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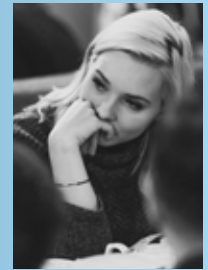
Bringing m-Learning into an ESP Classroom at Tertiary Level

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Abstract

Teaching languages is a challenge and a profession for millions of people around the world. Most English teachers are keen on their work and perform well at primary, secondary and higher institutions modifying their skills and making amendments to teaching materials, which they develop themselves and use. This is a typical picture of teachers of the 20th century when the focus was on simple technologies – tape-recorder, board, and video film. The 21st century is the time of new technologies and gadgets, mobile phones, which are now used as reliable communicators and have taken over.

The purpose of this article is to look into new opportunities of using mobile devices for teaching English to ESP students and develop an understanding of possible ways of incorporating these ideas into a classroom at tertiary level. The research is based on prepared in advance questionnaire. Results of this study show that the majority of 1st year students would like to be taught using new technologies but the offered tasks, which can be done in mobile learning, are limited to online tests and learning vocabulary and speaking. A number of 1st year students of the Institute of Foreign Languages of the Higher School of Economics (HSE), Russia are reluctant to any changes since they find the traditional way of teaching English more efficient. A few 4th year students of Design school of the HSE regret not having been taught with mobile devices because they could make the learning process more convenient, faster and more interesting.

The article offers a number of ideas and tasks in mobile learning, which can be implemented in an ESP classroom at the tertiary level.

Keywords: English language teaching, m-learning, MALL, mobile devices, ESP, language development

Introduction

Mobile phone penetration into people's lives nowadays is estimated at 96% globally (ITU, 2013). There is a strong trend to own more than one phone and a tablet. For the majority of people of all ages these gadgets give opportunities not only for making phone and video calls but for socialising, learning and working across real life settings. Due to these devices, people access information and resources, connect to and communicate with each other and create and share media. The world, in fact, is going online, and more users access information and data through mobile devices. Such online activities and courses in other than English subjects are already popular with the students of the HSE. They provide access to lectures and workshops in Economics, Banking, Finance, Sociology, and Mathematics. English courses are rare. The only existing are three in Intercultural communication, Lexical and Semantic typology and Semantics. A course in m-learning can be both interesting and useful and also demanded because it is not only learning with mobile devices but constant access to self-study, for example, from almost anywhere on a daily basis. Mobile learning ought to be also differentiated from e-learning, which is based on computer, laptop and web usage. It can probably be treated as part of e-learning using mobile devices such as mobile phones, tablets, digital media players, e-readers, and gaming consoles, which, even though used locally, can provide permanent global mobile context and a flexible version of e-learning. This global context, created by mobile devices, develops a learning context based on interconnected elements of user-generated contexts (Cook, 2010) or learner-generated contexts (Cook, 2010; Luckin 2010), which, when approached internationally, helps people to turn their real-world contexts into learning contexts with interaction with teachers and peers.

The paper will look at mobile learning opportunities, technologies and ESP students' attitude to incorporating m-learning into classroom activities. It will also examine teaching language skills with mobile devices and develop a variety of tasks which can be implemented with 1st and 4th year Bachelor students.

Mobile Learning in the 21st Century

The advantages of m-learning are obvious: language learning is opened to millions of people; language learners choose themselves what to learn, with whom and how; built-in dictionaries ease the process of learning, which can translate or explain the unknown word and provide its transcription; m-learning opens new perspectives to disabled people. According to some

authors (Warschauer, 2011), there are three issues which are associated with m-learning. They are transforming teaching and learning; developing 21st century skills and promoting social justice.

Transforming Teaching and Learning

Introduction of digital technologies is associated with new teaching programmes, educational approaches, methods, techniques, curricula, and lesson plans. With the spread of learner-centred approach, the teacher adopted a structuring and guiding role. Students become more active and freer to choose their content and context, plant their assignments on information system for feedback from peers before submitting to the teacher. Even though there is no or little evidence to the fact that mobile learning is better than formal or classroom learning, m-learning increases the autonomy and engagement of students in university studying and communication with teachers. A course on Coursera, for example, can be supplemented by one tutorial per week for additional discussions with students, which can be useful to those students who cannot attend traditional classes because they already have a part-time job.

