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TEACHING TOURISM IN ENGLISH THROUGH A MOBILE APPLICATION

Senior Lecturer Petar Todorov, PhD

Department of Foreign Language Teaching D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics, Svishtov, Bulgaria E-mail: p.todorov@uni-svishtov.bg

Senior Lecturer Tsvetana Shenkova Department of Foreign Language Teaching D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics, Svishtov, Bulgaria E-mail: ts.shenkova@uni-svishtov.bg

Abstract: This paper deals with the implementation of the Moodle Mobile smartphone application in the teaching of students in the major or Economics of Tourism at the D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics. Firstly, we set the theoretical framework for Mobile Learning, as we establish that the most appropriate devise for realizing such learning is the smartphone. Secondly, we conduct an experiment in which we prepare special topics in English and implement them through the Moodle Mobile application in the teaching process by enabling the students to benefit from the easy access to course materials, on the one hand, and the user-friendly course structure, on the other. Finally, we conclude that it is worth investing time and effort, as well as funds, in Mobile Learning, and in particular, a smartphone application.

Keywords: Mobile Learning, smartphone application, Moodle Mobile, Economics of Tourism.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of smartphone devices and applications in recent years has brought about new dimensions in users' expectations and perceptions of mobile technology. Education, too, has been greatly influenced by this trend as a wide range of methodologies has taken over the traditional "brick and mortar" methods. Blended learning and the flipped classroom have become the established means of training in classrooms across the world. Furthermore, educators and IT specialists have joined forces to create sophisticated learning applications that meet the demand. As a result, we now have forms like mobile learning that take full advantage of the opportunities offered by mobile devices and the applications developed for them. The aim of this paper is to present a research project which implements a smartphone application in the teaching of students at the D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics. The project focuses on the applicability of the Moodle Mobile smartphone application in the teaching of students in the Economics of Tourism major. The students are provided with access to a Moodle website, where we have created a range of activities divided into three main topics. The purpose of the project is to research on the one hand, to what extent students are prone to use the mobile application instead of the full version of the Moodle website. On the other hand, we aim to test the usability of the provided activities as we use materials that are taught in Tourism courses in Bulgarian and we have translated those materials into English. The project activities are carried out in several stages:

- Literature review establishing the theoretical framework of mobile learning;
- Pedagogical experiment students complete the activities using either the mobile application or the full version of the website;
- Surveying the students students complete questionnaires expressing their opinion on the experiment in which they have taken part;
- Analysis of the results;

Finally, we conclude that mobile learning is worth the time and effort invested in it, but more importantly, funding a project for the development of genuine smarthphone application to be used consistently with students in all forms of training.

EXPOSITION

Literature review - establishing a theoretical framework for mobile learning

In order to have a better understanding of mobile learning, firstly, we should be looking into the different types of mobile devices and their usability. According to Wikipedia, "A mobile device (or handheld computer) is a computing device small enough to hold and operate in the hand. Typically, any handheld computer device will have an LCD flatscreen interface, providing a touchscreen interface with digital buttons and keyboard or physical buttons along with a physical keyboard." (Wikipedia.com, 2017) Another significant feature of mobile devices is that "they are personal, especially if students have their own [and nowadays few, if any, students will not have one]. Unlike other technologies, mobile devices are designed to be a personal assistant carried with users wherever they go. It is something that is brought along as opposed to something you go to." (McQuiggan, 2015) Such devices can be: tablets, smartphones, PDAs, iPods, mp3 players, to name but a few. We argue that a laptop computer might also be included in this group, although it is far too big to be "handheld". However, bearing in mind the fact that a tablet fits the above description, and tablet screens vary from 7-10 inches, whereas laptop screens start at 10 inches, though inconvenient to hold in hand, a 10-inch laptop can be carried in a small bag. A laptop, though, will not meet one requirement that is very important for our research - in terms of its use, it does not differ much from a desktop computer, i.e., a Moodle site, for instance, can be accessed through a browser, without needing a special application. For the purpose of our study, we need to use a device that is convenient enough to be carried by users anywhere. Secondly, and most importantly, in order for a mobile device to be used to the fullest extent, it must be connected to the Internet. Basically, there are two main modules that provide an Internet connection: a Wi-Fi module and a sim card module. This is where lies the significant difference between the smartphone and the tablet - not all tablets have a sim card module, which means they can only be used at certain places, e.g., at home. On the other hand, a smartphone will always have a sim card module, as its primary function is to make phone calls. Although, size can also be put in as an argument for smartphones, we will not support it as currently, the market offers 6.6-inch (or larger) smartphones (phablets), which is nearly the size of the smallest tablet (at 7 inches). As the purpose of our paper is to present pedagogical research, we will not provide too much technical data. However, it is worth mentioning, that smartphones prevail over tablets in most departments (camera, screen resolution, CPU, storage, etc.) Furthermore, smartphones can be found in all price categories, and although the so called "budget phones" will be a little bit slower and with worse screen quality, they will perform the same functions as their flagship counterparts. For these reasons, we firmly believe that the most suitable device for realizing mobile learning is the smartphone.

