**Motivating students to read fiction books in English through ‘WordParty’ mobile app**

Urazova A.D, Telgoziev M.Zh., Kerimsheyeva I.K.

Nazarbayev intellectual school of physics and mathematics in Shymkent, Kazakhstan

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Аннотация

Бұл мақалада мобильді қолданбалар арқылы студенттерді ағылшын тілінде көркем әдебиетті оқуға ынталандырудың жолдары қарастырылған, мысалы WordParty мобильді қолданбасы мысал ретінде келтірілген. Мобильді қолданбаларды қолдану көркем кітаптарды оқуға ғана емес, сонымен қатар ағылшын тілінде емтихан тапсырудың маңызды құрамдас бөлігі болып табылатын оқу дағдысын жетілдіруге де септігін тигізеді.

Аннотация

Данная статья рассматривает пути мотивации учащихся к чтению художественной литературы на английском языке посредством мобильных приложений, в частности в статье приводится в пример мобильное приложение ‘WordParty’. Использование мобильных приложений не только способствует чтению художественных книг, но также и усовершенствованию навыка чтения, являющимся одним из важных компонентов при сдаче экзаменов на английском языке.

**Introduction**

To identify the topic for project work we had informal conversations with our colleagues within the English Department alongside with my observations of the school life. Doing that, we tried to clarify the next issues: *Challenges teachers face* and *What could be better at my school*.

Based on conversations, one of the key issues was a comparatively low results of reading according to the results of formal tests, such as IELTS and school exams at the end of each term. We also noted a low interest for reading books among students. Therefore, one issue, which seemed particularly interesting to us was to consider ways on how to raise students' motivation to read fiction books in English. Initial ideas included to organise activities among classes or even years.

**Rationale and Purposes**

These days, due to increased interest in TV, Internet surfing, social networks and computer games, interest in reading has decreased dramatically. Many people, especially teenagers, think that surfing Internet is cool in comparison with reading books (Alsup, 2017).

According to Shamatov (2015), low reading skills result in low performance in all subjects. On the contrary, the more time students spend on reading in their leisure time, there is a strong possibility that they will succeed in reading comprehension tests and academic reading in their further tertiary studies (Shamatov, 2015). Also, according to (Alsup, 2017), due to reading fiction, brainwork is encouraged to analyse the situations in the fiction books and draw a link to the real life.

It is assumed to take an advantage of the habit of using mobile phones and to use it for reading.

Thus, the purpose of the present project is to motivate students to read fiction books in English through ‘WordParty’ mobile app.

**Literature support**

The Internet offers a wide selection of books, which has a free access. Accessibility and many options for selecting books with one touch of a button encourage reading. For example, there is a wide range of books suggested for kids at The International Children's Digital Library (ICDL) at the University of Maryland. ICDL explores the relationship between children's access to e-books and children's perceptions of books, libraries, reading, technology, and other countries and cultures. Access to children's literature through the Internet contributes to their better understanding of the various cultures around the world (Castek, Bevans‐Mangelson & Goldstone, 2006)

According to the research by Scholastic US in 2012, it was revealed that children read more on computers and other gadgets rather than paper-based books. Majority of children answered that they have smart phones, computers, tablets and have access to Internet (Picton, 2014).

The study conducted in 2013 showed that reading on iPads had a positive impact on adolescents’ overall enjoyment of reading, mentioning dictionary and possibility to adjust font size as significant factors. However, researchers agree that this impact could be partially explained by the popularity of the iPad (Picton, 2014)

National Literacy Trust research found that children from low social background who read using both paper-based books and e-books in many cases performed better than if they read paper-based books only (Picton, 2014).

The research conducted by Picton and Clark (2015) proves that children’s interest in reading increased particlurly due to using technologies for reading.

However, McCormick, P. (2009) argues that paper-based books are good at developing concentration and the ability to keep attention, while with e-books, readers can be easily distracted by notifications and advertisements.

Thus, it is assumed that students’ motivation to read will increase with using technology. Also, it is necessary to get students’ feedback on their perceptions on the type of material to read using technology.

In addition to the literature review, we used Internet resources searching for tips on how to motivate students to read fiction. Among useful pieces of advice, one of the most popular one was to use technology, more precisely, authors suggested various online reading apps, such as Newsela, Useful science, Whooo’s reading, BookWidgets and etc. Therefore, we decided to choose one reading app to suggest to our focus group of students. While selecting the appropriate app, we were guided by the following criteria:

* Free access
* Availability in our country
* User-friendly app
* Vocabulary help (translation, definitions, synonyms)
* Range of books and genres
* Offline mode

Based on the above criteria, WordParty has been selected to use to motivate students to read.

**Activities (Methodology)**

To implement the project, the following activities were conducted.

**Step 1**

We had a conversation with the Head of English Department. The purpose of the meeting was to present the action plan on the implementation of the project and to introduce the mobile app, which was the main source to use for motivating students to read fiction in English. Regarding the outcome of the project, we were guided with one of the main types of differentiated approach, which is differentiation by outcome (Wellington). Several possible ways of expected outcome were discussed during the intensive session in Astana. Based on that, the possibility of exhibiting students’ reviews/posters on the creativity corner was agreed with the the head of ED. Then we had a conversation with a school librarian about the date and requirements of READx project to agree the possibility of presenting the book by students at the READx meeting.

**Step 2**

We demonstrated the mobile app using [www.wordparty.com](http://www.wordparty.com) resource to students and invited them to join the project. We looked at its possibilities and functions. Allow young readers choice about what they read. Alsup (2017) emphasizes the importance of giving students freedom to choose books to read. Therefore, we encouraged students to decide what book to read. Regarding the outcome after reading the book, our students were suggested several options. The first option was to present the book at the meeting of the READx project. The second suggestion involved writing a review of the chosen book. The last option was to create a poster based on the book. Finally, we agreed to discuss the interim progress the following week.

**Step 3**

Alsup (2017) suggests to read together with students and discuss books. Thus, a week later, we met with students to discuss the progress and to see what they have achieved so far. Students shared their opinion regarding the content of the book they were reading and also shared their experience of reading using WordParty mobile app.

**Step 4**

There was a final part of the project. It consisted of two parts, students’ presentations and then their written feedback. First, as Ellery (2010) suggests, students summarized the essential information and shared their thoughts regarding the content of the book. Also, they talked about their favourite characters, the moments that they liked most and were encouraged to justify their answers. Then they gave their feedback on the WordParty app in written form. They were asked to write their opinion on the advantages and disadvantages of the app and whether they will continue to use this app to read books in the future and whether they would recommend their friends to read books through reading apps.

**Project outcomes**

The expected outcome of the present project was an increase in students’ motivation to read. Even though it is challenging to measure the changes in the level of motivation in two weeks, according to the feedback students provided, overall, they enjoyed the process of reading books through the given mobile app and more than half of participants stated that they will continue using the app in the future. However, some students decided not to use the given app in the future, instead, they intend to find more advanced one. Nevertheless, the main goal of the project was to motivate students to read and we assume it was achieved, and the fact that they suggest different app proves that they get interested in the idea.

**Successes and challenges**

Regarding successes of the project, it is important to mention that all participants demonstrated interest and willingness to try the app for reading.

Based on students’ feedback, they mostly liked that the app is free and has user-friendly interface. One of the main advantages was a quick translation of unfamiliar words. Also, they mentioned that it has a wide range of books of different genres. Another advantage is that it is possible to read books offline.

Alongside with advantages discussed above, there were definitely some disadvantages mentioned by students in their written feedback. One of the main drawbacks was that sometimes the app suggested direct translations of the words which were not connected with the context of the reading text. Another disadvantage was that the app took rather long time to load.

**Lessons learned**

According to the students’ feedback, in recommendations section one of the participants mentioned that there are more advanced reading apps available in Play Market. Therefore, the conclusion which we draw for the future is to involve students from the beginning to discuss and listen to their initiatives.

**Link to theory**

Some participants mentioned that they prefer online reading for searching facts and reading news. In terms of reading for pleasure, they were in favour of reading paper-based books. This fact supports the research findings that the choice to use either gadget or books depends on the type of material to be read, more precisely, computers and smartphones are usually used for reading news and non-fiction (Picton, 2014).

**Conclusion and recommendations**

All in all, the present project had both successes and some challenges. Reflecting on the activities conducted and the whole process, we can conclude that this project gave us an opportunity to learn more about my students’ reading habits and preferences. The literature review contributed to our better understanding of using technology for reading. This small-scale project made us think about the importance of small steps in achieving good results.

Regarding the recommendations for the future projects, in case of working with students it is recommended to have more of their active participation in steps of the project.

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