Developing 21st Century Skills

According to some authors, 21st century skills include "creativity and innovation, critical thinking and problem-solving, collaboration and teamwork, autonomy and flexibility, and lifelong learning, all bundled together with digital literacies (Dudeney et al., 2013; ISTE, 2012; Mishra & Kereluik, 2011; NCTE, 2013). These skills are important for everyone but in many countries, specifically in Asia, they complement the existing traditional education systems. "New literacies and new skills don't only improve the chance of self-realisation but increase the richness of personal and social lives" (Pegrum, 2014, p. 35).

Promoting Social Justice

"Social justice is bringing the social and educational - and economic and political – development benefits of digital technologies to … populations" (Pegrum, 2014, p. 40). The focus is on improved educational opportunities for people who live in remote areas, for the disabled and children with dyslexia; on the development of regions where people are socially disengaged and can improve literacy and education perspectives, learn another language, specifically. English as a language of international communication; on the improvement of digital literacy among older population. The last idea got materialized in the Federal programme of the Moscow government (www.mos.ru/age) in Russia, according to which older citizens are offered to improve health conditions, obtain new knowledge and skills, develop creativity, sporting centres, creative laboratories and classes in each of Moscow central and outskirt districts

are free, and all pensioners are invited to join them.

Mobile Teaching in the 21st Century

Needs Analysis

Needs analysis is an important phase in preparing education programmes. Basically, needs analysis is used to find out, for example, what language skills students of Design of the HSE need in order to perform their social roles in future lives; or to determine whether the existing course and programme truly address the needs of future specialists in Environmental design, Communication design, Graphic design or Industrial design; or whether ESP students are happy with the teaching methods used at English lessons. As for the English Language programme for students of Design, it goes in line with other ESP programmes of the HSE, which are based on academic skills development, IELTS exam preparation and ESP. The specificity of the English Language programme for students of Design is that their entry level can be low since they do not have to take the State School Exam on leaving school, but the motivation to know the language is high. Under these circumstances, it is a great skill of the English teacher to fulfil the programme and make the English lesson interesting and memorable.

Data Collection and Analysis

In order to find out students' opinions on the usage of new technologies in teaching, 52 1st year students of the Institute of Foreign Languages (HSE) and 22 4th year students of the School of Design (HSE) were interrogated. Students were asked slightly different questions but that was done due to the fact that the former are at the beginning of the course of English and the latter are finishing it. Both groups of students got access to the usage of only CD recorders for listening tasks in their courses. The questionnaire included the following questions:

For 1st years:

1. Would you like to use mobile devices at your English lessons? Why or why not?
2. What skills could you develop using mobile technologies?
3. What techniques could be used to develop necessary skills?

For 4th years:

1. Do you regret not having been taught using mobile devices at your English lessons? Why or why not?
2. What skills could you develop using mobile technologies?
3. What techniques could be used to develop necessary skills?

Research showed that out of 52 interrogated 1st year students, 39 students appreciate the idea of being taught

with the usage of mobile technologies and devices. The main arguments for this are: it could enlarge the vocabulary; this can improve listening and speaking skills; search skills can develop quicker; learning in general can become faster and more convenient and up-to-date; students can answer questions online and make notes on the devices; lessons can become more interesting. Nevertheless, 13 students answered in the negative: they admitted using these devices in everyday life; they agree that English lessons are already interactive; students also think that phones are not very convenient and reading from the screen is less attractive than reading from a book or paper; students also expect that the devices will distract them from doing classroom tasks. Answering the 2nd question, students decided that using mobile devices can develop their writing skills; improve presentation skills; develop vocabulary and grammar understanding; help to search for information efficiently; develop quick thinking, decision making and fast typing; it can also help to filter relevant and irrelevant information and be good for self-study. In reference to the 3rd question, students suggested that they could do online tests and quizzes; watch films and organise discussions; download materials and use such tools as "Socrative.org" and "Siri". Results of this study are given in Figure 1.
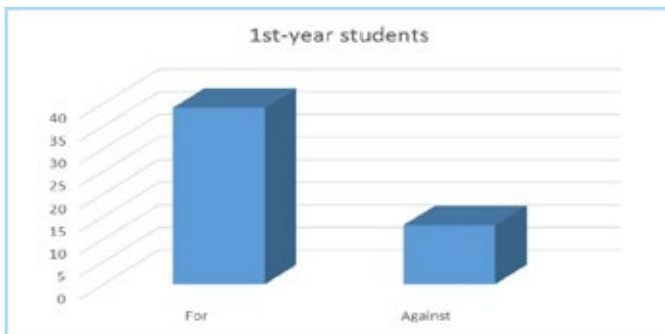

