

## LEARNING FOREIGN LANGUAGES VIA MOBILE DEVICES – ATTITUDE AND EXPERIENCE OF STUDENTS OF HIGHER BUSINESS SCHOOL OF PROFESSIONAL STUDIES IN LESKOVAC

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**Abstract:** *In the era of information and communication technology and its wide adoption in language classes around the world, it seems necessary to consider and apply mobile based learning in higher education in Serbia. This paper investigates students' attitude towards mobile learning and sets a basis for further implementation of this technology in Business English learning at HBSL. Analyzing and interpreting the acquired data (via an online questionnaire) we conclude that surveyed students have little experience with the use of mobile technology for language learning and are thus not familiar with ways how such technology could be incorporated in language classes and how they could benefit from its use. Despite high level of students' readiness to use mobile devices for language learning purposes, many students are still being “conservative” choosing to trust “old” language learning tools such as printed materials, etc. This proves the importance of continuous education of students and motivation on use of mobile technology for language learning both inside and outside of classrooms.*

**Keywords:** *m-learning, student motivation, language skills, mobile technologies, language learning*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Discussing the use of mobile technology for learning purposes (especially in the case of foreign language learning) seems an easy job as there are already numerous examples of effective use of m-technology for language learning. If we consider the vast and diverse use of mobile devices in various segments of life, it might appear logical to claim that m-technology use is not a question of future but of present. However, the situation in Serbia is different. While some Serbian teachers invest a great deal of effort to keep up with global trends and modernize their classes in terms of use of various technology (which not only enhances the teaching process but does wonders for learning process as well), when it comes to the use of mobile technology, especially in the process of foreign language learning we always seem to be one step behind the digitally developed countries of the region and the world. There are not many examples of efficient use of such technology in classrooms (this refers to all levels of study – primary, secondary and tertiary education – undergraduate and postgraduate studies) and thus there is not a lot of research which deals with this issue. This paper investigates the attitude of students of undergraduate professional studies at Higher Business School of Professional Studies in Leskovac towards mobile learning and thus sets a basis for further implementation of this technology in Business English learning at HBSL. This research is in line with previously conducted studies at HBSL. Namely, Stojković (2012) shows that students at Higher Business school extensively use social networks and different technology to get access to those social networks. [1] However, a research conducted in 2016 which investigated students' perception and use of e-books shows that students, despite this expressed readiness to use new technology in language learning, do not or rarely use e-books and always opt for traditional forms of teaching materials both in terms of foreign language study and study of other subjects. [2]

#### 1.1 Theoretical background

Extensive use and diffusion of digital technology has brought about the transformation of existing and creation of new forms of training. As the world becomes consumer oriented, education too thrives to put the learner at the heart of the learning process thus making the process more enjoyable and productive. New tools used in foreign language teaching are designed to “best fit learners' needs”. [3] Some of these “new” tools used in foreign language study can be called both old and new (as the first smartphones appeared in the 1990's, etc), and these include technology such as tablets, smartphones, laptops, etc. – small portable devices which initiated a revolution in the field of communicating, interacting and learning. The term m-learning was first coined around

time the first smartphones appeared and from then on it “grew” in size and importance. Various definitions and views on mobile learning have developed in recent years but as Sharples suggests, all can be placed in four broad categories: *technocentric*, *relationship to e-learning*, *augmenting formal education* and *learner-centered*. [4] Different researchers define m-learning as learning with the help of mobile devices, an extension and logical continuation of e-learning (first phase in development of mobile learning according to Sharples [5]) or as Traxler (2007) pointed out- “mobile learning therefore should be understood as both “a continuation of ‘conventional’ e-learning and a reaction to this ‘conventional’ e-learning and to its perceived inadequacies and limitations.” [6] Others define m-learning as “any sort of learning that happens when the learner is not at a fixed, predetermined location, or learning that happens when the learner takes advantage of learning opportunities offered by mobile technologies. [7] A Google search conducted by Laouris and Eteokleous in 2005 presents interesting results; namely, the researchers used a {+ “mobile learning” + definition} formula twice during the year of 2005 (first time in January 2005, second time in June 2005) and the difference in the amount of search results is astounding but very indicative of the rise in importance of phenomena of m-learning (1.240 search results in January 2005 and 22.700 search results in June 2005). [8] One of the latest definitions of mobile learning is that of Ally which says that “m-learning is a process of using a mobile device to access and study learning materials and to communicate with fellow students, instructors or institutions. [9]

