study, make it possible to collect, evaluate and process information, and learn in a real context at any time and in any place [8].

In our opinion, using applications for mobile devices in teaching is especially relevant in the case of distance learning, since students are not sufficiently familiar with the variety of the software products that are offered nowadays for learning a foreign language. The teacher’s task is to help the student choose the necessary and appropriate products that are able to enhance language learning and thereby individualize the learning process. Modern students have the opportunity to influence their own educational trajectory by selecting disciplines and courses on their own according to their needs, talents, and interests [9].

Students’ ability to design a set of disciplines for mastering contributes to the implementation of such an important phenomenon in education as academic mobility, when training in one educational institution can be replaced by training in another university and even in another country. Mobile technologies are transforming the balance between the educational process and student participation. That is why mobile learning is a new form of learning, different from distance or blended learning, which characterizes a new branch in the development of informatization of human society. With a variety of tools, mobile learning provides more options for personalized learning, i.e. an educational approach aimed at customizing learning for each student’s strengths, needs, skills and interests. Each student will get a learning plan that is based on the knowledge they have already had and the way of their best learning. Having the access to a large amount of content at any time and in any place, there are many opportunities for formal and informal learning, both inside and outside the classroom. Being very popular devices due to the availability of applications, laptops, tablets and smartphones are used to collect student responses, read e-books and websites, record reflections, transcribe lectures, collect and analyze data, etc [10].

According to the degree of integration into the educational process and the possibility of application, educational mobile applications and programs can be divided into three groups:

a) mobile applications as additions to the curriculum, which are additional materials and tools to the textbook and courses; they are appropriate and
convenient to use with basic materials for working in the classroom or for self-study;

b) *mobile applications designed for self-study of the discipline*, which can be used as additional materials in the classroom and outside the classroom for the development of various language skills and speech skills;

c) *mobile applications designed for a distance (mobile) form of training*, containing the main educational material with tests, reference check verifications, teacher’s feedback [11].

During mobile learning, virtual learning environments are used, which allow grouping participants of the learning process in order to further perform certain roles and tasks, as well as assess their success within the course structure. Virtual learning environments are divided into those that have portals for teachers (Moodle, Edmodo, Fronter, Blackboard, etc.) and without portals (DuoLingo, Busuu, etc.). Virtual learning environments are used to acquire theoretical knowledge and develop practical skills.

Let us consider a few examples of mobile technologies:

The first group includes the use of mobile technologies for instant data transmission, so-called messengers (Viber, Telegram, WhatsApp, etc.) in learning a foreign language. Such mobile applications allow creating a specific group of subscribers (e.g. students and teachers) and a “chat” for instant sharing information with the all members of the group. For instance, the teacher posts a photo or file with a task, a list of required vocabulary, infographics on the topic, write tasks, announcements, insert links to the necessary information on the Internet, etc. it is also possible to conduct surveys, write comments and messages in the group. One more way to use messengers is to attach an audio or video for students, which they can listen to or watch.

Another example of mobile technologies is the use of e-mails. The e-mail (both private and corporate) is an Internet service for the exchange of written messages between users. E-mail can assist in organizing telecommunication projects for information exchange between participants. Special methods developed for implementing language telecommunication projects are aimed at developing
students’ writing skills and developing their socio-cultural and cross-cultural competences.

Wiki technology is one of the modern Internet technologies allowing a person or a group of people at distance from each other to collaborate on the common written (multimedia) document. R. Martinsen and A. Miller indicate that on the basis of wiki technology it is possible to develop students’ writing skills [12].

A web forum is a section of a site designed to organize a network discussion by users of any issue. By using a web forum in learning students develop their writing and reading skills, as well as form the components of socio-cultural competence. However, we must admit that the web forum has lost ground a bit after the development of blog technology with its additional technological capabilities.

