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Teaching English Phrases through SMS

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Abstract: Achieving the maximum efficiency in teaching a second language (L2) has always been an important issue for educators. Current globalization processes, development of international business relations, political integrations among the various countries throughout the world, and the abilities of latest information and communications technologies (ICT) dictate the more significance of knowledge of foreign languages. All living conditions should be constructed according to the mentioned surrounding changes during the ICT era. Correspondingly, teaching methodologies are also being adapted in order to teach people more efficiently. This paper studies how cellular phones (cell phones) can be used in learning English phrases. In order to examine the impact of cell phones on learning a language an experiment was run among the college and university students in Kazakhstan, supported by GSM Network of KCell (Kazakhstan). Certainly, the use of smartphone apps in educational purposes have been already introduced among the users, however, this approach intends professionally developed classes with the participation of language teachers and a cellular network. This paper discusses the experiment results, in which 126 college and university students participated, and makes some suggestions based on the experimental mobile learning. Study reveals that users could make noticeable improvements learning through their cell phones after the conducted experiment. Positive improvements were noticed on the results of general tests of English language those conducted among all participants of the research.

Keywords: *Language learning, Mobile learning, m-learning*

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Introduction

Cellular phones for all needs

Since ICT is earning the tighter connection to our life almost every day, all living conditions should be constructed according to their positive impact to people. Correspondingly, using ICT, teaching methodologies are also being adapted towards efficiency. This paper discovers how cellular phones (cell phones) can be used in learning a second language (L2).

Presently, 100% of language learners use cell phones. The new features of the mentioned mobile devices are making people more and more dependent on their phones, which mean this gadget has been a part of our daily life (Facer, 2004). Considering this, educators also have to integrate their teaching into the mobile phones as possible; for instance, Başoğlu and Akdemir (2010) offer to use virtual flash cards on the phones while teaching. It is believed that today's cell phone users may expect more than just simple communication (Kukulska-Hulme &Shield, 2006). This phenomenon motivates the network providers too, to catch up their users offering different services to them.

Teaching or learning through cell phones would be useful for almost everyone, since that device is always at their reach wherever they are. Additionally, it is known that the main group, who use their cell phones actively, are the people between 15 and 45. Exactly, this age group includes potential language learners, when real demand for L2 comes from experience (Singleton & Ryan, 2004). Consumerism and brand awareness are central features of this generation's lives (Syrett & Lammiman, 2004). Meantime, majority of this group are mostly involved in different types of activities comparing to younger and older generations, such as studying, starting new job or business, building a family, having a baby, and many others. This means, they probably practice insufficiency of spare time to attend special language courses. From this point, middle-aged group, which is the main portion of society, has a great probability of subscription if they are offered a more convenient way of learning a language via a network operator, according to their needs. In terms of marketing, it would be a great engagement of mobile subscribers to (GSM, CDMA) network providers as well.

External Impacts on Language learning

From the point of political and economic view, Kazakhstan has been widening its connections with abroad. The flourishing international relations of the country with foreign states definitely create a demand for language learning within the society, because of its integrations not only in industrial sectors but also in

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social spheres. For instance, world-known publications, music, movies, Internet tools and others might be real factors to attract people to learn L2. It is believed that mass learning of foreign languages positively reflect on country's economics, politics, education and other key areas (Pinon & Haydon (ed.) 2010). Moreover, thanks to modern communication technologies international mass media, those are in different languages, are reaching more homes, which also motivates people to learn languages. The influence of the international media (including Internet), as an information source for current lifestyle and fashion, on learning languages were mentioned during the talk with the participants of the conducted survey.

Technological advancements

Mobile communications industry has been one of the most powerful areas at present, and the most beneficial income source on the economy of the world. The presence of six mobile technologies companies among 10 most expensive brands in the world, such as Apple, Microsoft, Google, Samsung, etc. tells their importance to public (www.forbes.com). Especially, Apple and Samsung are both trying to occupy the consumers putting all kinds of innovations to their new devices in almost every six months.