Figure 1. *1st Year Students' Results*

Out of 22 4th year students, only seven expressed regrets about not having been taught with the usage of mobile devices. They think that they can bring an interactive element to the lesson; make learning more interesting; can provide quick access to the Internet; facilitate learning; can provide more individual practice; and they can be good for extracurricular activities. 15 students, on the other hand, have no idea how mobile devices can be used in English classes; they admit that standard training provides all necessary skills; lessons were interesting, entertaining and educative without mobile devices and with printed books and materials; they anyway spend a lot of time with mobile devices every day. Answering the 2nd question, students decided that mobile devices could develop imagination and visual memory; they can improve vocabulary, grammar, and conversational skills; they are good for listening tasks and better communication; give access to fast Googling, reading and typing; develop creativity, time management skills and

multi-tasking. In their answers to the 3rd question, most students suggested that mobile devices can be useful for interactive games, quizzes, movies, podcasts or social media; for watching films with subtitles, searching for books with a modern view on English lessons; different gaming technologies; can provide access to vocabulary development (Lingualeo), mobile applications, Skype, Ehatrulet; do project creating tasks. These results are shown in Figure 2.
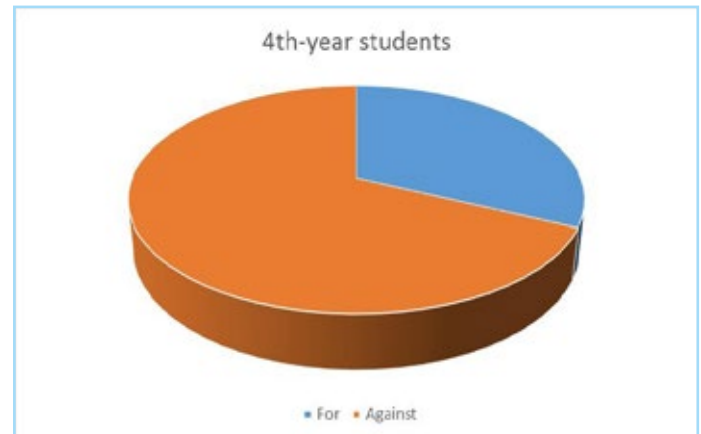

Figure 2. *4th Year Students' Results*

According to Pegrum (2014, p. 95), the trajectory of teaching in the 21st century demonstrates "increasing levels of pedagogical sophistication and increasing potential for transforming teaching and learning", "from a behaviorist (repetitive drilling of vocabulary, spelling, grammar and pronunciation) through a communicative towards a sociocultural paradigm". The first and simplest use of technologies in this kind of teaching is *language content* composition in the form of reading and listening texts. Examples of such sources are m.wikipedia.org and Yoza.project and Worldreader mobile project (in Africa and Asia), Mobiledu (in China). These sources provide glossaries or dictionaries, read-about options, multimedia materials, inbuilt quizzes, annotation tools and discussion channels (Pegrum, 2014, p. 99). The mobile teaching in tutorials, in order to drill vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation Podcasts are used. Students can train these skills both inside and outside the classroom at their own pace. Mobile teaching can also include communicative and sociocultural activities, which can be useful for both teacher and learner development. Examples of these are SIMOLA and MULU, where students can read short chunked texts and news stories at the required easy or hard level, listen to them, obtain immediate translations of words and phrases and answer quiz questions. They can also participate in discussion forums about stories they have read, "interacting not only with other learners but with native speakers, if they choose" (Pegrum, 2014, pp. 153-154). Mobile devices for communication involve learners interacting with teachers, peers and speakers of other languages, so they have become global since they also help to develop pragmatic competence and intercultural insights.

Skills Development with Mobile Devices

Teachers' Difficulties in Using Mobile Devices

Some English teachers are very reluctant to using mobile devices at their lesson. There are several reasons to it: firstly, it is very different from what they have been doing before; secondly, even though they would like to get involved into using new technologies, they are still afraid that something will go wrong or they will not be competent enough to deal with possible difficulties. This fear can be overcome if the university develops a certain policy in reference to the usage of mobile devices at the lessons, making them part of the educational process. At the same time, a special training ought to be organised on a regular basis for all teachers, specifically in the initial stages. This can help to build up confidence and self-esteem and help the teachers to integrate the mobile devices into their teaching.

