Survey on Multimedia Technologies for Mobile Learning Applications

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Mobile technologies are developing very fast. This paper presents a survey on multimedia technologies for mobile learning applications, focusing on multimedia programming techniques for Windows Mobile, Symbian, and Java ME.

Keywords: multimedia, mobile devices, mobile applications, mobile learning

1 Introduction
Mobile learning is implemented using different technologies and platforms. Each implementation has specific characteristics in terms of user interface and content and influences the quality management process. The software required for mobile learning process is a Web browser or a specific application, that can be standalone or a client application. Web-based platforms are very common in mobile learning process. Figure 1 depicts the architecture of this platform.

Fig. 1. Web-based mobile learning platforms architecture

The advantages of using Web-based mobile learning platform are:
- User’s minimal effort to set up the application;
- The user doesn’t need to learn how to use a new application; the client is a simple mobile Web browser (like Pocket Internet Explorer or Opera Mobile);
- E-learning content can be easily updated on the server.

There are also some disadvantages:
- Not so rich user interface (browser-based);
- Multimedia content is limited;
- Possible additional costs for traffic usage.

Distributed platforms have a similar architecture as Web-based platforms, but the client application is a rich application and not a simple mobile Web browser. The advantages of this platform are:
- Rich user interface;
- Support for multimedia content;
- E-learning content can be easily updated on the server;

There are also some disadvantages:
- The user need to install and setup the client application;
- The user have to learn how to use the application;
- Possible additional costs for traffic usage.

Standalone applications do not require network access. They are similar to the client applications for distributed platforms. The main disadvantage is that the update of content needs access to device. Errors and applications failures influence the learning process. Distributed applications and Web-based requires more test because of network access. The test plans need to include use cases on various hardware platforms, operating systems, networks bandwidths in order to cover a large number of scenarios.

Almost all mobile operating systems have
support for multimedia applications development. Some technologies and libraries exist in desktop versions (like Open GL, DirectX etc.), other are specific to some operating system [2], [3], [4], [5].

![Multimedia m-applications](image)

Multimedia m-applications (figure 2) access audio, graphics and media API through operating system or third party libraries. These API communicate with multimedia related hardware through device drivers. The display resolution, audio and video system, 3D support, and operating system influence the multimedia application development for mobile devices. The audio and video resources involve playback and recording capabilities.

2 Java Micro Edition (Java ME)
Java Micro Edition platform is intended for all mobile devices that have limited hardware and software resources. In order to allow the development of application for these devices, this platform has limited framework support comparing to its big brother, Java Standard Development Kit. Despite the early characteristics of devices, present and future mobile technologies allow software developers to design and implement rich multimedia content. In order to support this kind of resources, Java ME platform includes a package, the Mobile Media API (MMAPI), [6-7], that is flexible enough to run with many types of protocols and multimedia formats, as MP3, MIDI for audio, MPEG-4 for video and JPEG, PNG, BMP, SVG for pictures. The MMAPI framework has been designed to run on any J2ME-based virtual machine, including the CDC and CLDC virtual machines. This standard Java specification has been defined by the Java Community Process (JCP) in JSR 135, [7].

At the core of the MMAPI package there are two concepts that describe multimedia processing:
- **Protocol handling** refers to the process of reading data from a source, as local files, from a streaming server or from device components, into a media-processing system;
- **Content handling** refers to the process of decoding the media data and rendering it to an output interface.

Figure 3 describes the three high-level object types, Data Source, Player and Manager, that the API provides, in order to implement the two concepts.

![The MMAPI Architecture](image)

The relation between these components is based on the fact that the Manager object is used to create Player entities from Data Sources or Input Streams. Once created, Player class provides methods that will give control over the multimedia resource.

2.1 Audio
Different audio formats are managed by the MMAPI using:
- **Manager playTone()** method that generates simple tones, characterized by frequency and duration; this is the simple audio media format that can be managed and its role is to provide basic audio capabilities to mobile devices; the following sequence play a tone for 2000 milliseconds at volume 50

```java
try {
    Manager.playTone(ToneControl.C4, 4000, 100);
}
```
catch (MediaException me) {
} ... 

