

Mediatized Teachers-Students Interactions: How Mobile Social Networks Modify Pedagogical Contact

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Abstract: This paper is inspired by work on a doctoral thesis "Transformation of intersubjectivity in mediatized higher education" (EHU, Lithuania), where the implementation of social networks in education is treated as one of the cases of a broader process of mediatization. To analyze the transformation of intersubjective interaction in the mediatized pedagogical process, phenomenological optics is used. In contrast to research that treats "student experience" as "user experience" that is open to manipulation, measurement, and optimization (Ginzburg, 2011), the phenomenological approach considers it as a subject-subject interaction and the event of coexistence in pedagogical contact (Friesen and Hug, 2009; Friesen 2011). Thus, the paper substantiates the relevance of phenomenological optics for searching for answers to the following questions: how does the use of mobile social networks transform the intersubjective interactions of teachers and students?; how does this implementation modify pedagogical contact?; what are the consequences for the whole pedagogical process? Application to phenomenological methodology and conducting hermeneutic interviews are proposed as ways to get answers to these questions.

Keywords: Higher education, Intersubjective interaction, Mediatization, Mobile social networks, Pedagogical contact, Phenomenology.

1. Introduction

According to statistics, 5.32 billion people around the world are mobile phone users. 4.65 billion of them, or 58,7% of the world's population, are active social media users (Kemp, 2022). Mobile gadgets and social networks as a means of communication are particularly popular among the so-called "Net Generation". The peculiarity of the representatives of this generation is that their socialization took place with quite free access to the Internet. Today these people make up the majority of college and university students (Barnes, Marateo and Ferris, 2007). Mobile phones and laptops are the main means of obtaining knowledge and skills for them. For this reason, universities are forced to increase their online presence and use social media to engage the audience in their events. In recent years in the field of higher education there has been a noticeable trend towards expanding the use of social networks by colleges and universities (Feehan, 2023). The above-mentioned facts actualize finding out the answer to the question of how to make use of mobile social networks, originally designed for entertainment (Larrieu and Di Gesù, 2021), an effective pedagogical tool.

2. Mediatization of Higher Education

The question of the place and role of mobile devices and social networks in modern education is part of a broader discussion on the mediatic turn and the influence of mediatization on the pedagogical process in general.

The mediatic turn can be defined as a transformational shift driven by the widespread use of media in all areas of life, including everyday human contacts and global social processes. According to Friesen and Hug approach this turn has fundamental cultural, epistemological, and even existential consequences (Friesen and Hug, 2009). Although modern researchers of mediatization (Couldry, 2012; Hajarvard, 2014; Krotz 2007; etc.) assess the specifics of the ongoing transformations in different ways, they are in solidarity with the fact that mediatization is a multifaceted phenomenon that affects social institutions, communication models, our behavior and values.

Mediatization as a meta-process influences education. Today we are unlikely to agree with R. Clark's conclusions, based on the results of comparative studies, that "there are no learning benefits" to be gained from the implementation of media in the pedagogical process (Clark, 1983: 445). According to the researcher, "media are delivery vehicles for instruction and do not directly influence learning" (Clark, 1983: 453). In the years following the publication of his work, many arguments were provided pointing out the fallacy of his view, e.g.: (Petkovich and Tennyson, 1984). Mediatization of higher education research (Friesen and Hug 2009; Oosthoek, 2013; Poplavskiy, 2021; etc.) emphasizes that the integration of media into education affects not only the quality of learning but also transforms the learning process itself, as well as its goals and objectives.

3. Mobile Social Networks as a Learning Tool

Since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic mobile social networks occupy an important place among mobile learning tools. Mobile learning can be described as planned and systematic use of mobile technologies in education. This interpretation is in line with the definition that describes mobile social networks 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 the learning opportunities offered by mobile technologies" (O'Malley et al. 2005: 7). This type of learning differs a lot from the usual practices: access to educational content is organized differently (via mobile applications); communication between teachers and students is not the same (there is a dependence on the application algorithms and the functions incorporated in its design); the planning of educational activity is also dissimilar.