Teaching Reading and Writing

Teaching *reading* with mobile devices gives a lot of opportunities. The devices (even e-books) help students with vocabulary providing links to dictionaries, sometimes grammar, pre-and post-reading tasks. For example, the personalised intelligent mobile learning system (PIMS), which was developed for learners of English in Taiwan. It provides an ability to estimate learners' reading levels and recommend appropriate news articles, accompanied by Chinese translations (Chen & Hsu, 2008). *Annotation techniques* are also available and refer more to reading since they can imply a number of activities with vocabulary and translations.

There is also a variety of educational apps which allow students to improve their vocabulary by offering translation and audio of pronunciation for every single word. For example, *Ortsbo* - a new e-reader translation app from a Toronto-based firm could eliminate the language barrier when it comes to reading books in a digital format. Text-to-audio translation will correctly pronounce accent marks and uses a human-sounding voice. Another app of this kind is *Kybook Reader*, which allows tapping a word and shows a context menu containing several options, among them the translation (Educational Technology and Mobile Learning, 2018).

With *Google Classroom*, an online platform, ESP teachers at the HSE can incorporate interactive reading lessons for students to work on comprehension and fluency skills, using an extension tool Read&Write. It includes text-to-speech, text and picture dictionaries, dictation, word prediction, and many more features.

For *writing* skills development, mobile software offers detection of errors, spelling and strokes in Chinese characters and also mastering handwriting (Tam & Huang, 2011). Students can also compose short texts on various situations, upload pictures and detailed descriptions. One of the most popular apps to improve writing skills is *Grammarly*. It is an online grammar checker and proofreading tool that can help avoid grammatical errors. It is also a robust spell-check tool that keeps the writing mistake-free. *WhiteSmoke* is also a handy app which improves the quality of academic writing and helps to finish an essay or research paper on time. This app detects the most common spelling and grammar mistakes for avoiding them in the future (Educational Technology and Mobile Learning, 2018).

Students can also compose short texts on various situations, upload pictures and detailed descriptions. Insert Learning, a Chrome extension is used by teachers at the HSE to add instructional content to any web page. Teachers can differentiate instruction by scaffolding text with questions and media, and students can participate in embedded discussions. Insert Learning can assist with interactive writing by the teacher adding writing prompts for students on web pages.

Teaching Listening and Speaking

Listening online tasks can be easily downloaded as radio podcasts or talking books. These provide pre- and post-listening tasks and also translations. For example, *The LearnEnglish Podcast* is an app produced by the British Council. With interesting and engaging interviews with people talking about real-life things (celebrities, food, and more). The audio comes with a moving script and comprehension questions for each episode. Additionally, *English Listening Practice – World Talks* is focused on teaching English through listening. With over 1100 interviews, listeners also have the option of listening to mixer lessons. These mixer lessons allow the listener to hear six different people respond to the same question, which lets the listener hear various dialects (Educational Technology and Mobile Learning, 2018).

Online platforms such as *Edmodo, Moodle, Canvas, Google classroom* allow teachers at the HSE to use online material adapted from Internet sources (TED talks, IELTS academic listening etc.) to create listening tests for students.

Speaking tasks involve working on pronunciation, drilling sounds and even recording own pronunciation to compare with a model one of a native speaker (in reference to pitch contours), which is important basically for such a language as Chinese (Chun et al., 2013) and working on prosody in different languages (O'Brien, 2006). A list of mobile apps is successfully used to improve speaking skills. For instance, *English Listening and Speaking* is an app for those wanting to learn how to communicate in English. The app includes thousands of English conversations with audio and transcripts. Another example is *Speak English Fluently*, which is

designed to assist users in learning how to speak English conversationally in an American accent. In addition to the audio of conversations and common sayings, there is also a recording tool for users to record themselves and listen back to their pronunciation (Educational Technology and Mobile Learning, 2018).

For English classes at the HSE, *Fluency Tutor* is especially useful. It is a web-based application, used with Google classroom that provides tools to enable students to practice reading aloud and to record pre-assigned texts called "assessments" or tests.