## 1.2. Mobile assisted-language learning

MALL (Mobile assisted-language learning) is said to be the subset of m-learning and CALL (Computer assisted-language learning). Chickering and Ehrmann were first to use the term CALL in 1996. Simply said MALL refers to the “anytime and anywhere” use of mobile technology in language learning. Still, this notion is not as simple as it seems. Its history runs parallel with that of m-learning and as such has gone through several stages of development and implementation. From flexible access to language learning materials to extensive use in developing all 4 language skills, MALL has focused (since the mid 1990’s) on exploitation of various mobile technologies such as pocket e-dictionaries, PDAs, mobile phones, MP3 players, etc. [10] As with the rise of number of “m-learning definitions”, MALL has been the subject of an ever increasing number of publications, scientific papers and conferences. The topics covered include considerations of learning theories, technical specifications, user attitudes, teacher training, teacher and student motivation and cases of implementation. This only stands to show that mobile assisted-language learning is attracting more and more attention as it is becoming a widely accepted method of learning a foreign language in any given context. This research aims at contributing to this field by investigating user attitudes and motivation on using mobile technology (namely PDAs) with students of HBSL. It should stimulate debate, further development and implementation of such technology in the above mentioned educational institution and other institutions in Serbia.

## 1.3. Students’ perception of mobile learning

While mobile technology has become an integral part of our daily lives, its use for educational purposes is still to some extent limited as scientists continue exploring both the positive and negative effects of its use for language learning both inside and outside classrooms. Understanding advantages of using mobile devices for learning (flexibility, portability, social interactivity, context sensitivity, connectivity, individuality, etc.) is equally important as understanding its disadvantages such as the issue of visibility (small screens especially with mobile phones and PDAs), high level of dependency, connectivity problems (failure with Wi-Fi connection), classroom performance issue due to extensive use of mobile devices for chatting or browsing of non-academic web sites, etc. Still, scientists today recognize and point out the importance of use of mobile technology in education as this technology has the potential to support all forms of education starting from primary to secondary and tertiary education. Higher education is said to be the most appropriate to integrate student-centered mobile learning [11]. The process of integrating mobile technology in mainstream education is a complex process and the first step in its integration would be to perform an extensive analysis on student perception of mobile learning. We want to know if students can, will and want to use mobile devices for educational purposes. According to Pollara (2011) “student perception is a critical piece of m-learning study, because positive experiences will encourage participation and acceptance of m-learning by those students.” [12] Previously conducted research on student attitudes and perceptions toward m-learning (Al-Fahad 2009, Bettentuit Junior 2008, Cavus & Ibrahim 2009, Garret & Jackson 2006, Manair 2007, Wang, et al 2009, Wyatt, et al 2010, Venkatesh, et al 2006, Williams & Bearman 2008, etc.) show that students found m-learning effective, enjoyable and useful so that a general conclusion of the previously mentioned studies is that student perception of mobile learning is reported to be positive.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

Following the previously conducted studies, we aim at understanding the experience and attitude of HBSL’s students towards the use of mobile devices in foreign language study. The following study questions guided the research:

- 1) How do students currently use their personal mobile devices for educational and non-educational purposes?
- 2) To what extent do students use mobile devices for learning English language?
- 3) Are students ready and willing to adopt the use of mobile devices in the classroom for foreign language study?
- 4) What is their perception on the use of mobile devices for language learning?

