

The Effect of Using Mobiles on Learning English Vocabulary by Iraqi EFL Students

أثر استخدام الهواتف المحمولة على تعلم

مفردات اللغة الإنجليزية لدى الطلاب العراقيين متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلفة أجنبية

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الملخص:

تستكشف هذه الدراسة تأثير الهواتف المحمولة على تعلم مفردات اللغة الإنجليزية من قبل الطلاب العراقيين في مرحلة التعليم الثانوي. كما تستقصي مواقف الطلاب العراقيين تجاه استخدام الهواتف الذكية في تعلم مفردات اللغة الإنجليزية. وتهدف أيضاً إلى تحديد المشكلات التي يواجهها الطلاب العراقيون في تعلم المفردات أثناء استخدام الهواتف. تألفت عينة الدراسة من 30 طالباً في الصف الرابع الاعدادي من ثانوية أم الربيعين للمتفوقات في محافظة نينوى. تم اختيار المشاركات بشكل عشوائي من مجموعات مختلفة و تم جمع البيانات من خلال استبيانات. أظهرت النتائج أن الطلاب العراقيين لديهم موقف إيجابي تجاه استخدام الهواتف الذكية في تعلم مفردات اللغة الإنجليزية. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، أثبتت النتائج وجود مشكلات يواجهها الطلاب أثناء استخدام الهواتف الذكية في تعلم المفردات.

Abstract

This study explored the effect of mobile phones on learning English vocabularies by Iraqi EFL students at Nineveh Governorate. It investigates Iraqi EFL students' attitudes about the use of smartphones in learning English vocabulary. It also aims at identifying the problems that Iraqi EFL students face while using phones in learning vocabulary. The sample of the study consisted of

30 EFL fourth preparatory students from Om Al Rabeen Secondary School of Outstanding Girls at Nineveh Governorate. The participants were chosen randomly from different groups. Data were collected through questionnaires. The findings showed that Iraqi EFL students had a positive attitude towards using smartphones in learning English vocabularies. In addition, the results proved that there were problems that EFL students face while using smartphone in learning vocabulary.

Key Words: Smartphones, English vocabulary, Reading difficulties.

1. Introduction

The mobility technologies have penetrated people's daily life and have had an enormous impact on the lifestyle of modern people. Due to the rapid evolution of these technologies, mobile learning (M-learning) has becoming more and more accepted in both teaching and learning processes. Mobile learning (M-learning) is adopting mobile devices for education. With the explosion of mobile technologies, there have been significant changes in pedagogical practices and student learning behaviors. The case of M learning is studied here from the perspective of access to learning that goes beyond what can be available in a traditional e-learning environment. Brown (2003) stresses that mobile technologies increase their availability. Additionally, the widespread use of mobile devices by younger generations has significantly affected their learning processes as well, posing both challenges and opportunities to enhance educational experiences at all levels of education. In general, mobile technology changes the way teaching and learning has been done traditionally can nurture lifelong learning supports conducting knowledge or information out without time and space limitations.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

To understand general, non-specialized English texts, L2 students have to possess a vocabulary of about 5,000 words Laufer (1997). The acquisition of vocabulary continues to be a major difficulty for students especially when resources are finite. The limited classrooms hours in Iraqi schools makes the requirement for complementary learning resources all

the more palpable. Therefore, technology can be an excellent tool to help with vocabulary acquisition. The vocabulary learning can be effectively supported by mobile technology especially smartphones. Such devices provide learners with flexible, independent learning anytime and anywhere. Furthermore, there is a large range of mobile applications that could help learners to learn vocabulary and promote the learning outside the classroom. Purpose of the Study The purpose of the present study is to investigate learners' attitudes and perceptions towards utilizing smartphone applications for learning English vocabulary.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

Mobile technology is an important part of the daily lives of EFL students. Thus, the purpose of this study is to investigate the Iraqi EFL learners' attitudes and perceptions towards using mobile Apps for learning English vocabulary. Furthermore, the research aims to discover what barriers and problems students encounter when using the technology for learning purposes.

1.4 Limitations of the Study

This research is limited to fourth stage preparatory EFL students at Om Al Rabeein Secondary School for Outstanding Girls in Nineveh Governorate. In addition, the study is restricted to the period when the research was implemented (i.e. first semester of academic year 2024–2025). A questionnaire was the instrument used in this study for data collection.

1.5 Research Questions

The research aims at providing answers for the following research question: what are EFL learners' perceptions and attitudes about using mobiles in learning vocabulary?