Teaching Grammar and Vocabulary

Mobile messaging is the most common way of obtaining necessary *vocabulary* due to the regular transmission of words and phrases, accompanied by translations, examples, definitions or quiz questions (Pegrum, 2014, p. 131). It is illustrated, for example, in the British Council via Nokia Life, which is designed for three levels (easy, medium and difficult). Many apps provide an opportunity to learn vocabulary through a game. For example, *Knudge* offers a lot of exercises and games that will assist in learning new words and improving English vocabulary. *Quizlet*, designed as a quiz game, comes with flashcards that test vocabulary skills. Quizzes are divided into time, memory, and learn modes. There is also an audio transcription for learning the pronunciation (Iftakhar, 2016).

One more example is *Bookwidgets*, an app which can be integrated into any learning management system (LMS), including that of the HSE. It has many templates for questions and games (flashcards, crossword, hotspot etc.) that get automatically graded and that are visually much more appealing to students than standard paper worksheets (Menon, 2019).

Grammar is often treated in a similar to vocabulary in MALL exercises. A good illustration of this is MASELTOV (Mobile Assistance for Social Inclusion and Empowerment of Immigrants with Persuasive Learning Technologies and Social Network Services) project where grammar is evaluated along with vocabulary and other aspects of language. One more illustration is the *LearnEnglishGrammar* app, which offers a more practical way of learning English grammar. The app is designed for learners of all levels. Each level has more than 600 grammar activities, divided into about 25 grammar topics like Simple past, Past continuous, Question tags, Prepositions, Conditionals and Future perfect to assist in learning English grammar systematically. *Grammar Up* is one of the most appreciable English learning apps for iOS. It provides the multiple-choice quiz system featuring more than 1800 questions across 20 grammar categories. It can be immensely helpful in improving your grammar, word selection and vocabulary.

With the introduction of new automated spelling tests, using Text-to-Speech technology and BookWidgets

testing now takes 15 minutes, students at the HSE are given instant feedback on how they performed and even look through their results to compare their input with the correct answer.

Examples of m-Learning Tasks

Mobile learning is acknowledged as a key training delivery format by organisations across the world. It provides a way for educational institutions to deliver knowledge and educational content to students on any platform and at the time of need. Students use mobile apps and tools to complete and upload assignments to teachers, download course instruction and work in online social groups to complete tasks.

A variety of learning management systems (LMS) and online services can be used by teachers to create different types of interactive content to assign to students. The content can be easily shared with students in many formats, and it is also possible to get detailed analytics on student performance. With the usage of Google classroom (LMS) and *Bookwidgets* app, several mobile learning solutions for teaching English at the HSE were created.

In general, exercises are divided into four categories: vocabulary, grammar, listening & watching, reading & writing.

Vocabulary.

1. Flashcards - a vocabulary game which is an excellent way for students to learn vocabulary and to test themselves. Teachers can use it in class to test student's knowledge about a subject matter, for example, through an oral exercise

2. Crossword - a crossword puzzle, generated from a list of words and descriptions. It can be used for all sorts of exercises. For example, definition exercise, language exercise, etc.

3. Hangman - the classic hangman game, where the list of words is provided. It can be used for all sorts of exercises. For example, a spelling exercise, vocabulary exercise, a guessing exercise.

4. Word search - a puzzle which is a great way to introduce new terms or vocabulary to students. It is effortless to configure and to use. It can be adjusted to the level of the student by making the puzzle easier or more complicated.

Grammar.

5. Table - a fill-in table exercise is mainly used for drilling grammar forms, for example, irregular verbs, tenses etc.

6. Gap filling - an exercise where students need to fill in the blanks, which is especially useful for learning English grammar.

7. Drag and drop - a category and filter exercise aimed at revising grammar.

Listening & watching.

8. Multimedia worksheet - a video material which is embedded right into the course. It allows students to stream HD YouTube movies from the Internet without leaving the iBook and answer the question after watching. Classic movies or educational videos can be used to make the lesson more interesting.

Reading & writing.

9. Text questions - a worksheet which includes reading material and a list of questions after it. Each question is supposed to have one answer and can also be used for vocabulary and translation exercises. Multiline text question allows writing any written task such as essays, articles, proposes, letters etc.

10. Multiple choice - a form of quiz where respondents are asked to select the only correct answer from the choices offered as a list.