### 2.1. Participants

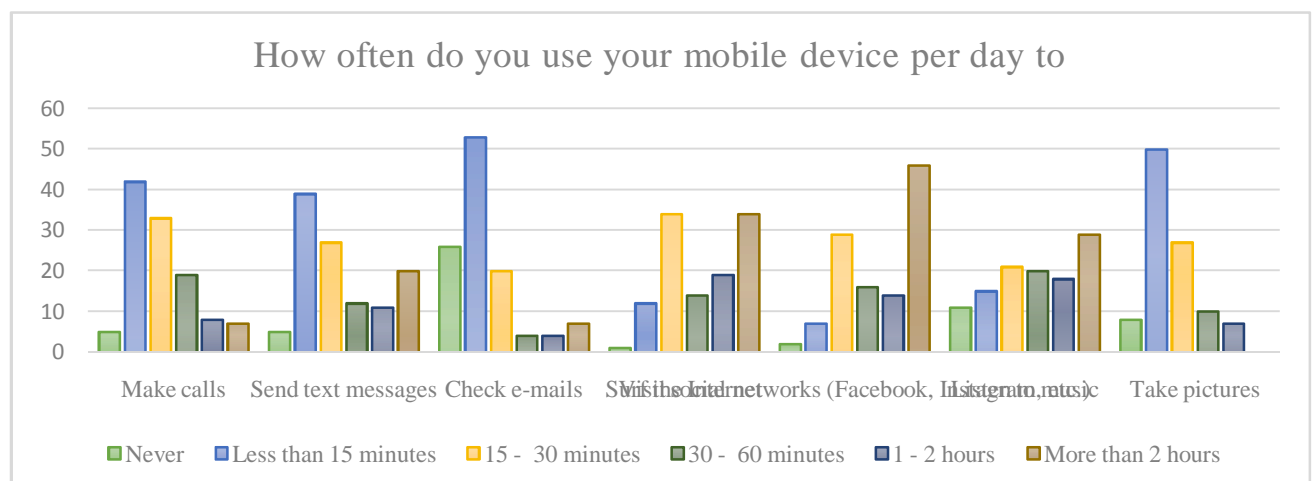
The study was carried out during the summer semester of school year 2016/2017. Participants were students of Higher Business school of Professional Studies (undergraduate studies) - 1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> year students. Number of participants in this study was 114 students. Participants were both male 22,8% (n=26) and female 77,2% (n=88), ranging in age from 19 to 41. Participation in this study was voluntary and anonymous.

### 2.2. Instruments

Quantitative and qualitative data for this study was collected through an electronic survey with both Likert-scale and open-ended responses. A link to the survey which directed the users to the site where the survey was being hosted (Google Docs) was posted in Facebook groups for first, second and third year students. These groups are created and managed by tutors that each study program at HBSL has, and they are mostly used for information sharing between students and their tutors. The questionnaire was in English and it contained 18 questions.