1.6 Significance of the Study

The findings from the current study provide some evidence about how mobile phone applications facilitate learning outside the classroom environment. The research inquiry describes the EFL participants' usage patterns of mobile apps in the learning vocabulary asking to get significant

information about their experiences on smartphone-learning. In addition, the results might be a source of motivation for teachers to embed mobile phone applications in their teaching practices.

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1 Mobile Learning (M-Learning)

Mobile learning has been characterized by Traxler (2005) as learning through the use of mobile devices and can include accessing resources for learning, or interaction with peers, instructors and other educational resources from anywhere. This definition focuses on the ability of mobile devices (e.g. smart phones and PDAs) to distribute curricular materials over individualized and portable personal hardware. He also defines mobile learning to be any education that occurs with the help of handheld/portable located form of learning. On this issue, he claims that learning mediated by mobile technologies enables learners to acquire education resources whether it is, wherever they are. (Ibid.)

While mobile learning changes to traditional educational methods by offering more personalized and informal learning opportunities. It gives learners learning opportunities outside conventional classrooms and adds to their learning style in using more convenient ways of learning. AlKahtani (2006) portable, interactive, collaborative, private, blended and having access to immediate information. All of these properties together enable continuous learning in various situations.

Past research shows that students have a favorable attitude toward mobile devices in learning English. Studies have established that mobile technologies facilitate flexibility and portability in learning, which stems from its user-friendly nature and accessibility Alfahad (2009). In addition, students' motivation and their self-perception improve using mobile devices in learning.

Steel (2009) cites the results of a survey by Course Smart, where students regardless of their status as university attendants were documented checking their digital equipment; smartphones, laptops and tablets. Although mobile technology has its benefits, some individuals may still face difficulties such as small screen sizes, lack of keyboard and short

battery life. However, mobile phones are still among the most popular used devices in language learning. Young children find it exciting to use highly pervasive mobile devices, especially smartphones, because of the versatility offered. With the engagement of smartphone on daily basis, mobile applications have evolved for being able to support language learning, particularly in vocabulary acquisition. The mobile applications are software which can be downloaded via smartphones and portable handheld devices, allowing learners to access language learning materials in a convenient way.

Mobile operating systems - Android, Apple iOS, Microsoft and BlackBerry all have online stores where learners can search for, download and install applications developed to assist in second language learning. Despite the wide-spread proliferation of these applications, relatively few studies have investigated student use of mobile apps for learning purposes and the academic benefits that are derived from such use. In contrast, the efficacy of individual mobile learning (m-learning) tools, especially Short Message Service (SMS), to facilitate vocabulary acquisition has received extensive investigation and is lent strong support in a number of contexts such as that reported by Cavus and Ibrahim (2009) in Turkey among others. El-Hussein and Cronje (2010) investigated the use of mobile phone apps in learning context, through discovering the benefits, downsides and difficulties related to using smartphones. Questionnaires and interviews were conducted to elicit students' general profiles of mobile phone usage in the classroom as well as their attitudes towards related problems. The results revealed that the majority of participants had positive attitudes towards mobile application integration into learning. In addition, it was found that there were better learning attainments with the use of cell phone and mobile application.

Alshabeb and Almaqrn (2018) further explored how university students use social media applications in learning languages, emphasizing on mobile-assisted learning. The sample comprised 102 respondents who completed a questionnaire, as well as five students who were interviewed to dive deeper into their perceptions about the role of social media in supporting learning. The results indicated that students have positive

attitudes towards utilizing technological tools in English course. As a result, the scholars also suggested that educational administrators and decision-makers have implemented technology-oriented learning methods as pedagogical tools to improve the quality of students' learning.

2.2 Pros of Employing Mobile Devices for Learning English Vocabulary

Thornton and Houser (2005) indicate the fact that smartphones and tablet screens keep becoming bigger makes these devices even more convenient and easy for L2 learners to access lesson materials. Moreover, because of their wide availability, they have been key to the democratization and globalization of educational resources – such as language learning materials.

1. Supporting Personalized Learning

Unlike printed course materials, the use of mobile-based platforms for language courses offers mobility and personalization. Teachers may also tailor course calendars, incorporate multimedia content, and adjust the instructional materials presented; learners themselves can personalize their learning based on personal interests and pace of learning.

2. Anytime and Anywhere Access

The widespread use and easy access of learners to mobile technology provides constant availability to learning materials wherever, and whenever they are needed. A number of mobile learning apps even offer for offline download, which means that learners can learn wherever they are without an internet connection.

3. Enhancing Linguistic Immersion

Mobile language learning applications are used for language immersion through various activities. Students can interact with listening activities, view instructional videos, read digital texts, play games karaoke and word puzzles. This diversity promotes longevity of use and helps children add vocabulary thanks to its natural language exposure.