- **Player** object, created to access audio files stored on the device or on a Web server; the next code sequence gets an MP3 file over the network and plays it:

```java
try {
   String mp3 = "http://myserver.com/" + "media/music.mp3";
   Player p = Manager.createPlayer(mp3);
   p.start();
} catch (IOException x) {
...}
```

- InputStreams and Player classes to access device stored audio resources, as MP3 files; media can be stored as a resource within the JAR file or in a RecordStore:

//from JAR file
InputStream is1 = getClass().getResourceAsStream("m.mp3");
Player p1 = Manager.createPlayer(is1, "audio/mpeg");
p1.start();

//from RMS
InputStream is2 = new ByteArrayInputStream(myRecordStore.getRecord(id));
Player p2 = Manager.createPlayer(is2, "audio/mpeg");
p2.start();

2.2 Graphics and Animation

The concept of graphics and animation management is directly related to the framework elements that allow developers to control device display. One core element of the J2ME platform used in this scope is the **Canvas** class, [9], defined in the `javax.microedition.lcdui` package, that lets an application draw screens using the low-level user-interface API.

The next code sequence is used to draw an image on the device display, creating a splash screen.

```java
protected void paint(Graphics g) {
   Image logo;
   try {
      logo = Image.createImage="/images/logo.jpg";
```

```java
g.setColor(0, 0, 0);
g.fillRect(0, 0, 100, 100);
g.drawImage(logo, 0, 0, 100, 100);
g.setColor(200, 0, 0);
g.setFont(Font.getFont(Font.FACE_SYSTEM, Font.STYLE_BOLD, Font.SIZE_LARGE));
g.drawString("My Agenda v1.0", 5, 30, 0);
g.setColor(0, 0, 0);
g.drawLine(5, 50, this.getWidth(), 50);
   } catch (Exception err) {
      ...
   }
```

The image is loaded from the JAR and figure 4 shows the result.

**Fig. 4** Drawing image on mobile device display

The limitations of **Canvas** class is generated by a lack of control over when a canvas repaints itself or over how quickly key and pointer events are received by the object. In order to overcome this drawback and to provide support for software gaming industry, it was designed the **GameCanvas** class, that extends the **Canvas** class.

The role of the **GameCanvas** class is to provide efficient resource management for animation and event handling. Basic elements of an animation and their classes are:

- animation background implemented by the **TiledLayer** class; the background is viewed as a grid with custom dimensions; this provides an efficient and simple way
to manage interactions between game components and dynamic generation of the environment; based on few resources, as the background elements in figure 5, resources are multiplied and put in the grid; the following code sequence, creates a 6x7 grid and populates it with 32x32 pixels graphical elements, that were extracted from a PNG image.

```
LayerManager lm = new LayerManager();
lm.append(sButterfly);
sFluture.setPosition(100,150);
lm.append(tlBackground);
lm.paint(this.getGraphics(), 0, 0);
lm.setViewWindow(0,0,latime,inaltime-20);
flushGraphics();
```

Fig. 5 Game application in J2ME and its resources

On advanced mobile devices that incorporate a camera, MMAPI includes support for accessing it from code. For that the player is created using a `capture://video` locator. By default, the image format used to store the camera capture is PNG. The next code sequence allows the user to capture an image by camera:

```
try {
player = Manager.createPlayer("capture://video");
player.realize();
videoControl = (VideoControl)
(player.getControl("VideoControl"));
if (videoControl != null) {
  videoControl.initDisplayMode(Vide
USE_DIRECT_VIDEO, this);
}
}
```

- animated elements, defined as *Sprite* objects; this class is designed to manage animation sequences independently from the main thread; the next sequence creates a Sprite object based on butterfly.png, described in figure 5; the sprite animates the butterfly by changing in a predefined sequence the four images;

```
int flight[] = {1, 2, 3, 3, 2, 1, 0};
sButterfly.setFrameSequence(flight);
sButterfly.setRefPixelPosition(8, 8);
```

- *LayerManager* class that provides game developer methods to manage animation elements; assign a *LayerManager* object, animation elements are interconnected and it is decided how and in which context they are made visible; next sequence puts together, in a GameCanvas, both the background and the sprite;

```
try {
player = Manager.createPlayer("capture://video");
player.realize();
videoControl = (VideoControl)
(player.getControl("VideoControl"));
if (videoControl != null) {
  videoControl.initDisplayMode(Vide
USE_DIRECT_VIDEO, this);
}
}
```