Social networks play a special role in mobile education not only due to the wide range of their functions but first of all, due to their availability (or "handiness" (Zuhandenheit) in Heidegger's terminology). Social networks that allow access from mobile devices (Facebook, MySpace, Google Plus, etc.) and also mobile-based social networks, created by universities or student communities themselves, are actively used today to create virtual "bulletin boards", maintain contacts, control over the execution of tasks, exchange information, track the emotional mood of students, conduct consultations, etc.

Although the skepticism toward the possibilities of mobile social networks in higher education is still quite popular today, it is hardly possible to deny the influence of this tool on the process of obtaining new learning experiences for students.

4. Intersubjectivity in Mobile Learning Research

The overwhelming majority of works devoted to digital and, in particular, mobile technologies in educational activities comes from a paradigm in which the emphasis is made on the effective development of students' skills, their measurement, and reporting on their performance. Intersubjectivity in these publications attracts research interest insofar as interaction in mobile applications or social networks is a necessary condition for the successful achievement of learning outcomes. Intersubjectivity, interpreted, for example, as cooperation and engagement in the performance of tasks, is described primarily as a means of developing academically significant skills and abilities (Alamri, Almaayah and Al-Rahmi, 2020; Tang and Hew, 2017; Tu and Sujo-Montes, 2015). The following topics dominate the majority of publications: analysis of the benefits and risks of using mobile learning tools in education; evaluation of the effectiveness of the development of students' competencies; analysis of students' and teachers' assessments of the use of mobile applications and social networks (Baydas and Yilmaz, 2018; Nikolopoulou, Saltas and Tsiantos, 2023; Zaidi, Osmanaj, Ali and Zaidi, 2021; Zhang, 2015). Intersubjectivity sometimes becomes an independent object of scientific interest (Di Gesù, 2021), but it should be emphasized that there are still very few works that problematize the phenomenon of intersubjectivity in mobile learning research.

Also it seems useful to digress from the question of the effectiveness of mobile education and raise the question of what exactly changes in pedagogical contact when we use, for example, mobile social networks in higher education.

At the same time, there is a point of view according to which the vast majority of research in the field of mobile learning is not sufficiently theory-based, despite the importance of theory in guiding educational processes (Lampety and Boateng, 2017; Okai-Ugbaje et al., 2017). In this context, the appeal to philosophical theory seems justified.

Since most of the work has a strong empirical character and uses questionnaires and surveys (Goundar and Kumar, 2021; Ray and Saeed, 2015; Snoussi, Belkacem, Radwan and Gaidi, 2020; etc.), it seems important to use different research methods.

5. Teachers-Students Interactions from a Phenomenological Perspective

Before moving on to a more detailed consideration of the specific use of mobile social networks in higher education, let's give a brief description of the phenomenological perspective, which seems promising for research on student-teacher interactions. The relevance of turning to this approach is due to the fact that it opposes the dominant view on the use of gadgets and mobile applications for gaining knowledge. The phenomenological view refers to the intersubjectivity experience constitution, where the process of gaining new

experience is no less important than the result. Phenomenology has a lot of methodological tools that allows to gain a deeper understanding of what happens when gadgets are used for educational purposes.

In this regard, it is worth mentioning Heidegger's reflections on the role of technology, as well as Ihde's more recent studies on the specifics of living in the modern technologized lifeworld (Ihde, 1990; Ihde, 2010). According to these approaches, technology is not only a tool that serves external purposes, but also something that helps us to be open to the world. From a phenomenological perspective, this opening is an event of coexistence (Bakhtin, Heidegger), in which no result can ever be given or predicted and only the movement toward the new experience is possible. Phenomenological thematization of intersubjectivity (Heidegger, Ricoeur, Waldenfels) can be useful for expanding the understanding of how mediatisation transforms subject-subject interaction in pedagogical contact. The focus on the dialogue and the process of generating meanings (Gadamer) is promising for the analysis of what exactly happens between people during communication in social networks. The problematization of embodiment (Merleau-Ponty) can complement today's widespread interpretations of user experience as based solely on intellectual/cognitive work.