The second feature that will distinguish a mobile device from a desktop or laptop computer is the specific application that can be used in the learning process. Although smartphones also offer access to sites or platforms through a web browser, they usually function by installing a particular application. The two major operating systems on which such applications can be installed are Android (by Google) and iOS (by Apple). Although there are others, the statistics show that Android and iOS are way in front of their competitors and have firmly occupied the market with nealy 98% of the market share. In fact, Android itself holds 65.53% of the market share (see fig. 1), which makes it the most popular operating system. (Netmarketshare). As we seek applications that work with a Moodle platform, we have found a number of third-prty applications which can be installed on either of these operating systems, or only on one of them. According to Aberdour (2013), these will include: "mTouch (for iPhone), MoodleEZ (for iPad), iActive (for iPhone), Droodle (for Android), mDroid (for Android), etc." However, these applications are either outdated, or do not function. Therefore, we have decided to use Moodle Mobile – the only application that works on both Android and iOS and is free to download and install.



Fig. 1. Mobile/Tablet operating system market share as of September 2017

Moodle Mobile is available at:

for Android: https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.moodle.moodlemobile;

for iOS: https://itunes.apple.com/bg/app/moodle-mobile/id633359593?mt=8.

This application does not have the functionality of a full Moodle site, but is completely synchronized with it and makes use of the most basic features required for completing a certain course.

Conducting the experiment

The experiment was conducted in several stages. First, we had to create materials suited to the students' needs. In creating the materials we took the following into account: "Understanding your users is an important part of designing online experiences. [...] Learners are highly unlikely to sit at a smartphone and complete a 60 minutes e-learning course or type out an essay." (Aberdour, 2013). With this in mind, we set out to create activities that are short in length and do not require much explanation. In order not to burden students additionally, we decided to offer them activities that consisted of short reading texts followed by several multiple-choice questions. We divided the course into three topics: Tourism, Tour Guide and Travel Agency. Figure 2 shows what Topic 3 looks like:



Fig. 2. Section 3 – Travel Agency

Figure 3 shows how a certain activity is designed:

🗧 Activity 6
requests that purchase. The holiday or ticket is supplied to them at a discount. Travel agents make a profit, therefore, from the difference between the advertised price, which the customer pays and the discounted price at which it is sold to the them by the supplier. This is known as the commission. As agents sell packages on behalf of tour operators, financial protection is generally not required as the consumer's contract is direct with the financially protected tour operator. However, many travel agents now wish to provide financial protection to provide their customers with an added level of protection. 1. Travel agents sell to their customers the services that are offered by other companies (suppliers).
а Тпре
b. False

Fig. 3. A reading activity.