- `Image` objects; the following code sequence, creates a 6x7 grid and populates it with 32x32 pixels graphical elements, that were extracted from a PNG image.
byte[] pngImage = videoControl.getSnapshot(null);
image=Image.createImage(pngImage,0,pngImage.length);
}catch(MediaException me){
    ...
}

The key elements from the above sequence are:
- create Player object
  player = Manager.createPlayer("capture://video");
- getControl over the resource
  videoControl = (VideoControl)(player.getControl("VideoControl"));
- getSnapShot to get the captured image.
  byte[] pngImage = videoControl.getSnapshot(null);

2.3 Video
J2ME provides video management with the VideoControl interface. A reference to the video resource is provided by the Player class and its getControl() method.

The below sequence plays a video file on mobile device:

... Player p;
VideoControl vc;
try {
    p = Manager.createPlayer("http://myserver.com/movie.mpg");
    p.realize();
    // get video control
    vc = (VideoControl)p.getControl("VideoControl");
    //get a GUI to display the video
    Item videoItem = (Item)video.initDisplayMode(
        VideoControl.USE_GUI_PRIMITIVE,null);
    //append the GUI to a form
    videoForm.append(videoItem);
    p.start();
} catch(IOException ioe) { }
catch(MediaException me) { }
...

3 Windows Mobile
DirectShow is available starting with Windows Mobile 5. This is technology is based on COM. It is highly recommended to play the media files in a separate thread.

3.1 Audio
Audio files can be played using:
- standard API function,
- a shell function (Windows Mobile 6 and up only)
- DirectShow
- third-party API

The PlaySound function is limited to PCM WAV formats. This call plays the specified file. If an error occurs, bResult will be set to FALSE:

BOOL bResult = PlaySound(L"\Windows\Alarm5.wav", NULL, SND_FILENAME);

For other formats, SndPlaySync function can be used. This function is related to Windows Mobile 6 shell. A sample call of this function is:

HRESULT hr = SndPlaySync(L"\Windows\Ring- WindowsMobile .wma", 0);

DirectShow can be used to play audio files. Depending on installed codecs, various formats can be played. The following code is used to play an audio file using DirectShow:

CComPtr<IGraphBuilder>   pGraphBuilder;
CComPtr<IMediaControl>   pMediaControl;
CComPtr<IMediaEvent>     pMediaEvent;
LPCWSTR fisAudio = L"\My Documents\audio2.wav";
HRESULT hr = S_OK;
CoInitialize(NULL);
//Here we create the filter graph
manager hr = pGraphBuilder.CoCreateInstance(CLSID_Fil-
terGraph);
if (hr != S_OK)
    CoInitialize(NULL);
//Here we create the filter graph
manager hr = pGraphBuilder.CoCreateInstance(CLSID_Fil-
terGraph);
if (hr != S_OK)
    CoInitialize(NULL);

//Render the media file
hr = pGraphBuilder->>RenderFile(fisAudio, NULL);
The thread waits until the audio file ends so that this code needs to be in a separate thread.
There is a third-party API developed that allows playing sound.

### 3.2 Graphics and Animation

The basic drawing primitives are provided by the GDI. Usually the drawing is handled on WM_PAINT message.

The following listing demonstrates how to use them to draw shapes and text using GDI API:

```csharp
Rectangle(hdc, r.left, r.top, r.right, r.bottom);
```

There is support for 3D graphics using Direct3D Mobile. There are limitations of Direct3D Mobile compared to Direct3D due to hardware constraints.

First, a device has to be initialized and its properties to be set. The device will be used to render the 3D graphics based on objects properties (coordinates and color). The distance to the objects, the view angle, the light, the view window and other properties can be controlled.