As a result, phenomenology can strengthen the foundations of qualitative research in education and technology by proposing a model of teacher-student interaction, where the emphasis is not on quantitative parameters, but on the holistic experience of intersubjective communication.

6. The Specificity of the Transformation of Pedagogical Contact (Hypothesis and Research Method)

From a phenomenological perspective, pedagogical contact between teachers and students is an event of the meeting, resulting in a new experience of interaction that is significant for all its participants. Pedagogical contact cannot be described in terms of a simple transfer of information from one subject to another. This is a complex and multifaceted process, the results of which are influenced not only by the cognitive or linguistic abilities of the participants but by the whole set of their manifestations: bodily expressions, emotional states, etc. Since pedagogical contact is always influenced by the environment, it is reasonable to assume that the introduction of mobile social networks into the pedagogical process of higher education institutions will also have significant consequences for each of the parties involved.

Based on the analysis of the research literature on the use of mobile social networks in higher education, we assume that key changes will be found in:

- reconfiguration of space and its new characteristics – this is evidenced by the fact that the university auditorium is being replaced by digital rooms, groups, and chats (so-called Appspace), which now act as a new environment;
- transformation of presence – this is evidenced by the fact that face-to-face communication with the usual signals of involvement (greetings, eye-to-eye contact, raised hand, etc.) has been replaced by new ways of "non-embodied" maintaining of contact and showing one's attention, interest, involvement or lack of it;
- shifts in time – this is associated with the blurring of the boundaries between studying and free time, different work structuring and task scheduling; prolongation of communication (communication extends in time) and a simultaneous increase in its discreteness (shorter messages, gaps between questions and an answers).

Focusing solely on theoretical sources cannot be sufficient in the study of changes in pedagogical contact, occurring under the influence of the increasing spread of mobile social networks. It is assumed that the use of a hermeneutic interview can significantly enrich the work (van Manen, 1997: 98–99; Friesen, 2011: 35–41). The hermeneutical interview as a research method differs from the traditional survey. It is quite a free interpretive conversation in which both of the participants are involved in a dialogue, which allows you to see the significance of the phenomenological issue. To achieve this goal, experience-oriented questions should be used: "What did you feel?", instead of "What did you think?"; "What was it like?", instead of "What happened?", etc. To obtain the most complete results, it is important to conduct such a conversation with all participants: both students and teachers.

7. Results and Discussion

Since the work is in progress, the selection of the best wording for the hermeneutical interview questions is ongoing. However, it seems significant that gaps in mobile learning research have been identified, and the

prospects of using phenomenological theoretical optics to overcome them have been substantiated. The work can also be significant for concretizing the understanding of the phenomenon of pedagogical contact and its specifics in the process of implementing mobile social networks in the practices of higher education. The contribution to academic debate lies in the fact that the research develops a line of moving away from focusing on efficiency in a quantitative sense and focuses on the analysis of the essential qualitative parameters of interaction between students and teachers.

8. Conclusion

As mentioned above, today both students and teachers often express skepticism about the prospects for the widespread implementation of mobile social networks in educational practices. Nevertheless, there are some reasons to believe that satisfaction with the use of new technologies may increase if the changes in pedagogical contact are taken into account. To carry out such research, it is important not to rely on the existing ideas about how social networks work from the technical side, but to analyze how the intersubjective interactions of teachers and students are changing under their influence. The results of this analysis will be useful for making recommendations for mobile application developers, which will probably make them more suitable for pedagogical purposes.

Acknowledgments:

The author extends her appreciation to prof. Tatiana Shchyttsova, colleagues from the Academic Department of Social Sciences and The Center for Research of Intersubjectivity and Interpersonal Communication (EHU) for their support in starting and continuing this research.

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