Nowadays, the programming requires more intelligence, which means the software side is getting much smarter and profitable. For that reason, some software cost more expensive than the device itself. For instance, there are mobile applications for about $1000 while the device costs around $700 (The Telegraph, 2013). Moreover, recently, the Facebook, the giant social network, acquired the WhatsApp free messaging service for $19 billion, while Microsoft Corporation acquired the Nokia Corporation, which had been a giant cell phone device producer for several years, for about $8 billion only (www.forbes.com).

The number of cell phone users is increasing around the world, especially, with noticeable contribution of the developing countries (en.wikipedia.org). The main factor of this increase can be explained by the affordable prices for cell phones. Currently, according to the statistics of www.mobithiking.com, the number of worldwide mobile subscribers reached up to 6.915 m people, which is 95.5% of the whole world population (7.240 m) (See Table 1).

According to the Statistics Agency of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 29.19 m subscribers registered to the mobile networks in Kazakhstan (30.03.2013), while the number of Kazakhstan's population is about 17 m. This statistics says that the share of subscribers in Kazakhstan is 172%. This indicator was 148% in 2012 (number of SIM cards to 100 persons /www.kursiv.kz/). Most people use more than one device or multi-SIM devices. Moreover, considering the fact that Kazakhstan is one of the developing countries in the world, the requirements to learning languages should be also high, which leads the country to integrate with the foreign markets rapidly. It is believed that the same situation can be observed in many other developing countries throughout the world.

It can be assumed from Table 1 and Table 2 that Kazakhstan is the leader amongst CIS countries in this area, and is developing at the same level with the leading countries in the world.

Study justification

This work aims to prove that one of the most efficient and modern ways of learning L2 (and not only language) is through mobile or cell phones. As mentioned above, the potential language learners and the most active cell phone users are in the ages of 15-45. Other groups: the first one can be between 6-14, who use their telephones for communication purposes only (EU Digital Agenda Scoreboard, 2013) with their parents and are generally not willing to learn a language through their mobile devices. The third group can be a little old or may not be much interested in learning a new language. So, this study analyses the facts implying the middle age group members, who are between 15-45 ages.

Moreover, the middle group uses more power on influencing their surroundings: in the family, at work and society. This fact also may bring the mentioned language learning practice to the forward plan. Additionally, this group has the most money spending power, ability to track the common social trends, highly receptive to new products and services. Some researchers have found that young generation is individualistic, anti-corporate, and resistant to advertising efforts (Bush et al., 2004; Wolburg & Pokrywczynski, 2001).

Moreover, traditional way of teaching can be boring for middle-aged generation, who mostly prefer on-the-go methods and "fun" in learning (Cooney & Keogh, 2007). Generally, they routinely multitask in their devices: surf the internet, message, play games, take photos, search locations and many more. The latest applications those are made by third parties to install in smartphones offering even more useful functions for the devices comparing to stock ones. One of them, certainly, a free messaging service among the users of smartphones and tablets.

Since the use of mobile phones, short messaging service (SMS) has been popular among active users because of its convenience and visual data exchange. Since then, users have sent billions of short messages. According to some statistics, mobile phone users in developed countries sent about 50 messages per day (www.wikipedia.org). Daily Mail states that Britain is one of the countries where tremendous number of SMS is delivered among the subscribers. In 2011, 39.7 billion messages were exchanged among the users (www.dailymail.co.uk). However, the format of messaging communication is changing according to the improvements of technology. Currently, even more

people are involved in sending messages through various apps designed for smartphones, such as, WhatsApp, Viber, iMessage, Skype and others. According to Jan Koum, the WhatsApp CEO (Germany),

Table 1. Key Global Telecom Indicators for the World Telecommunication Service Sector in 2014 (retrieved from www.mobithinking.com)

	Global	Developed nations	Developing nations	Africa	Arab States	Asia & Pacific	CIS	Europe	The Americas
Mobile cellular subscriptions (millions)	6,915m	1,515m	5,400m	629m	410m	3,604m	397m	780m	1,059m
Per 100 people	95.5%	120.8%	90.2%	69.3%	109.9%	89.2%	140.6%	124.7%	108.5%

Table 2. Top 10 mobile markets by number of subscriptions (www.mobithiking.com)