The following code initializes the device and the pyramid that will be rendered:

```csharp
PresentParameters presentParams = new PresentParameters();
presentParams.Windowed = true;
presentParams.SwapEffect = SwapEffect.Discard;

device = new Device(0, // numar device
DeviceType.Default, // configuratia
this, // fereastra parinte
CreateFlags.None, // parametri de creare
presentParams); // parametri de prezentare

// camera settings
device.Transform.View = Matrix.LookAtLH(
    new Vector3(0.0f, 0.0f, -2.0f), // camera position
    new Vector3(0.0f, 0.0f, 0.0f), // camera focus
    new Vector3(0.0f, 0.5f, 0.0f) // camera up
);

// set up the projection
device.Transform.Projection =
    Matrix.PerspectiveFovLH(
    (float)Math.PI / 4, // angle
    1.0f, // scaling factor
    1.0f, // near Z plane
    100.0f // further Z plane
    );

//display objects even on the hidden side
```
device.RenderState.CullMode = Cull.None;
//manually control the light
device.RenderState.Lighting = false;

//pyramid initialization (coordinates and color)
vertices[0] = new CustomVertex.PositionColored(0.0f, 0.0f, -0.5f,
Color.Yellow.ToArgb());
vertices[1] = new CustomVertex.PositionColored(0.5f, 0.5f, 0.0f,
Color.Green.ToArgb());
vertices[2] = new CustomVertex.PositionColored(-0.5f, 0.5f, 0.0f,
Color.Red.ToArgb());
vertices[3] = new CustomVertex.PositionColored(0.0f, 0.0f, -0.5f,
Color.Yellow.ToArgb());
vertices[4] = new CustomVertex.PositionColored(0.0f, -0.5f, 0.0f,
Color.Blue.ToArgb());
vertices[5] = new CustomVertex.PositionColored(-0.5f, 0.5f, 0.0f,
Color.Red.ToArgb());
vertices[6] = new CustomVertex.PositionColored(0.0f, 0.0f, -0.5f,
Color.Yellow.ToArgb());
vertices[7] = new CustomVertex.PositionColored(0.0f, -0.5f, 0.0f,
Color.Blue.ToArgb());
vertices[8] = new CustomVertex.PositionColored(0.5f, 0.5f, 0.0f,
Color.Green.ToArgb());
vertices[9] = new CustomVertex.PositionColored(0.0f, -0.5f, 0.0f,
Color.Blue.ToArgb());
vertices[10] = new CustomVertex.PositionColored(0.5f, 0.5f, 0.0f,
Color.Green.ToArgb());
vertices[11] = new CustomVertex.PositionColored(-0.5f, 0.5f, 0.0f,
Color.Red.ToArgb());
// initialize the buffer (3D points)
vertBuffer = new VertexBuffer(
    typeof(CustomVertex.PositionColored), // tip buffer
types.Length, // number of points
device, // device
Usage.WriteOnly, // access type
CustomVertex.PositionColored.Format, // point types
Pool.SystemMemory); // memory used

// fill the buffer with data
vertBuffer.SetData(vertices, 0, LockFlags.None);

The code that draws and rotates the pyramid is:

device.Clear(ClearFlags.Target,
Color.Black, 1.0f, 0); device.BeginScene();

/unghiRotire += pasRotire;
device.Transform.World =
Matrix.RotationYawPitchRoll(0f,
unghiRotire, 0f);

draw using triangles
device.DrawPrimitives(PrimitiveType.Tria
gleList, 0, 3); device.EndScene(); device.Present();

Figure 6 shows the capture of a mobile device screen running the Direct3D Mobile code presented in this section.

3.3 Video
Video can be played on Windows Mobile based
devices using DirectShow or Windows Media Player control. These methods require the use of COM technologies.

