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Main criteria for designing mobile applications for language learning

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It goes without saying that information technologies have become an indispensable part of educational process and their wide use is gradually coming to a new level. It is impossible to ignore the fact that the development of mobile and wireless technologies has opened up a huge array of possibilities in the domain of language learning. Indeed, modern smartphones and tablet computers running on different platformshave a number of indisputable advantages. Among others, it is possible to single out the following:

- access to learning materials in any place and at any time;
- the possibility of using mobile training programs for virtually many aspects of speech activity, including listening, without the use of additional materials and devices;
- the colorful presentation of the material with illustrations and multimedia effects;
- automatic and fast verification exercise, which gives students the opportunity to receive the most current information on their progress;
- mobility and dynamism of the learning processes and huge flow of information;
- the possibility of effective distance education, which today is extremely popular, enabling to make training available for all categories of students;
- portability is considered a great advantage because both smartphones and tablets are compact and lightweight, which enables a learner to take notes or enter all types of data directly into the device;
- flexible hours of learning are indeed a great boon as students can access the system anytime 24-7 and from any location;
- individual pace of learning.

Not surprisingly, the technical capabilities modern mobile devices provide their users with have attracted attention of scientists and practitioners who unanimously agree that the use of these mobile technologies are well aligned with educational goals such as extending learning opportunities, improving student achievement, supporting differentiation of learning needs, goals and learning styles, and deliver authentic learning materials to students who would otherwise have no access to them [4, 157-158]. Such scientists as Kukulska-Hulme, Naismith, Hockly, Crompton and othersare known to do their research into m-learning or mobile assisted language learning (MALL). M-learning or mobile learning is defined as "learning across multiple contexts, through social and content interactions, using personal electronic devices." [1, 45-49] With regard to technologies, G. Trentinand M. Repetto refer to M-learning technologies such devices and gadgets as handheld

computers, MP3 players, notebooks, mobile phones and tablets. [5, 33-38] More recent thinking of mobile learning, however, has emphasized the wider context of learning as part of a mobile lifestyle rather than only focusing on technology aspect. Kukulska-Hulme, for example referred mobile learning to either formal or informal learning mediated via handheld devices and potentially available anytime anywhere. [3, 15-18]

Although m-learning seems to be ubiquitous, there is yet no agreed definition of it, which can be explained by the fact that this notion has changeable nature and is constantly undergoing rapid evolution, with increasing availability of new and more sophisticated handheld devices on the market. It is also necessary to notice that the majority of scientists considered using mobile phones for educational purposes in terms of their main technical capabilities (the Internet connection, text messaging, built-in cameras, voice recording, dual-language dictionaries, etc.) and activities connected with them, yetresearch on using mobile apps for language learning remains scant.

When it comes to using mobile applications for educational purposes, it is necessary to bear in mind both their technical and pedagogical characteristics. In our opinion, the mobile applications should meet the following requirements in order to be effectively employed in the process of learning languages.

Accessibility. Since the mobile market offers a great variety of smartphones and tablet computers using different operational systems such as IOS, Android or Windows, it is necessary to make sure that the particular mobile app is accessible and supported by the mentioned platforms.

User friendliness. Educational applications must be easy to navigate because apps that are complex and take a long time to master may not be worth the commitment.

Content.Correctly organized content is the key criterion when it comes to designing mobile applications for language learning. First of all, it is necessary to make sure that the content is appropriately presented, it is accurate and relevant. It is also important to take into account the connection of the content to the learning objectives and its adequacy for the target audience.

Personalization.The possibility of adjusting content and settings to meet specific needs of the learner guarantees engagement throughout the learning process as well as contributes to the acquisition of new knowledge and skills.

Feedback.The type of feedback learners receive when performing certain actions is a crucial part of the design process as it can play a very important role in how the learners understand the subject, perceive their mistakes and gain new insights.

Integration of social interactions.The fact that the learner can see other people's scores somehow adds a sense of being part of a community and it also adds motivation as it appeals to the competitive nature in learners. On the other hand, interaction with fellow students and instructors will be a great help. It is an accepted fact that learning is made easier when

information is shared and questions answered through a sort of combined study.

In conclusion, it is necessary to emphasise on the importance of employing such portable devices as smartphones and tablets for educational purposes, in particular language learning, since their technical characteristics and versatile mobile applications have great potential in enhancing and fostering the learning process, making it more engaging and interactive on condition all the criteria mentioned are met.

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