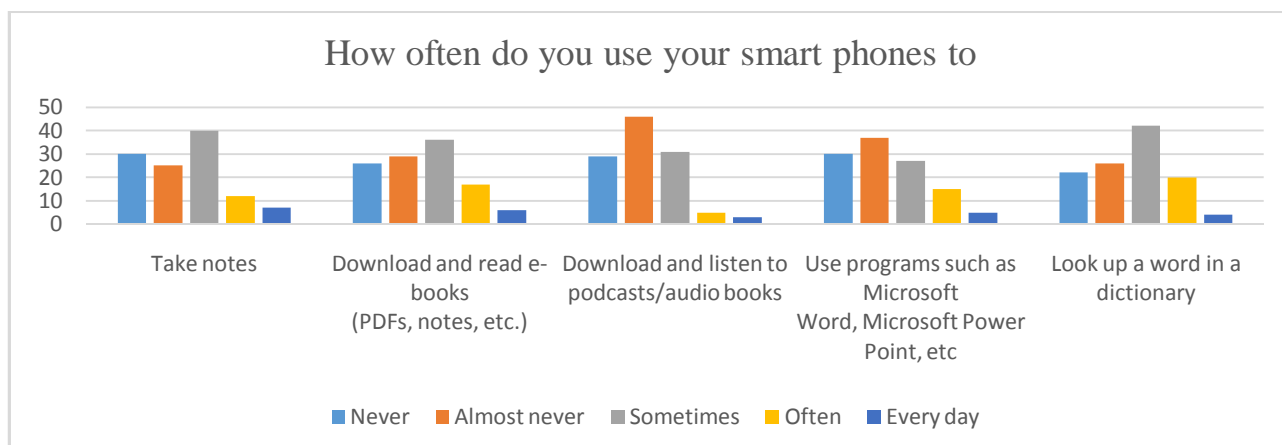
### 2.3. Data analysis and discussion

Question number 3(“Do you have mobile devices”) and 4(“If your answer is yes, what mobile devices do you have”) stand to show that mobile devices are widely spread and popular among student population as 98,2% of the sample claims to own at least one mobile device. Most of the students own a smart phone (65,8%) and a mobile phone 42,2% while only 3% of students own an iPod or an iPad device. Question number 5 aimed at showing how much time per day students spend using their mobile devices to perform non-academic activities such as making calls, sending text messages, checking e-mail, surfing the Internet, visiting social networks (Facebook, Instagram, etc.), listening to music and taking pictures. Frequency and type of use of mobile devices for non-academic (i.e. general) purposes is shown in chart 1.



**Chart 1.** How students use mobile devices for non-academic purposes

The results show that students’ main purpose in using their mobile devices is socializing (visiting social networks such as Facebook, Instagram, etc.) and surfing the Internet. A surprising fact is that 60, 4% of students spend less than 15 minutes to respond to or send new e-mails.



**Chart 2.** How often students use smart phones for “academic” activities

Question number 6 contrasts with question number 5 as it analyzes the frequency and type of use of mobile devices (in particular smart phones as we expected that the research will show that most of the students possess and extensively use smart phones in comparison to other mobile devices) for activities which can be considered important in an academic environment. The results show that students are not very keen on using their smart phones for activities which are outside the “fun and leisure” zone. While students in this research claim that they do “Sometimes” take notes or download and read e-books, or look up a word in a dictionary, categories “Never” and “Almost never” (their sum total) are greater in value than the sum of categories “Often” and “Every day” for every question asked. Still, when asked if they use their smart phones for academic purposes (question number 7), the majority of students answered “yes” – 69, 3%. These results lead us to a conclusion that students are perhaps unsure of what falls into the category “academic purposes”, so that further explanation or additional questions related to the topic are necessary to obtain more detailed and precise data. This questionnaire also did not deal with the reasons why students use or do not use mobile devices for activities as the ones previously mentioned, so this question remains to be answered in some next research.

Answers obtained for question number 8 – “Do you use any apps for studying” confirm the results obtained in questions number 6 and number 7 and the interpretation we offer. Namely, 57% of the surveyed students said that they do not use any apps (applications for smart phones – Android or iOS) for studying (by studying we here refer to any kind of study). Of those who did answer “yes” (43% - n=49) – the majority wrote EDMODO (19 students out of 30 who did provide an answer to an open-ended question to write down the names of apps that a student used for studying – question number 9). EDMODO is an online networking application that helps connect learners around the world to resources and people in the process of acquiring or developing new skills. This famous Learning Management System was founded in 2008 and it now counts more than 79 million users. At HBSL, EDMODO was introduced in the school year 2014/2015 and since then it has been used for Business English and English for Tourism classes (I, II and III year of study). Students learning experience related to the use of this platform will be published as a part of a PhD dissertation of one of the foreign language professors at HBSL. Other answers that students provided for this questions were Google Translate (3 respondents), Duolingo (2), Memrise (1), Mondly languages (1), Microsoft Word and Power Point (1). Provided answers show that students’ experience with the use of smart phone apps for studying is not vast as the majority claims not to have used them and another factor that leads to the same conclusion is that some who did answer “yes” avoided giving an answer to the question what apps were used for studying purposes. It is important to mention that numerous researchers point out that the knowledge on how to use mobile devices for social or any other, specific personal functions is not always a good indicator on how to use mobile devices for educational purposes. A research conducted by Abdous, Camarena and Facer in 2009, found that learners did not listen to podcasts for learning languages because they lacked the knowledge on how to download and use such content. [13]