	Country	Mobile subscriptions in millions	Population in millions source: World Bank	% of population	% of population	Last update
	World	6,587.4m	7,046m	93.5%	26.6%	06/13
1	China	1,246.3m	1,351m	92.3%	33.2%	02/14
2	India	772.6m;	1,237m	62.5%	3.4%	01/14
3	USA	345.2m	313.9m	110.0%	91.6%	06/13
4	Indonesia	285.0m	246.9m	115.4%	18.4%	06/13
5	Brazil	272.6m	198.7m	137.2%	55.5%	02/14
6	Russia	237.1m	143.5m	165.2%	28.7%	06/13
7	Japan	137.9m	127.6m	108.0%	85.3%	02/14
8	Vietnam	127.7m	88.8m	143.8%	20.3%	06/13
9	Pakistan	126.1m	179.2m	70.4%	N/A	06/13
10	Nigeria	128.6m	168.8m	76.2%	7.5%	02/14

WhatsApp now has more than 430 million monthly users and sees more than 50 billion messages cross its servers each day (www.tweaktown.com).It should be noted that there are many analogue apps out there of such services, so it can be imagined how people are involved in messaging today.

The given statistics highlight the importance of determining the efficiency of language learning through their cell phones, and impact on improving the subscribers' knowledge in general. This study does not analyse the users' level of intention in terms of learning a language, but considers only their willingness to acquire (any) "lessons" from their mobile devices. Thus, during the experiments a "language learning" case was used as a tool to study the subscribers' behaviour. It means, other studies on delivering the knowledge (not language learning) via mobile devices may vary in their outcomes.

Background

Language learning has been an important component of the current lifestyle. Majority of parents believe that speaking in foreign languages leads their children to success in their study and career, so those children are grown up with that belief, which is mostly true (Plasberg, 1999). Moreover, current globalisation process, development of international economics and tourism are also calling people for learning foreign languages. In any area and country, cultural diversity is making more success rather than closed society (Bakens, Mulder & Nijkamp, 2012). Especially, our chosen group, who are the active members of the society, clearly understand these demands.

Certainly, there are many other ways of delivering the knowledge and learning a foreign language during the modern era of information technologies. Various electronic books, videos, cartoons and multimedia softwares are offered to users in order to teach languages (Yeh, 2014). However, as the life gets faster and more competitive, people have been experiencing the shortage of time. There are many similar researches related on language learning are being carried (Levy & Kennedy, 2005; Cho et al., 2004). Majority of such studies are mainly about learning English language.

While just few years ago, cell phones were an item of luxury, today, they are the most affordable communication device, though depending on their brands and models. It is another factor caused the number of cell phone users to flourish. According to Ericsson Mobility report (2013) the number of mobile subscribers exceeds the number of television viewers.

Presently, many studies state that the traditional messaging method is getting outdated (Ling & Baron, 2007). Programmers are developing more attractive and convenient applications that give users to exchange messages free of charge through the internet. Moreover, the advanced messaging services are preferred by users, which support picture, audio and video, and with sharing options via social networks.

Theoretical Framework

Survey results show that majority of respondents accept news and various information from their mobile operators without much frustration. Therefore, the messages in educational purposes, delivered by mobile networks, have much probability to be accepted favourably. Moreover, the automated SMS services reach the subscribers always on their preferred (adjusted) time and make information available to them systematically.

Theoretically, this topic is not new in education. More than 10 years ago mobile technologies were considered as "a familiar part of the lives of most teachers and students" in the UK (Facer, 2004). Though, this practice is claimed as effective, formally, it has not been used in language learning in a continuous way. Prof. Liliana Jacott also discusses general educating advantages of mobile learning in her book titled "*Mobile Learning. A Handbook for Educators and Trainers*" (2009). Her book presents many examples and practical experiences that illustrate the new possibilities that mobile technologies might have in education and training. Certainly, this method of teaching are not limited to only English language. For instance, Korean researchers, Cho et al. (2004), propose offering a whole mobile-based courseware for Korean language learners through smartphones connected to the internet. Thornton and Houser (2005) did experiments by sending short mini-lessons for learning vocabulary through e-mail to mobile phones of the students three times a day, that very similar to this study.

