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Professional paper

Mobile Applications in Teaching Foreign Languages in Tertiary Education

Extended summary

Modern devices with many diverse applications have significantly raised interest in the concept of mobile or m-learning. The standard features of mobile phones include access to the Internet and therefore an unlimited access to educational material at any place and at any time. Students can use their mobile applications for learning, not only in the classroom, but also while they are on holiday, in public transport, in their spare time, and in many different situations. In addition, they can decide on the mode and pace of learning on their own.

This paper presents a research conducted to examine students' attitudes about the advantages and disadvantages of using mobile language learning applications, in order to determine how frequently the students of the Singidunum University use mobile applications for learning foreign languages, what applications they use, and to establish the main advantages and disadvantages of this learning tool in the classroom.

The number of m-learning applications is constantly on the rise. Teachers can choose m-learning applications that suit their students' level of knowledge or the predominant type of intelligence. The categorisation of the m-learning applications can be organised according to Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences (Gardner, 2000). Some m-learning applications contain gamification elements that additionaly motivate and engage students, i.e. users. These ele-

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ments make an application more interesting and envoke a competitive spirit in the users (Munday, 2016).

The paper offers a description of the research methodology, data processing, and the interpretation of the results. In order to obtain the data, an anonymous survey was conducted, which was compiled by the authors for the research purposes and distributed to students via email. Apart from the quantitative part, a qualitative research, in the form of a focus group, was conducted as well to provide a clearer picture of students' habits when using mobile applications for foreign language learning. The respondents were students of the Singidunum University who voluntarily accepted to participate in the research.

The research showed that the greatest advantage of using mobile applications is their availability at any place and at any time, as well as the fact that such applications are mostly free of charge and their use does not require additional costs for students/their families. On the other hand, the biggest disadvantages relate to the offered grammar exercises, which, according to the respondents, are not detailed enough and often lack the explanations of various rules. Based on the analysis of the responses, the researchers concluded that these applications are not used continually mainly because of the absence of a more thorough approach to this tool not only as a means of entertainment, but also as a teaching resource.

The obtained results indicate that the most important advantage of using m-learning applications for learning languages is that they make the teaching process more interesting. Students would gladly use them at every class, or at least occasionally; they would use them independently and especially in pair/group work, as they consider this form of learning to be the most interesting and challenging one.

This research unequivocally confirmed that mobile applications for foreign language learning are very popular among the student population, but also that students' interest in this type of learning is not exploited enough. One of the recommendations is that different applications, depending on students' abilities and lesson goals, should be integrated in the teaching process and should serve as an addition to the planned curriculum, actively contributing to the quality and diversity of teaching.

The results of this research, as well as of similar studies, show that a traditional approach to teaching is still very alive in our country. The authors of the paper believe that it should not be completely abandoned, but that it should be enriched with new and modern methods, primarily by using mobile applications more frequently and with a clear purpose. Given that there is still no clearly defined institutional support to this approach to foreign language learning, a more in-depth research could provide further instructions for making the teaching process more modern, as well as offer suggestions for creating new applications targeting specific goals. Such applications would be used systematically in teaching and put to practice in a controlled and appropriate manner.

Keywords: mobile applications, foreign language teaching, m-learning, students, teachers.

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