After preparing the course activities and designing the course itself, the students were registered on the Moodle site: learnblended.gnomio.com. Each student received a unique user name and password. All registered users were notified via e-mail with detailed instructions on how to enter the site and use the mobile application. The students were provided with sufficient time to complete the activities. Table 1 below shows the number of students who have taken part in the course, the completed activities and their grades:

													Course
First name	Surname	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	average
Polya	Atanasova	-	-	-	-	-	-	3,82	-	-	-	-	2.16
Polina	Borisova	4,8	3,6	5,4	4,2	5,1	4,8	4,91	6	6	6	4,2	5.00
Evelina	Boyadzieva	2,4	3,6	2,4	3,6	5,1	3,6	4,91	4	5	4,3	3	3.81
Alexandra	Coneva	-	3,6	-	3	-	-	6	6	-	-	-	2.96
Emil	Danev	-	-	-	-	-	-	2,73	2	-	-	-	2.06
Iva	Dimova	6	6	6	6	4,3	6	5,45	6	6	6	5,4	5.74
Nelly	Dimova	6	3,6	4,2	6	4,3	4,8	4,36	6	6	5,1	4,8	5.01
Svetoslav	Iliev	-	-	-	-	-	-	3,82	-	-	-	-	2.16
Virginia	Ivanova	3,6	4,8	3	-	6	3,6	3,82	5,33	1	3,4	4,2	3.79
Unzule	Kokoi	4,8	3,6	4,2	4,2	2,6	4,8	6	4,67	5	3,4	4,8	4.37
Ceca	Markova	-	-	3	-	-	-	3,82	2,67	2	-	-	2.31
Tanya	Mincheva	6	4,8	3	3,6	3,4	6	4,36	4,67	5	5,1	3,6	4.50
Diana	Miteva	4,8	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	5.89
Iva	Mitkova	-	-	-	-	-	-	3,82	5,33	-	-	-	2.46
Petya	Nedyalkova	4,8	4,8	4,8	4,8	5,1	4,8	5,45	5,33	5	6	4,8	5.06
Petya	Ninova	4,8	3,6	1,8	4,2	2,6	1,2	4,36	3,33	-	-	-	2.99

Table 1. Students who have taken part in the experiment

Kaloyan	Orlovski	-	-	-	-	-	-	4,91	4	-	-	-	2.44
Nikolay	Petkov	-	-	-	-	-	-	3,82	-	-	-	-	2.16
Dancho	Stankov	4,8	6	6	6	5,1	6	4,36	4	6	6	6	5.47
Diana	Stefanova	-	I	-	-	-	-	-	4,67	I	-	-	2.24
Maria	Stoyanova	4,8	4,8	3,6	5,4	4,3	6	3,82	4,67	4	4,3	4,8	4.59
Angelina	Vasileva	-	I	-	-	-	-	4,91	4,67	I	-	-	2.50
Preslava	Vasileva	4,8	4,8	3	-	-	-	6	4,67	I	-	4,2	3.40
Afanasyi	Yurukov	6	-	3	-	-	-	6	4	-	-	-	3
Nikolay	Zlatev	6	6	-	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	5.63

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The results can be presented graphically in figure 4 below:



Fig. 4. Graphic representation of the results

The mean of all greades is 3.66, which in itself is not a very high result, but on the other hand, it is still positive. Furthermore, we should take into account the fact that for one reason, or another, some students have not completed all activities, which means that the overall result could have been much higher. Although, the main objective of the project is to carry out research on the usability of the mobile application, we are confident that students have benefited from the provided mobile learning, though some of them might obviously have been confused by their first contact with the Moodle Mobile application and could have done much better, had there been more time or opportunity.⁷

CONCLUSION

The conclusions that we can draw from the realization of this research project are incomplete, as we still miss the most important data – students' questionnaires. This data will provide us with valuable information on the students' use of the mobile application as well as their satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the course materials. Moreover, it will inform us on why some students have not been able to take part in the experiment. Nevertheless, we can conclude that mobile learning has its place in higher education. It might still not be used a substitute for conventional training. However, it can be used to supplement courses by providing students with

⁷ At the time the paper is written, we are yet to conduct the surveying of the students. Therefore, we do not have the data necessary to draw conclusions on the usability of the mobile application or on the suitability of the provided course materials.

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additional course materials to access through a mobile device. In addition, it is worth investing funds in the development of a mobile application, which could have improved functionality and serve as an alternative to Moodle Mobile. As Traxler (2015) argues, "mobile devices can deliver learning to people, communities and countries where other educational interventions have been too expensive, difficult, dangerous or demanding."

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