American researchers, Kurt Squire and Seann Dikkers, University of Wisconsin-Madison, highlight the importance of internet functionality on mobile learning via internet-based applications. Their suggestions strictly suggest using smartphones only, in which they advise to develop subject-based apps (Squire & Dikkers, 2012). Many scholars recommend using mobile gadgets on teaching and learning vocabularies (Pincas, 2004; Levy & Kennedy, 2005; McNicol, 2005; Stockwell, 2007). This paper's proposal is very similar to the vocabulary teaching structure, since it studies teaching English phrases via mobile devices.

Cooney & Keogh (2007) try to teach Irish language via mobile phones and web chat, believing in that exciting and fun methods would motivate more students get interested in learning. Cavus and Ibrahim (2008) also mention that students may even find enjoyable learning L2 via their mobile phones.

Certainly, being convinced in the practicality of the general idea of using the mobile devices in education, some institutions are trying to integrate their activities in smartphone-based applications. For example, Abilene Christian University (U.S.) give free iPods and iPhones to their freshmen installed 15 university web applications to offer some courses and instruction through those devices (Hlodan, 2010). These are specifically university-based applications, differing from our discussion that may comprise and educate all interested parties of the society.

The main difference of our research from the previous studies, as mentioned above, is the studying the effectiveness of learning a language with the help of mobile phones. Majority of the similar researches focus only on the technical details and the contents of the offered services. In this study, mainly, the attitude of the subscribers towards mobile learning practice is demonstrated.

While studying the behaviour of the users on the above-mentioned issue, certainly, other influencing external factors to their decisions will also be considered, such as: sms costs, types of telephones, locations, subscribers' ages, used networks, etc.

Based on the mentioned model, the following hypotheses are considered:

Hypothesis 1: Learning a language using a mobile phone is practical.

Hypothesis 2: Teaching through the network may not use simple SMS only, but also multimedia messages (pictures, sound, and video).

Hypothesis 3: Current tendency of communication and software improvements are leading to mobile learning.

Method

Measures

In order to obtain needed data on proposed topic, the users' behaviour was calculated by running experimental service provided by KCell, a GSM network of Kazakhstan and by asking different questions orally from selected sample during the questionnaire. So, the summary of the study is not based only on direct answers but on indirect implies as well.

To identify the reactions and responds of the selected participants (Group Y), we run an SMS service experiment by the support of GSM network (KCell) and the British Council (Kazakhstan) during 8 months. The service was named "*Phrase of the Day*". KCell delivered English words and phrases to the selected groups in 3 different levels and purposes: Advanced, Business and IELTS, in the following formats:

Table 3. Experimental offered language levels and SMS language programme by cellular network (Phrase of the Day)

No.	Level	Translation	Definition in the original language	Example
1.	Advanced	No	Yes	Yes
2.	Business	Yes	Yes	Yes
3.	IELTS	No	Yes	Yes

According to the gathered data, the use of messaging service is quite active in both types of cell phones, though the share of smartphones is considerably high

(87%) (Figure 1). The research was mainly proposing the usage of messaging service in delivering the lessons (phrases) through the mobile devices.

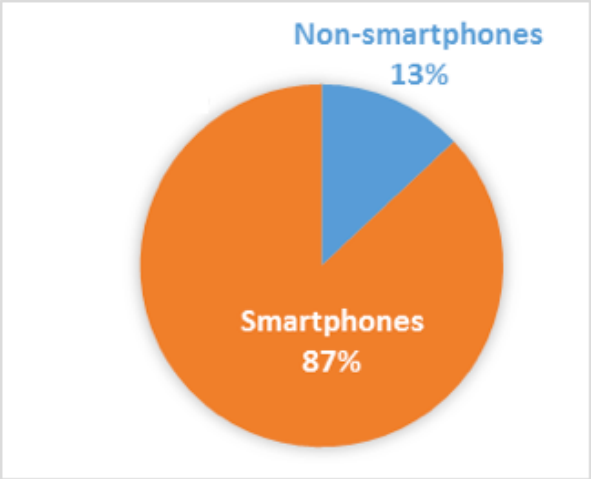

Figure 1. Share of cellphone types among the youth

Moreover, we had another group (Group Z) to compare who also studied those levels of English language without the use of the mentioned SMS service. Therefore, these two samples were tracked, whose English instruction methods were based on mobile learning versus traditional teaching only, in order to obtain clearer image of our m-learning experiment on language learning. It should be noted that Group Y had lessons in traditional classroom teaching as well.