A blog technology is a modern Internet technology that allows users to post information in a multimedia format on a page in the form of a diary or journal, as well as comment on user messages. Phone blogging implies that students write blogs on their phones using word press platform. These blogs are usually simple and short and use more informal English. We support O. Korotun [3] who indicates that this technology assists greatly in developing students’ writing skills and sociocultural skills based on blog technology.

An excellent opportunity for developing students’ listening skills is using podcasts on different topics including their major. A podcast is an episodic series of digital audio files that a user can download to a personal device for easy listening. There are a lot of educational and non-educational (authentic) podcast services on the Internet that can be used to develop students’ listening skills. There are also the services that allow posting podcasts of users, as well as organizing a network discussion of the posted podcasts in a microblog or on a forum. Thus, using the podcast service, facilitate developing listening and speaking skills as well as the socio-cultural student’s competence.

The means of synchronous video-Internet communication including the technologies that provide the ability to communicate in a real-time mode are based on Internet programs that provide video and audio communication. They have distinctive didactic functions: the organization of synchronous distance learning; the
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development of students’ cognitive activity; the development of collaborative learning skills and the skills of self-study. These mobile technologies facilitate developing communication skills (reading, writing, speaking, listening) and socio-cultural and intercultural skills and can be used for implementing a mobile learning model.

An electronic dictionary is a dictionary containing data in digital form and can be accessed through different media. Electronic dictionaries can be of several forms, including software installed on tablet or desktop computers, mobile apps, web applications, and as a built-in function of e-readers. Electronic dictionaries are useful in organizing students’ research, which results in developing their cognitive activity, learning skills in cooperation, as well as the skills of students’ self-study. Electronic dictionaries are used to form students’ language skills and their translation competence.

The linguistic corpus is the arrays of texts on electronic media, grouped according to a specific feature (chronology, author, region, etc.). In recent years, methodological studies have indicated the importance of using monolingual corpora and the corpus of parallel texts in developing students’ grammatical and lexical knowledge and skills [10].

Reference resources on the Internet are available to all users of mobile devices using mobile applications of Internet browsers. They include online encyclopedias, catalogues, Internet media, virtual tours of museums, galleries, theaters, cities, etc. These resources have the following general didactic properties: accessibility, multimedia and hypertext structure. With their use, it is possible to organize the students’ research work, develop their cognitive activity and self-study competence.

The final group of mobile technologies used in learning a foreign language at university includes the use of specific educational programs (mobile applications). Some examples of the applications for vocabulary extension are “Quizlet”, “Memrise”, “WordUp”, etc.

Students also install such applications as: dictionaries, translators, applications for learning ESP (English for engineers, doctors, service professionals, IT, etc) on their mobile devices.
The advantages of mobile technology use are as follows:

1) integrating multimodal language tasks using images, audio and video into teaching;

2) facilitating collaborative activities in the classroom with the use of mobile devices (for group recording, listening and talking);

3) increasing the types of activities, a variety of exercises through by using of authentic resources through applications and online sites;

4) using mobile devices to personalize learning;

5) developing students’ digital literacy and other vital 21st-century skills that will be necessary for their future jobs;

6) encouraging students’ self-study with the help of automatic reminders.

Conclusions. It is an undeniable fact that mobile phones are ubiquitous today, so they can be effectively used as a powerful tool for learning a foreign language. The analysis of mobile technologies in teaching a foreign language shows that a wide range and variety of existing mobile learning resources allow choosing applications according to individual needs, interests, level of proficiency in a foreign language of the student as well as teaching tasks. From our point of view, the practical application of mobile applications has great potential, as it increases the motivation and cognitive activity of students, interest in the subject, helps to personalize learning, develop 21st-century skills and removes the psychological barrier of using a foreign language as a means of communication. On the basis of mobile technologies, it is possible to develop all types of language skills and socio-cultural and cross-cultural competencies. As capabilities of mobile devices are constantly growing, they can be more widely used as educational tools and occupy a central place in both formal and non-formal education, as well as in distance learning.

References:


