The overview of digital instruments and mobile applications for EFL at school

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Abstract: These days it is impossible to imagine everyday routine without digital technologies and the sphere of education is not an exception. The use of digital technologies for educational process is becoming especially relevant because they create new opportunities for studying and assist to make lessons more attractive, useful and productive for learners. The aim of the article is to reveal the tendency of using digital technologies by teachers at the lessons and define the most popular ones. This article discusses a variety of digital instruments and mobile applications for learning English used for different educational purposes by both teachers and learners. The article provides an experience of using digital instruments and mobile applications by school teachers based on data collection, generated from the survey. The survey results have shown that most school teachers have regular tendency to apply digital technologies and mobile applications at their lessons to make it more interesting for learners, however, some school teachers considering these technologies useful still rarely or never apply them at their lessons. The article findings can benefit teachers with identified variety of digital instruments and mobile applications for teaching and assist to engage learners into the process of teaching a foreign language efficiently.

Қалай дәйексөз алуға болады / Как цитировать / How to cite:

Introduction

The current trend of the educational system development implies the active introduction of digital technologies in all spheres of educational activity because digital competence is one of the main competencies of the XXI century. The President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev in his message "Digitalization of Kazakhstan: new growth horizons" stated that one of the main factors of competitiveness in the modern world is deep digitalization and for Kazakhstan, the transfer of modern digital technologies is extremely important. The standards of education of the new generation and the modern society determine the need to consider digital competence as a component of the information and communication competence of the teacher. This competence includes knowledge, skills and abilities that are necessary to assess the impact of digital technologies on teaching foreign languages, the adaptation of methods for their successful integration into a traditional language classroom, the ability to interactively use modern communication tools and technologies in the process of teaching foreign languages.

The process of digitalization of modern education in the field of teaching a foreign language intends to provide the possibility of improving a foreign language acquisition, increasing information content, interaction and learning efficiency. These days, distance learning has already become our reality where lectures and webinars are offered in electronic format and digitalization has brought these changes to the educational process. The entry of digital technologies into educational process lays the groundwork for pivotal upgrade of theoretical and methodological foundations of teaching and learning foreign languages. Researchers in the field claim that digitalization focuses on maintaining such a modern education tendency as lifelong learning and creates conditions for the individual educational growth based on digital technologies [1]. Modern means of instructions in the context of digitalization can offer unique visual features that allow a teacher and a learner to change the learning process completely.

Moreover, the adaptation of digital technologies into learning process raises the possibility of making students not passive but active in educational activities as specifically students are the main participants of the learning process [2].

However, the use of digital technologies requires an innovative approach to the organization of the educational process in line with indispensable pedagogical criteria to improve the process of forming a foreign language communicative competence of school students [3]. The appearance of different gadgets leads to using them in education for the enhancement of educational process as a visual tool, the instrument of drilling, skill training or the resource of additional information where a teacher can create new opportunities for students to deepen subject knowledge, develop digital literacy and creativeness. Furthermore, the last two years of pandemic and its consequences can be taken as an example that digital technologies are of greatest relevance for all life spheres especially for education as it was unbelievable to live online life and to study online only for nearly a year. The only way to provide communication for studies was using various educational platforms, different digital instruments and mobile applications. It became another crucial point of an ultimate adaptation of digital technologies into educational area.

These days, it is increasingly evident that the use of mobile phones is significant as people use them not only for calls but also for studies. There are lots of digital instruments that can be used for teaching and learning different languages, especially English, moreover, almost all of the digital educational instruments have their own mobile applications with appropriate service for making the learning process more comfortable and comprehensible. There is a direction of using computers in teaching languages such as Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL), which is "defined as an approach for teaching languages, where the computer acts as an auxiliary tool for presenting and evaluating material [4] and Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) which is language learning that is assisted or enhanced

through the use of a mobile digital device. MALL differs from CALL in its use of personal, "portable devices that enable new ways of learning, it focuses on the continuity or spontaneity of access and interaction across different contexts of use" [5], [6].

Digital instruments in educational area are a subgroup of digital technologies which are elaborated for developing the quality and information rate for teaching and learning, also for making educational process more attractive for children and students [7]. They include electronic educational systems, social networks, educational platforms, services for gamification and others. The aims of such sources are to simplify the process of teaching and learning, to monitor academic results and progress, to increase the interest and involvement of children into educational process with the help of diverse forms of obtaining knowledge, however, a high quality of the educational process is the main aim of using digital instruments.

These days, there are lots of digital instruments and mobile applications which can assist teachers with teaching English language, for feedback and can be useful for individual learning. Most of these digital instruments have mobile application for making education process more accessible. Ones of the most popular are Padlet, Kahoot, Learning Apps, Miro, Microsoft Teams, Mentimeter, Plickers, Google services, Zoom, Skype and others [8], [9]. There is a need to group these digital instruments and mobile applications by following classification:

1. Digital services for organizing online-meetings or online-classrooms in a real-time environment such as Microsoft Teams, ZOOM, Skype, Whats App.

2. Digital services for organizing collaborative activities at the lessons such as Padlet, Google services, Miro, Mentimeter.

3. Digital services for academic performance, assessment or for organizing tasks for self-control such as Kahoot, Learning Apps, Quizlet, Quizizz, Google services.

Considering this classification, there are some popular digital instruments and mobile applications for teaching and learning English language such as Padlet, Kahoot, Google services and Zoom.

Padlet is a multifunctional service for storage, organization and co-working with various materials. This instrument can be used by a teacher for having effective lessons with the opportunity to distribute study materials, to organize project activities of children, to conduct a survey, to create an announcement board and others [10].

Kahoot is an educational platform based on games and questions. This service provides teachers with the opportunity to create and apply gaming elements for attracting children's attention. Children answer questions while playing the game. They can see the questions on the shared screen and use their own smartphones, tablets or laptops [11].

Google service is an online service for creating forms for reflection and feedback, online testing and surveys. This service is simple in using with comfortable and understandable interface [12].

Zoom is one of the most popular video conferencing and online meeting services. Zoom helps students to study in a distance learning environment. The advantages of this tool include stability in the operation of the platform, the ability of the organizer to turn on / off the microphones, turn off or request the participants to turn on the video, screen sharing can be paused and a built-in interactive whiteboard. The disadvantage is a complex interface, as well as a time limit (the duration of the videoconference is limited to 30 minutes, after which the connection with the participants is automatically interrupted) [13].

Materials and methods

The article is aimed at revealing the most relevant tendency of using digital instruments

and mobile applications for teaching English language in the context of digitalization in Kazakhstani schools. To achieve this aim, the most popular digital instruments and mobile applications are specified by conducting a survey among 45 English language teachers at schools who have different number of years of teaching experience. The survey was comprised of 7 questions designed to gather detailed insights into the teachers' usage patterns, preferences, and challenges related to digital tools. This survey was prepared by Google forms which allows to analyze the received answers visually by graphs, pie charts and individually.

Results and discussion

The article presents the results obtained from a survey among English language teachers currently working at schools. 45 English language teachers completed a survey whose working experience ranges from 2 to 40 years. This range in experience provides a broad perspective on how digital tools and mobile applications are utilized across different levels of expertise.

By capturing insights from teachers at various stages of their careers, the survey offers a more comprehensive understanding of how digitalization is being integrated into English language instruction in Kazakhstani schools. The findings from this survey aim to highlight key trends and challenges in the use of digital technologies in education, reflecting both the innovations applied by young teachers and the adaptations made by more experienced ones.

The first question is focused on the number of years of teaching experience (figure 1). Out of the 45 respondents, 28 English language teachers (62%) have answered as 10 and less years of teaching experience, while 17 teachers (38%) have an experience of more than 10 years. More than a half of participants (62%) in this survey are young teachers that indicates that the use of digital instruments and mobile applications are more attractive for young teachers than for more experienced teachers, because before completing this questionnaire they were acquainted with the topic.
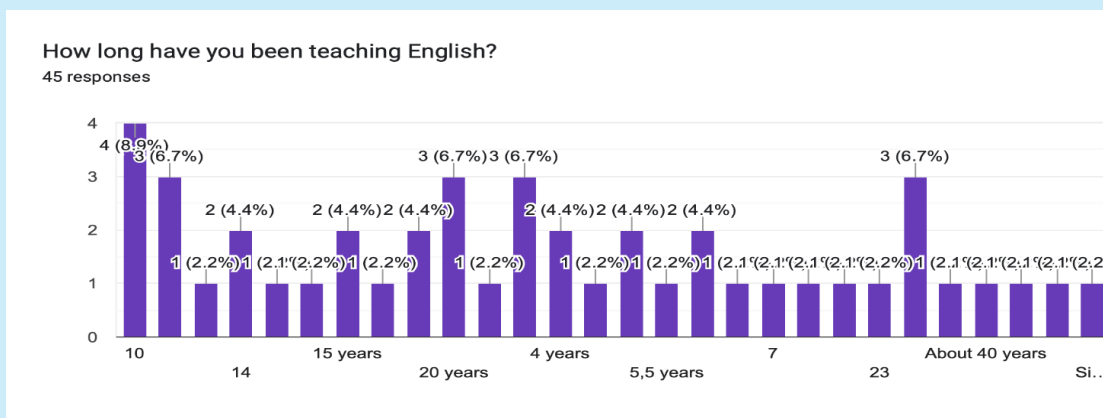

Figure 1. The period of teaching experience

In the second question, the teachers indicated the educational stages they taught (figure 2). The results of this question show that most of the teachers have classes from different educational stages, where some of

them can teach all of the stages while others teach two of three. The biggest number of teachers is 29 (64.4%) who teach in secondary school while 55.5% of teachers (25) teach high school students. 17 teachers (37.7%)

have primary classes, 4 of them (8.9%) teach adults and 4 teachers (8,8%) teach at universities. As this article is considering the use of digital instruments and mobile applications by teachers at schools, the teachers who give lessons in universities or for adults will be eliminated from the survey. Analyzing the individual lists of answers, only one teacher teaches English for only university students, while the rest 44 respondents have a mix of classes.

What level (levels) do you usually teach?
45 responses

- Primary school — 16 (35.6%)
- Secondary school — 28 (62.2%)
- High school — 24 (53.3%)
- Adults — 4 (8.9%)
- University — 2 (4.4%)
- All school levels including univ… — 1 (2.2%)
- Students of university — 1 (2.2%)
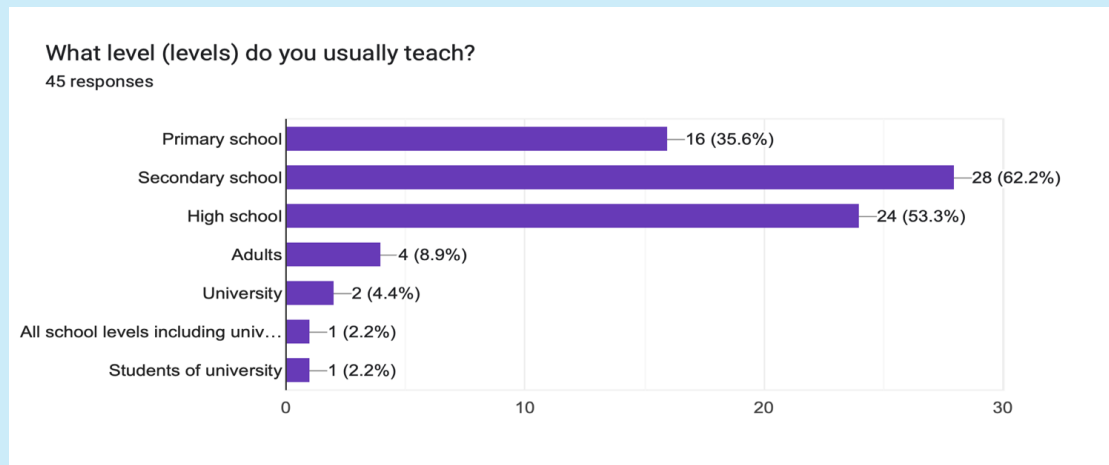
Figure 2. Educational stage

The third question was about the using of digital instruments and mobile applications at the lessons which required answers "Yes" or "No" (figure 3). 44 participants (97.8%) answered "yes", while only one participant marked "No". This strong majority highlights the widespread adoption of digital instruments among English language teachers in Kazakhstani schools, showing that nearly all teachers in the survey are integrating digital tools into their instructional practices.

Do you use any digital instruments or mobile apps at your lessons?
45 responses

97.8%

● Yes
● No
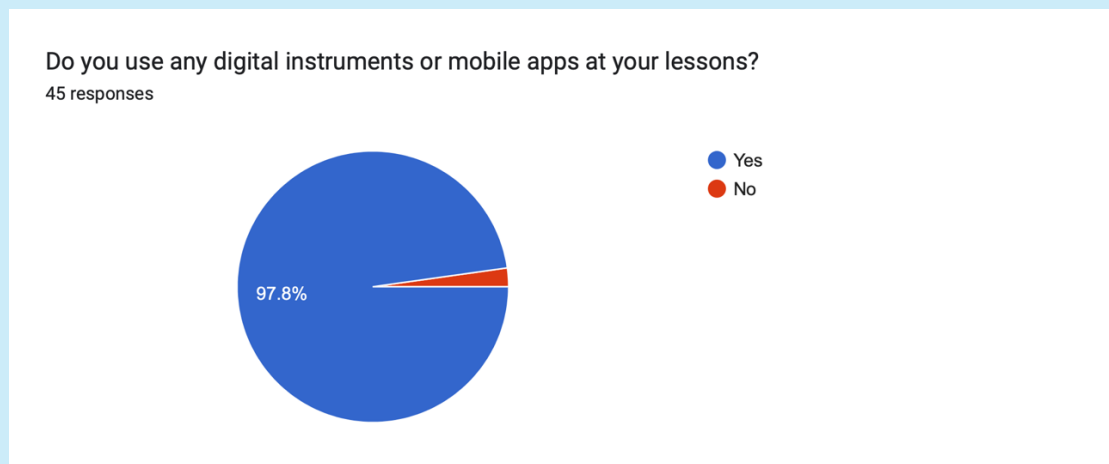
Figure 3. The use of digital instruments and mobile applications

The fourth question was about the frequency of applying mobile applications and digital instruments for teaching, which has shown that 33.3% of the teachers "often" use digital instruments or mobile application at the lessons, 31.3% "always" use such instruments, 24.4% - "sometimes", 11.1% - "rarely" (figure 4). Neither of participants marked "never" which means that all the teachers (young and more experienced teachers) try to use new technologies for making their lessons more interesting for students and integrating new technologies into their teaching practices. It means that teachers recognize the value of using digital tools to enhance engagement and make lessons more dynamic and appealing to students.

How often do you use digital instruments or mobile apps at the lessons?
45 responses

- Always
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never
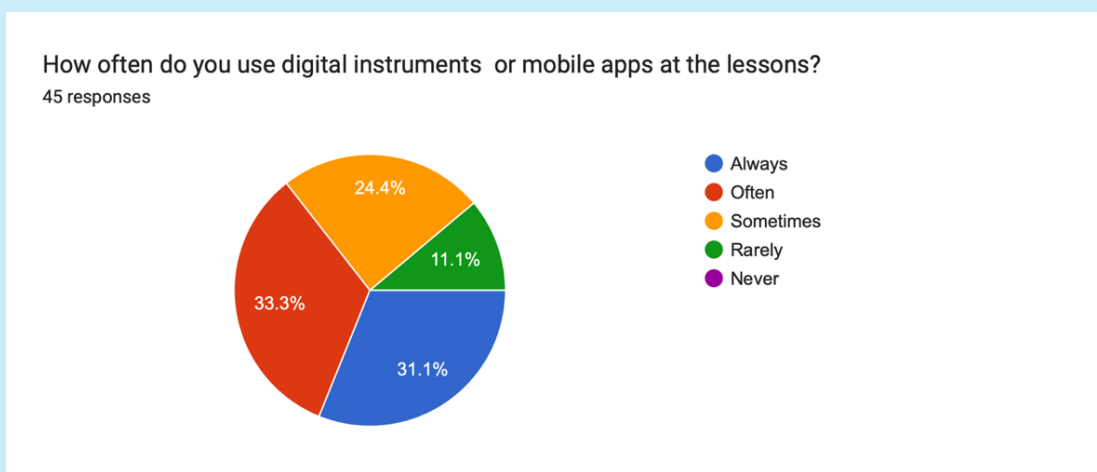
Figure 4. The frequency of using digital instruments and mobile applications

The fifth question was: What are the most useful digital instruments for teaching English you have applied (figure 5)? (For example: Kahoot, quizlet, learningapps, miro, etc.) The examples were given in order to give participants a line of thinking. The most popular digital instruments used by the participants were Kahoot (18), Miro (9), Wordwall (7), Padlet and Quizlet (6), Google documents (5), Zoom (4), Quizizz and learningapps (2) and others like Jamboard, Nearpod, Preply, BBC, Joyteka, Canvas, Edvibe, Youtube, Microsoft Teams, Mentimeter, quizalize were mentioned by one participant only. Some of the digital instruments were mentioned by the several participants. One of the participants mentioned "notebook and mobile phone" as digital instrument.

Thus, question indicates that teachers also experiment with a variety of digital tools to meet specific teaching needs and classroom dynamics. This variety also reflects the flexibility of digital tools to support diverse approaches for language instruction, whether for assessments, interactive learning, or collaborative work.

What are the most useful digital instruments for teaching English you have applied? (For example: Kahoot, quizlet, learningapps, miro, etc.)

45 responses

Kahoot

Wordwall

Padlet

Quizzes, Miro

Quizlet, Jamboard, Google Documents

Nearpod,qr code, Bilimland platform

Kahoot, quizlet, padlet, jamboard

Miro and quizlet

WordWall

Figure 5. The list of the most useful digital instruments

The sixth question was about the most useful mobile applications for teaching English where the examples of such applications were written (figure 6). One of the most often mentioned apps is Kahoot (11), Duolingo, Quizlet, Padlet, Memrise (4), wordwall (3), Words and Quizizz (2) and others like Miro, Nearpod, Grammarly, Telegram, Zoom, English galaxy, Wordout, Goosechase, Canva, British Council, Offline dictionary and lingualeo were mentioned only once by several participants. One of the participants mentioned "notebook and mobile" as a mobile application.

The results highlight that teachers are also exploring other applications to enhance language learning. This diversity emphasizes the flexibility and adaptability of mobile technologies in supporting different teaching approaches and objectives in English language instruction.

What are the most useful mobile apps for teaching English you have applied? (For example: kahoot, memrise, duolingo, words, etc.)

45 responses

Kahoot

Wordwall

Duolingo

Quizlet

Duolingo

Words

Padlet

Miro, Quizzes, Kahoot

Kahoot and nearpod

Figure 6. The list of the most useful mobile applications

The final question asked participants to express their level of agreement regarding the effectiveness and usefulness of digital technologies and mobile applications for teaching English (Figure 7). The majority of respondents held a positive view, with 25 participants (55.6%) selecting "agree," and 11 participants (24.4%) marking "strongly agree." This indicates that more than 80% of the teachers surveyed believe that digital tools play a valuable role in English language instruction.

A smaller portion, 7 participants (15.6%), expressed a neutral stance, suggesting they may see some benefits but perhaps have reservations or remain undecided about the full impact of these technologies. Only 1 participant (2.2%) chose "disagree," and another participant (2.2%) selected "strongly disagree," indicating a very small minority of teachers who do not view digital tools as beneficial for their teaching.

Overall, the data reflects a strong consensus among teachers that digital technologies and mobile applications are effective tools in enhancing English language education, with only a few participants who feel otherwise. This general agreement presents the growing acceptance and reliance on technology to engage students and improve learning outcomes in Kazakhstani schools.
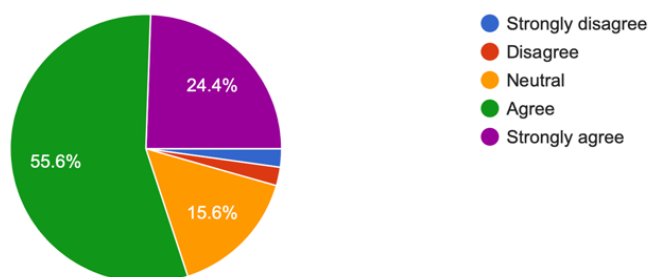

Figure 7. The effectiveness of using digital technologies and mobile applications

Conclusion

In conclusion, the integration of digital technologies into education is essential, as they are widely regarded as highly effective tools for enhancing the teaching and learning process. However, these digital instruments and mobile applications are not designed to replace teachers but rather to complement their efforts by fostering a learning environment that encourages collaboration and productivity among learners. The survey revealed that teachers are familiar with and competent in using a variety of digital educational platforms and mobile applications, demonstrating that these tools play a significant role in improving the effectiveness and attractiveness of language education.