In order to gather clearer data, we divided our questions into two parts: first part is learning about the behaviour and purpose of users towards using their cell phones, and the second part was designed to study their willingness to learn L2 via their devices.

Sample

The convenience sample consisted of 126 participants enrolled in different schools. 30 of them are from school, 68 are students from Suleyman Demirel University (SDU, Kazakhstan) and other 28 were the MA students from the International Business School (IBS, Kazakhstan). Exactly half of the mentioned groups, Group Y, was trained with KCell SMS lessons and the other half, Group Z, was not. All students volunteered to take an experimental survey. The experiment was applied to each group in various times. SDU students received the sample m-learning messages from KCell GSM Network (Kazakhstan) on Business level of proficiency, between September and December, 2012. The MA students of IBS participated in the mentioned research from January to March, 2013, who were offered IELTS level SMS classes. School pupils received the similar SMS messages during March-April, 2013 on Advanced English language level. The message format was a regular SMS, so recipients with non-smart devices did not have any technical issues on receiving them.

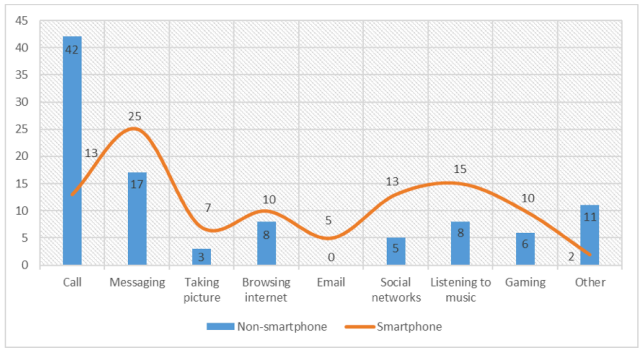

Figure 2. Cell phone usage purposes among the youth (activity %)

Sample Profile

Most of the sample was male (56%), freshman (78%) and in ages of 19-25 (54%), who, supposedly, are currently building their future plans, which means, they may have more intentions to learn L2. Number of MA students was less than other groups, since they generally speak one or more foreign languages and were taken for variety purpose. (Table 4). It is believed that the chosen sample consists of only students, i.e. not quite mixed (by professions, ages, social groups, etc.). However, the purpose of the experiment was to survey the parties who are willing to learn a language, in order to determine the efficiency of mobile learning.

Table 4. Sample profile details

Variables	Categories	Number	%
Age	16-18	30	24
	19-25	68	54
	26-30	26	21
	30 and older	2	2
	Total	126	100
Academic Status	School pupils	30	24
	Freshmen	40	32
	Juniors	16	13
	Seniors	12	10
	MA Students	28	22
	Total	126	100
Gender	Female	56	44
	Male	70	56
	Total	126	100

Results and Discussion

Participants were interviewed/questioned if they would learn a language through the mobile learning system. As expected, all of the participants mentioned their willingness to study a foreign language by using various gadgets. It can be also explained because of its novelty in learning, comparing to other methods of studying.

One of the notable moments, some people have absolutely no idea how to learn a language (except taught courses), even are not interested in how language courses work or about finding the best ways to study. This means, a clear instruction to those types of people about the mobile learning would make a good leap in their decisions. Moreover, the experimental mobile learning project was not tiresome and designed

for optimal time for users during the day. Since this practice is new, certainly there were some conservatives, who mentioned their preference to learning in traditional methods.

Moreover, before and after the experiment all participants were tested in order to identify their English level. As mentioned, they were mainly divided into two groups (Group Y and Z): first was offered additional SMS classes, while the latter was taught in traditional method. Still, for detailed look at the changes in the level of each group, the participants had been analysed according to their academic status. To identify the difference of level of groups pre- and post-experiments, the gathered data was analysed in t-test analysis.

When we compare the pre-experiment test scores of the groups, there is no significant relation between these groups. Independent t-test was used to compare these groups. Table 5 shows the t-test results.