The code is similar to audio playback using DirectShow, for video playback a window is required. The following code initializes the filter graph manager and the player window and plays a video file in full screen:

```cpp
CComPtr<IGraphBuilder> pGraphBuilder;
CComPtr<IMediaControl> pMediaControl;
CComPtr<IVideoWindow> pVidWindow;
CComPtr<IMediaEvent> pMediaEvent;

LPCWSTR fisVideo = L"\My Documents\video4.3gp";

HRESULT hr;
CoInitialize(NULL);

// Initialize the filter graph manager
hr = pGraphBuilder.CoCreateInstance(CLSID_FilterGraph);
if (hr != S_OK)
{
    TCHAR temp[50];
    swprintf(temp, TEXT("%s : %x"), TEXT("Eroare initializare filtru!"), hr);
    MessageBox(hWnd, temp, TEXT("Eroare!"), MB_OK | MB_ICONERROR);
    return;
}

//initialize the media control
hr = pGraphBuilder->QueryInterface(IID_IMediaControl, (void **)&pMediaControl);
//initialize the video window
hr = pGraphBuilder->QueryInterface(IID_IVideoWindow, (void **)&pVidWindow);
//initialize the media event
hr = pGraphBuilder->QueryInterface(IID_IMediaEvent, (void **)&pMediaEvent);

//video file rendering
hr = pGraphBuilder->RenderFile(fisVideo, NULL);
if (hr == S_OK)
{
    // Video window settings
    pVidWindow->put_Owner((OAHWND)hWnd);
    pVidWindow->put_WindowStyle(WS_CHILD | WS_CLIPSIBLINGS);
    //Play in full screen
    pVidWindow->put_FullScreenMode(OATRUE);

    //start playing the video
    hr = pMediaControl->Run();
    if (hr == S_OK)
    {
        long lEventCode = 0;
        //wait until video end
        pMediaEvent->WaitForCompletion(INFINITE, &lEventCode);
    }
}
else
{
    TCHAR temp[50];
    swprintf(temp, TEXT("%s : %x"), TEXT("Eroare redare video"), hr);
    MessageBox(hWnd, temp, TEXT("Eroare!"), MB_OK | MB_ICONERROR);
}
CoUninitialize();
```

The video playback has to take place in a separate thread in order to keep the user interface functionally.
4.1 Audio
The Symbian audio component allows playing and recording audio files, depending on installed codecs.
Audio files can be played using CMdaAudioPlayerUtility class. Applications that use it need a helper class that implements MMdaAudioPlayerCallback interface in order to receive notification about the player. Audio streams can be played using the CMdaAudioOutputStream class.
The following code implements a player class that can be used for audio files:

```cpp
#include <MdaAudioSamplePlayer.h>
enum TState {EIsNotReady, EIsReady, EIsPlaying };

class CAudioPlayer: public CBase, public MMdaAudioPlayerCallback {
    void CAudioPlayerL(const TDesC& aFisier);
    TState iStare;
    CMdaAudioPlayerUtility* iPlayer;

public:
    void ConstructL(const TDesC& aFisier);
    static CAudioPlayer* NewL(const TDesC& aFisierAudio);
    static CAudioPlayer* NewLC(const TDesC& aFisierAudio);
    ~CAudioPlayer();
    void Play();
    void Stop();
    void Pause();
    //callback functions
    void MapcInitComplete(TInt aEroare, const TTimeIntervalMicroSeconds& aDur);
    void MapcPlayComplete(TInt aEroare);
};

CAudioPlayer* CAudioPlayer::NewL(const TDesC& aFisierAudio) {
    CAudioPlayer* self = NewLC(aFisierAudio);
    CleanupStack::Pop(self);
    return self;
}

CAudioPlayer* CAudioPlayer::NewLC(const TDesC& aFisierAudio) {
    CAudioPlayer* self = new (ELeave) CAudioPlayer();
    CleanupStack::PushL(self);
    self->ConstructL(aFisierAudio);
    return self;
}

void CAudioPlayer::ConstructL(const TDesC& aFisierAudio) {
    iPlayer = CMdaAudioPlayerUtility::NewFilePlayerL(aFisierAudio, *this);
}

//the audio will play if the player is ready
void CAudioPlayer::Play() {
    if(iStare == EIsReady) {
        iStare = EIsPlaying;
        iPlayer->Play();
    }
}

//Not shown Stop, Pause, SetPosition, GetPosition, volume control
void CAudioPlayer::MapcPlayComplete(TInt aEroare) {
    iStare = aEroare == EIsNotReady ? EIsReady;
}

void CAudioPlayer::MapcInitComplete(TInt aEroare, const TTimeIntervalMicroSeconds&) {
```
The audio file can be stopped, paused and resumed. Also it is possible to position in the audio file. The following code is used to play an audio file using the class above:

```cpp
iPlayer = CAudioPlayer::NewL(_L("C:\System\Data\audio2.wav"));
if (iPlayer)
  iPlayer->Play();
```

### 4.2 Graphics and Animation

Drawing is similar to other programming platforms. It is necessary a device context that will be used to draw on the display. The following code is used to draw some basic shapes and text on the application main window:

```cpp
CWindowGc& gc = SystemGc();

gc.SetPenStyle( CGraphicsContext::ENullPen );

gc.SetBrushColor( KRgbYellow );

TRect rect = aRect;

rect.Shrink(20, 20);

gc.DrawEllipse(rect);

TPoint point(10, 10);

gc.UseFont(CEikonEnv::Static()->NormalFont());

gc.DrawTextVertical(_L("DrawTextVertical"), point, 0);

gc.DiscardFont();
```

Usually this code is called from the `Draw` function, called when the screen needs to be painted.