However, the findings also suggest that there is a need for teachers to be better informed about how to seamlessly integrate technology into the educational process. Additionally, there is a clear necessity to fur-

ther develop teachers' capacities in effectively using digital tools and mobile applications in their lessons, ensuring that they are well-equipped to harness the full potential of these technologies to enhance their digital skills and pedagogical practices. This continued professional development will be key to optimizing the benefits of digital instruments in education.

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Обзор цифровых инструментов и мобильных приложений для изучения английского языка как иностранного в школе

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Аннотация: В наши дни невозможно представить повседневную жизнь без цифровых технологий, и сфера образования не является исключением. Использование цифровых технологий в образовательном процессе становится особенно актуальным, поскольку они создают новые возможности для обучения и помогают сделать уроки более привлекательными, полезными и продуктивными для учащихся. Цель статьи - выявить тенденции использования учителями на уроках цифровых технологий и определить наиболее популярные из них. В данной статье представлен опыт применения учителями школ цифровых инструментов и мобильных приложений. Сбор и анализ данных был получен в ходе онлайн-опроса, в котором участвовали около 45 учителей английского языка. Результаты опроса показали, что большинство школьных учителей регулярно используют цифровые технологии и мобильные приложения, чтобы сделать уроки иностранного языка более интересными, однако другая часть опрошенных считает эти технологии полезными, но редко или никогда не применяет их на своих занятиях. Выводы этой статьи могут познакомить учителей с разнообразием цифровых инструментов и мобильных приложений и помочь эффективно вовлечь учащихся в процесс обучения иностранному языку.

Ключевые слова: цифровые инструменты, мобильные приложения, цифровизация, цифровые технологии, образовательные инструменты.

Мектепте ағылшын тілін шет тілі ретінде үйренуге арналған сандық құралдар мен мобильді қосымшаларға шолу

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Аңдатпа. Қазіргі таңда күнделікті өмірді цифрлық технологиясыз елестету мүмкін емес. Білім беру процесінде цифрлық технологияларды пайдалану әсіресе өзекті мәселе болып табылады, өйткені олар жаңа оқу мүмкіндіктерін жасайды және оқушылар үшін сабақтарды тартымды және қызықты етуге көмектеседі. Осы мақаланың мақсаты- шет тіл сабақта цифрлық технологияларын қолдану тенденциясын сипаттау және осының ішінде ең танымалдарын анықтау. Мақалада мектеп мұғалімдерінің цифрлық құралдар мен мобильді қосымшаларды қолдану тәжірибесі келтірілген. Деректерді жинау және талдау мақсатымен онлайн сауалнамада 45-ке жуық ағылшын тілі мұғалімдері қатысты. Сауалнама нәтижелері көрсеткендей, мектеп мұғалімдерінің көпшілігі шет тілі сабақтарын қызықты ету үшін цифрлық және мобильді қосымшаларды үнемі пайдаланады, алайда сауалнамаға қатысқандардың тағы бір бөлігі бұл технологияларды пайдалы деп санасада өз сабақтарында жаңа технологияларды сирек немесе ешқашан қолданбайды. Бұл жағдай мұғалімдер арасында цифрлық білім мен дағдылардың жетіспеушілігін көрсетеді, сондықтан қосымша кәсіби даму мен білім беру бағдарламаларына қажеттілік туындайды. Соңғы талдаулар мұғалімдердің цифрлық құралдарды тиімді пайдалану үшін даярлықтарын арттырудың маңызды екенін көрсетеді. Осы мақаланың қорытындылары мұғалімдерді цифрлық құралдар мен мобильді қосымшалардың алуан түрлерімен таныстыра алады және оқушыларды шет тілін оқыту процесіне тиімді тартуға көмектеседі.

Түйінді сөздер: сандық құралдар, мобильді қосымшалар, цифрландыру, цифрлық/ сандық технологиялар, құзыреттілік, шет тілі, білім беру құралдары.