Table 5. Pupils (Group Y and Z): Pre-experiment scores

Groups	N	$\overline{X}$	SD	t	p
Group Y	15	,710	,125	,920	,366
Group Z	15	,670	,116		

Table 5 shows that initially divided groups can be accepted as equal groups. There is no statistically significant differences between these groups (p>,05). This means that both groups have the same knowledge levels about the English phrases.

In principle, if the hypothesis is null, it would be H_0: $\mu_1 = \mu_2$, but the results of (30) school pupils paired sample t-test analysis show the followings:

Table 6. Pupils (Group Y): pre- and post-experiment

Groups	N	$\overline{X}$	SD	t	p
Pupils (before experiment)	15	,710	,125	-5,14	,000
Pupils (after experiment)	15	,783	,093		

As it is seen from the Table 6 pupils made some improvements within 2 months (March-April, 2013) to more than 7% (78,3% against 71,1%) which is statistically significant (p<,00) H_0: $\mu_1 \neq \mu_2$.

Table 7. Pupils (Group Y and Z): post-experiment scores

Groups	N	$\overline{X}$	SD	t	p
Group Z (after experiment)	15	,685	,119	-2,49	,026
Group Y (after experiment)	15	,783	,093		

Table 7 shows that post experiment scores of the experimental group (,783) is higher than control group (,685) and this relation is statistically significant (p<,05). This means that sending SMS to students to teach the English phrases was successful. *Hypothesis 1*: *Learning phrases by using a mobile phone is practical*. According to the answers of the respondents and considering the circumstances of their use, people have more convenient possibility to retrieve valuable information through their mobile phones. Moreover, participants think that cell phones are the least time consuming and rather affordable way of getting instructions. Thornton and Houser (2005) also confirmed the 'encouraging' post-test improved range of scores on teaching vocabulary Japanese students via mobile phones. The same successful results can be observed in the studies of Alemi, Sarab and Lari (2012).

The following figures visualize the pace of students' level of learning English phrases:

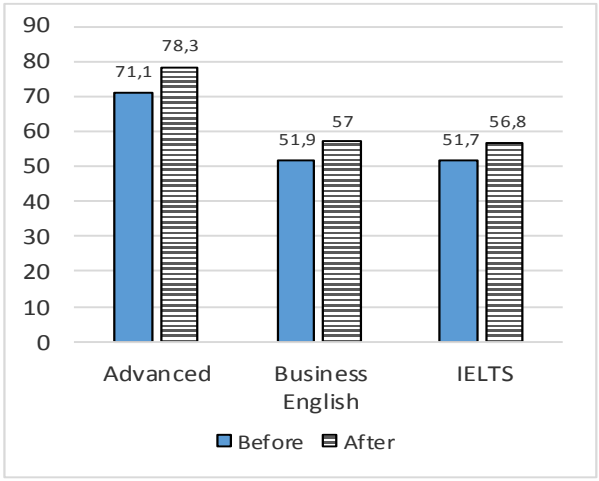

Figure 3. *Group Y* (studied with SMS programme) test performance results (%).

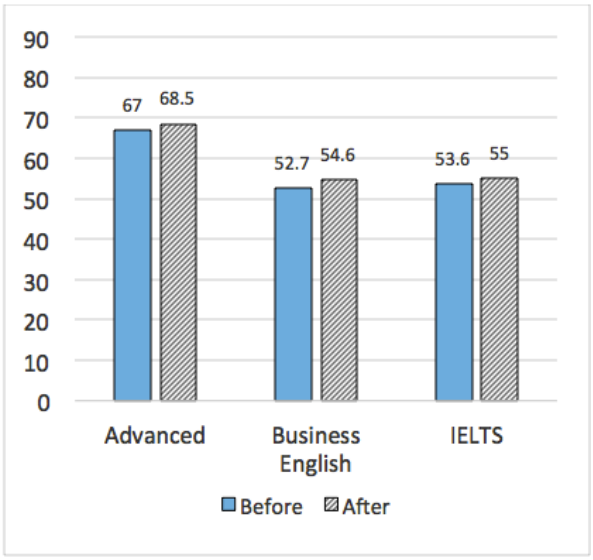

Figure 4. *Group Z* (studied normal university programme) test performance results (%).