Question number 10 collected information on the use of apps for studying foreign languages (“Have you ever used any app to study a foreign language?”) Answers obtained are in line with results for the previous question – 58% of the students answered “No” as opposed to 42% who said “Yes”. Those who answered yes had to answer the following question (question number 11) which urged them to provide names of apps they used for foreign language study. Here again many students avoided giving an answer while those who did answer (37 students of 47 who answered “yes” in question number 8) provided the following answers – Edmodo (10), Google

Translate (6), Duolingo (5), Busuu (2), Mondly languages (1), Rosetta Stone (1), English Lesson (1), Urban dictionary (1), English-Croatian dictionary (1), Españoldiccionario (1). Some of the answers were unclear; namely, some students wrote down answers such as “German,” “Francis,” “French language” or “Translate.” There are no apps for smart phones under these names, so these answers remain unclear. Also, 4 students wrote that they do not remember the names of the apps they used for foreign language study.

The before mentioned platform for learning, EDMODO, although actively used at HBSL, is not an obligatory requirement for any of the English language courses. It is predominantly used for “outside the classroom” activities. Therefore, the results for question number 12 – “Do you use EDMODO on your smart phone (EDMODO app)” are not surprising. One half of the surveyed students (50%) answered no. These results are in slight discordance with results for questions number 8 and 10 where the percentages of negative answers were 57% and 58% respectively. Students who said that they did not use EDMODO on their smart phones were asked to explain why they avoided using smart phone version of EDMODO. 37 students provided an answer to this question and the majority of them said that they find it easier to use the program on their computer (14 students gave this answer). Other answers were: lack of phone memory, dislike of mobile version or lack of need for its use on a smart phone.

In question number 14 we asked students to tell us how familiar they are with some of the most famous applications for foreign language study. The following table provides summary of students’ answers.

**Table 1.** Number of students and the level of familiarity with a particular language learning app

	I have never heard of it	I have heard of it but I haven’t used it	I used it
Learn English by Listening	27	60	27
Learn English Grammar	33	62	19
Duolingo	65	39	10
Practice English Grammar	42	53	19
Business English Skills	40	56	18
Business English Pod	59	50	5
Busuu - Easy Language Learning	51	53	10
Babbel – Learn Languages	61	48	5

We understand that out of 114 students who participated in the study, only a small number uses or has used any of the here named applications. In some cases (Business English Pod, Busuu – Easy Language Learning and Babbel – Learn Languages) the difference in number of those who have never heard of the application and those who have heard of it but haven’t used it, is rather small. Surprisingly, a high number of students has not heard of Duolingo (65 students), a language learning app with over 120 millions of users. Other surprising fact here is the number of students who have used this app – 10 out of 114 participants.

Question number 15 investigates students’ readiness and willingness to adopt new technology for foreign language study in classroom setting. Moreover, this question aims at understanding students’ perception on the use of mobile technology for language learning. Respondents rated each item on a 1-5 Likert scale from “strongly agree” (5) to “strongly disagree” (1).

**Table 2.** Students’ perception and attitude on the use of mobile device for language learning

Question 15- Statements	<i>n</i> =	<i>m</i> =	<i>sd</i> =	<i>mode</i> =	<i>median</i> =
1. Mobile devices can be a great tool for language learning	114	4.008	0.832	agree	agree
2. Teachers should incorporate mobile devices in language learning activities	114	3.429	0.878	agree	neutral
3. I am willing to use mobile devices for language learning purposes	114	3.666	0.818	agree	agree
4. Mobile devices are more suitable tools for language learning than printed materials	114	3.052	1.066	neutral	neutral
5. I think I would be distracted if we used mobile devices for language learning	114	3.175	1.019	agree	neutral

6. I am ready to use mobile devices for language learning purposes	114	3.710	2.709	agree	agree
7. I need training to use mobile devices for language learning purposes	114	3.114	1.090	neutral	neutral
8. I think I would learn more if I could use mobile devices during class	114	3.429	0.973	agree	neutral
9. I think mobile devices cannot be used for serious language learning	114	2.973	2.023	neutral	neutral
10. It is better to use computers than smart phones for language study	114	3.464	1.061	neutral	neutral