All m-learning exercises can be sent out to the students with a link (similar to a YouTube video) which can also be shared through a LMS or social media. Students who receive the link will be able to complete the activity, regardless of the type of device they are using. When students submit an assignment or test, it is possible to give feedback on each student's answer beneath each question.

Illustrations of the tasks are shown in Figures 3, 4 and 5.
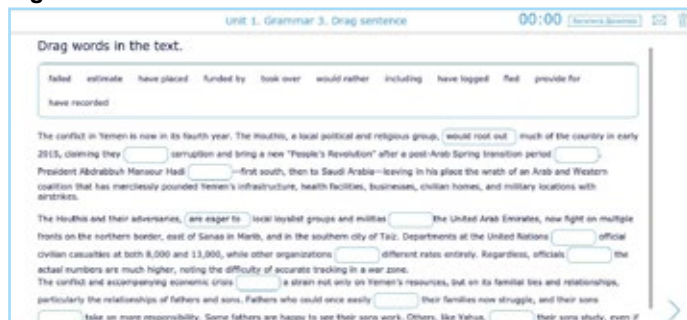

Figure 3. *Crossword*

Figure 4. *Drag and Drop*

Students' Opinions and Analysis

1st year students of the School of Design (HSE) were asked to fulfil interactive assignments and give their opinion about the content. 63 students were interrogated by answering the following questions:

1. Which exercise did you like the most? Why?
2. Which exercise did you like the least? Why?

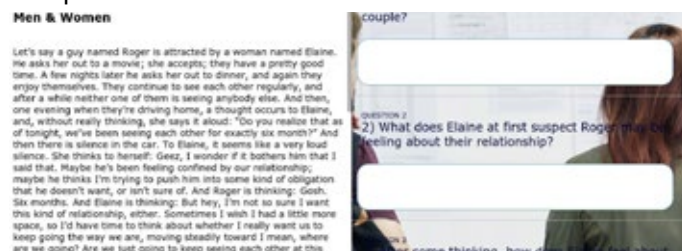Students could choose one or several exercises or skip the question.

Figure 5. *Text Questions*

According to the investigation, the most esteemed exercises were considered to be multimedia and flashcards, as 56 out of 58 (multimedia) and 55 out of 56 (flashcards) students were pleased to use them as a part of homework and classroom activities. Students decided that the usage of video content is very interesting, educational and can improve their perception of English speech. Flashcards make the process of learning new vocabulary easier and more visual. On the other hand, the least valued assignment was the gap filling, as 21 out of 39 students voted against this method of learning grammar, regarding it to be too traditional and unexciting. Other exercises were mainly highly appreciated by students. Overall, m-learning assignments were estimated as a useful and amusing way to learn the English language. These results are shown in Figure 6.
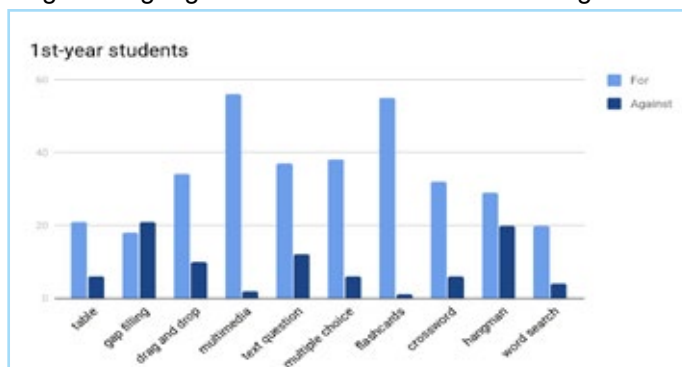

Figure 6. *1st Year Students' Results*

Conclusion

In the 21st century, there is a demand for the usage of mobile technologies. Between traditional learning and mobile learning university students tend to choose the latter, which they find interesting, unusual and useful. Some students treat it as fascinating because it is still

not very common at tertiary level. The research showed that students enjoyed using mobile technologies both in class and as home assignments. Multimedia and flash cards were most appreciated by the students and gap filling – least. In other words, mobile learning is making its first steps in university education, so teacher training is becoming very urgent. Digitally trained teachers can professionally help students to progress in mobile learning and improve the efficiency of English classes. Further research can also focus on the effectiveness of mobile teaching and learning and the evaluation of it can be disseminated through social networks in order to spread the 21st century skills.

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