As it can be seen from these tables, the impact of SMS classes is quite noticeable in teaching, language learning in our case. The mentioned improvements were gained for 2 months for Advanced English level, 4 months for Business English, and 3 months for IELTS. Certainly, mobile learning does not completely cover the traditional teaching techniques, but it would be a good supplementary for those, who are already studying and it would be useful for people, who already acquired fundamental language levels.

Hypothesis 2: *Teaching through the network may not use simple SMS only, but also multimedia messages (pictures, sound, and video).* Despite the fact that all samples of the research were young people, survey revealed that non-smartphones are still in use (approx. 17%), especially, because of their battery durability and simplicity. However, those cell phones usually do not support multimedia messages.

Besides, smartphones' functions are not limited to networks services as long as they are connected to the internet. For instance, any legal entity or individual is able to create their own group (to offer their services) using Internet traffic on a messaging application, such as Viber or WhatsApp without depending on bound to a cellular network. These sources may offer much cheaper services comparing to network costs in the future. Considering these factors, Hypothesis 2 was not supported. However, the aim of this paper is not business oriented, but is about developing the teaching techniques on language learning.

Hypothesis 3: *Current tendency of communication and software improvements are leading to mobile learning*. The development of internet services and abilities of messaging (and other) applications designed for smartphones are getting really smart. For instance, there are apps that track the health conditions of their owners. As mentioned, messages that use third-party applications and internet connections significantly overcome the normal messages (SMS) by their amount. Moreover, mobile application stores, such as Google's Play Market and Apple's Appstore offer hundreds of various applications to download in order to learn languages in different ways. This survey revealed that there were some users among the experiment participants, who use use such apps. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 was supported. Many research showed the usefulness of the mobile learning that is used SMS for instruction (Virvou and Alepis, 2005; Cavus and Dogan, 2009). Also Young, (2007) concluded that SMS text messaging provides the most appropriate technology to address the issues to support students in distant placements and reduce feelings of isolation whilst on practice. Yousuf, (2007) found that mobile learning can improve the entire distance education by enhancing ways of communication among distance learners, tutors and supporting staff. Overall, even though the service was almost unknown, the survey outcomes state that used sample had a positive attitude on mobile learning. However, it can be assumed that the future mobile teaching technology will be used through smart applications, but not simple SMS, since they may comprise multimedia teaching tools, such as text, photo, sound and video. Huang and Sun (2010) strongly advise using the mobile devices in teaching English because of its listening exercise system that can enhance learners' English listening abilities to a high degree. Therefore, this trend may have effective use in teaching phrases. If needed, instructors are able to contact to learners directly using free calls through the internet, without any difficulties. Furthermore, as Geddes (2004) mentioned, it can be used in "anywhere, anytime" with possibilities of saving the messages' history to look back or repeat the previous lessons at convenient time and place.

Conclusion

Although this study did not include the people with wider ranges of ages, the main purpose was to identify the importance of mobile learning in studying phrases (or a language). Therefore, the surveyed group was the most suitable sample since they are well informed about the cell phone functions and have a desire to learn a language. Moreover, majority of these people are the heavy users of internet apps that give them enough capacity to compare the traditional and modern ways of messaging services.

Advanced smartphone applications can do more professional job: explaining the words while reading, providing sounds and sample videos. These opportunities put mobile devices ahead to be used as a source of valuable knowledge. Additionally, as the smartphone market is developing and the internet is getting common, they are getting much accessible to everyone.

Public awareness of the convenience of mobile learning and its functions may significantly increase the number of language learners, if the majority, mostly elder people, will learn about how the service works.

According to the behaviour of the respondents in this study, especially students feel little or no social pressure on learning or choosing a foreign language. They are grown-up enough to make their own decisions, though in most cases they are financially dependent to their families. It means, the network services and/or the functions of new telephone applications they use can be easily advertised among their peers to be purchased or used further. The price sensitive parties always look for accessible ways of performing their plans, where mobile learning can be preferred as a reasonable choice.

This information might be useful not only language instructors, but also to industries who want to run some instructions to their students and/or employees.

Limitations

Limitations of this study may affect the ability to generalize findings. The sample was non-random and may not be a 100% representation of general target

audience. However, there is no indication that this group of respondents differs significantly in their learning behaviour from others, because it includes the parties from all regions of Kazakhstan.

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