### 4.3 Video

Symbian's multimedia framework has support for playing and recording videos. The source can be a file on disk or a stream of data. The architecture is similar to audio playback, an observer class need to be created to receive the framework events. Additionally a window is needed to playback the video. `CVideoPlayerUtility` is the class used for video playback and the interface `MVideoPlayerUtilityObserver` is required to handle the playback events through callback functions. The following class can be used to play video files:

```cpp
class CVideoPlayer : public CBase , public MVideoPlayerUtilityObserver
{
  CVideoPlayerUtility* iPlayer;
  CVideoPlayer();
  public:
    void ConstructL(const CCoeControl& aView);
};
```
static CVideoPlayer * NewL(const CCoeControl& aView);
void PlayL(const TDesC& aFisierVideo);
void Stop();
~CVideoPlayer();
//callback methods
void MvpuoOpenComplete(TInt aError);
void MvpuoPrepareComplete(TInt aError);
void MvpuoFrameReady(CFbsBitmap& aFrame,TInt aError);
void MvpuoPlayComplete(TInt aError);
void MvpuoEvent(const TMMEvent& aEvent);

void CVideoPlayer::MvpuoPrepareComplete(TInt aErr)
{
    if (KErrNone == aErr)
    {
        iPlayer->Play();
    }
    else
    {
        iPlayer->Close();
    }
}
void CVideoPlayer::MvpuoEvent(const TMMEvent& )  {}
void CVideoPlayer::MvpuoPlayComplete(TInt aErr)    {}
void CVideoPlayer::MvpuoFrameReady(CFbsBitmap& ,TInt)    {}
void CVideoPlayer::MvpuoOpenComplete(TInt aErr)
    {
        if (KErrNone == aErr) { iPlayer->Prepare(); }
    }
void CVideoPlayer::Stop()
    {
        iPlayer->Stop();
    }
void CVideoPlayer::PlayL(const TDesC& aFisierVideo)
    {
        iPlayer->Close();
        iPlayer->OpenFileL(aFisierVideo);
    }
CVideoPlayer::CVideoPlayer ()    {}
CVideoPlayer::~CVideoPlayer ()
    {
        if (iPlayer != NULL)
        {
            delete iPlayer;
            iPlayer = NULL;
        }
    }
CVideoPlayer * CVideoPlayer::NewL(const CCoeControl& aView)
    {
        CVideoPlayer * self = new (ELeave) CVideoPlayer ();
        CleanupStack::PushL(self);
        self->ConstructL(aView);
        CleanupStack::Pop();
        return self;
    }
//initialize the player
void CVideoPlayer ::ConstructL(const CCoeControl& aView)
    {
        TRect rect(aView.PositionRelativeToScreen(),
                    TSize(aView.Rect().Width(), aView.Rect().Height()));
        iPlayer = CVideoPlayerUtility::NewL(*this,
                                             EMdaPriorityNormal,
                                             EMdaPriorityPreferenceNone,
                                             aView.ControlEnv()->WsSession(),
                                             *(aView.ControlEnv()->ScreenDevice()),
                                             *(aView.DrawableWindow()));
In order to use the video player class, an object needs to be initialized and to call the PlayL method:

```cpp
if (!iVideoPlayer)
iVideoPlayer = CVideoPlayer::NewL(*this->iAppContainer);
if (iVideoPlayer)
iVideoPlayer->PlayL(_L("C:\video\Video000.3gp"));
```

The player objects need to be released when finished.
The camera can be used for video playback and recording, if available.

6 Conclusions
Using operating system native API leads to faster applications but long development curves and difficulties on porting applications to other operating systems.

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References

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