The results show that the majority of students is willing and ready to adopt new tools for foreign language learning. Students see mobile devices as a great tool for language study (m=4.008). They mostly agree that teachers should incorporate mobile devices in language learning activities and that they would benefit from such way of teaching. In that sense, although the majority of the sample is neutral when it comes to choosing between printed materials and mobile devices, the percentage of those who find mobile devices more suitable tools for language learning is greater to that who thinks the opposite. On the other hand, what worries, to some extent, are the results which show that students think that they would be distracted if they used mobile devices for language learning and that they find it better to use computers than smart phones for language study.

Question number 16 asked students to say whether they would use their mobile devices to perform homework assignment. The majority (61,9%) answered “maybe.” This question was incorporated into the study as more and more research show that the number of students using smart phones or tablets to complete homework assignments is increasing. This research ends on a positive note as 53.5% of students say that they would use applications for foreign language study (in their free time) if their teacher recommended some. Finally, having determined and understood the level of familiarity and use of mobile devices and apps for foreign language study (and generally use of mobile devices for academic purposes) as well as students’ attitude on the use of mobile devices for language learning, we wanted to tackle with the issue of students’ motivation for learning English language. Namely, motivation is considered one of the key factors that determines success in second language learning. Motivation is defined as “the learner's orientation with regard to the goal of learning a second language.”[14] Motivation is divided into two basic types: integrative and instrumental. Integrative motivation is said to be motivation where learners want to learn a language because they want to be able to communicate with people who speak that language. Instrumental motivation, on the other hand, is such where students want to learn a language out of particular reasons, that being either success in school or job setting. As the correlation between the increase in student motivation and use of mobile devices for language learning is obvious and proven by several researchers (Gardner 2007, Csizer&Dörnyei 2005, Dörnyei 2003, Kimetal 2013) we wanted to identify learners’ motivational orientations. The obtained results for question number 18 (“What is your main goal of learning English”) show that the majority of students (67,3%) learn English in order to communicate with people who speak this language while 21,2% learns English to succeed in work. This data, together with the rest collected through this research, will help better prepare further research on this topic and subsequently implement mobile technology in language learning at HBSL.

### 3. CONCLUSION

Mobile devices have completely invaded all aspect of our lives. From tools used merely for communication to entertainment tools and tools used for educational purposes, mobile devices have become not only a necessity but a tool we wish to employ and which we extensively enjoy using in gathering new knowledge or developing new or already existing skills. Mobile devices are said to make the language learning process “personalized, authentic and situated.”[15] Convenience, flexibility and portability which are associated with mobile devices are additional reasons to consider when employing these devices in all learning environments. Still, the constant advances in technology are, in many cases, not followed by examples of effective use of that technology. The use of mobile devices in the process of language learning (and learning in general) is still being marginalized especially in Serbia. Consequently, this study aimed at understanding the currents students’ practices in using mobile devices for both educational and non-educational purposes and in particular learning of English language, as well as their perception on the use of mobile devices for such activities. The results of this research show that students’ experience with the use of mobile devices for learning (language learning) is rather limited as students choose to use their mobile devices for leisure activities over academic purposes. One learning platform (and mobile application) which is used by the surveyed students is the one presented to them in class – EDMODO. This, together with results obtained for questions related to students readiness and willingness to use mobile devices for language learning (positive) and students’ motivation, leads us to a conclusion that students

at HBSL need to be actively familiarized with new modes of learning (including numerous ways of employing mobile technology for language learning) and further motivated to accept these new ways of acquiring new knowledge.

The process of integrating mobile technology in the classroom is extremely complex. It comes in stages and must include revision of numerous factors that have effect on the learning outcomes. In line with student centered approach where a teacher must first be aware of students' needs and abilities, this study is but the first step in adopting m-technology in a conservative setting where numerous limitations interfere with incorporation of full-scale mobile learning initiative. Since this is a small-scale study, further research would investigate larger student body and would try to tackle with other hindering factors in adoption of mobile technology for language learning.

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