4. Instant Student-Teacher Interaction

Students can be faced with questions while studying their lessons or while working on exercises. Not addressing these questions in a timely manner will cause them to be lost and turned into learning opportunities. M-learning facilitates instant communication between student and tutors, such as during online instructional sessions. Learners are able to send 1-1 messages through the learning platform at any time, which can trigger learners to ask for clarification. Answers can be given by the platform instantly or discussed during class enabling everyone to benefit from it. In self-directed courses, mobile learning also fosters closer interaction between learners and instructors by allowing communications within the course environment with independence of external tools.

5. Removing Time and Schedule Constraints

Mobile learning facilitates the challenge of time constraints, which are one of the most common reasons learners state for not attending traditional classes. Where appropriate learning centers or class times are not available, mobile-based learning provides a convenient means of independent language study. It is easy to access learning materials on mobile devices, and people can learn with leisure time without carrying books (for example, during commuting or travelling).

6. Variety of Learning Resources and Higher Teaching Quality

Learning platforms may also accommodate content in various forms, such as audio recordings, video recordings, hyperlinks, interactive exercises and Digital Readers. This variety adds to course development and the total quality of learning. Naturally, students are more satisfied with better understanding of the subject, and generally remain focused on the topic lessons.

7. The Notion of the Digital Backpack

In education, the emerging K-12 integration of mobile learning supports the development of so called “digital backpacks” and lessens dependency on traditional textbooks. Mobile apps for language learning are usually integrated with lessons, exercises, flashcards and dictionaries all in one

place so learners don't need to reach for any other resource but their mobile device.

3. Methodology of the Study

This section describes the methodology and research design used in this paper. It describes the key elements of the approach such as participants, data collection, instrument, its validity and reliability and statistical techniques used for analysis.

3.1 Methodological Procedures

Quantitative study with the aim to explain using the causes on what are the factors influencing certain relationships. A researcher-made questionnaire was employed to gather data on EFL learners' attitude toward using smartphone applications for learning and improving English vocabulary.

The questionnaire comprised 10 close-ended questions, two major parts including students' attitudes towards using smartphone applications and the challenges and difficulties they experience when applying these applications for learning vocabulary. The respondents of the study were 30 fourth grade preparatory EFL students, from some different preparatory classes who were chosen by random from among the females at Om Al Rabeein secondary school for outstanding girls in Nineveh governorate. To ensure the face validity, two professors of English language from University of Mosul scrutinized and judged the questionnaire. In addition, the research instrument's reliability was examined via Cronbach's Alpha coefficient (Cronbach, 1951), which assesses internal consistency and can be between zero and one. According to Kumar (2011), greater consistency and stability of an instrument implies better reliability. According to Table (1), the general reliability coefficient for the questionnaire is 0.749, which means that it has an acceptable and high reliability.

Table (1): Values of Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient to Determine the Reliability of Measurement of the Instrument.

Questionnaire sections	Number of statements	Alpha Coefficient
Attitudes of EFL Learners in Nineveh Governorate about utilizing smart phone applications	10	0.749

3.2 Participants of the Study

The population of current research included (30) fourth level preparatory EFL students in Om Al Rabeen Secondary School for Outstanding Girls/ Nineveh Governorate. The participants were randomly selected from various groups to represent a diverse sample.

3.3 Instruments of the Study

The instrument used to acquire data was a questionnaire. Before data collection, official permission was sought from school authority to carry out the study in Om Al Rabeen Secondary School for Outstanding Girls. The researcher gave the questionnaire to two groups at a time in the first academic semester 2024–2025. The purpose of the instrument was to deal with several problems experienced by EFL learners. Thirty questionnaires were handed out, 30 were returned and all answers were considered valid for use in statistical processing.

3.4 Validity of the Instrument

For the sake of content validity, the questionnaire was validated by four university educators specializing in EFL at varying career levels. Following their feedback and advice, the questionnaire items were revised to reflect greater clarity, relevance and appropriateness.

3.5 Reliability of the Instrument

After the questionnaire was distributed and information collected, the reliability of instrument was controlled by piloting with seven subjects randomly selected from research material. Cronbach's Alphas were > 0.74 , suggesting that internal consistency and reliability of the survey were sufficient for data analysis.

3.6 Research Procedures

Data collection took place in 2025 after receiving official permission for the study. After filling up the questionnaires, quantitative data were analyzed in SPSS (Statistical Packages for Social Sciences). The main statistical methods used to analyze the study variables were simple and multiple regression analyses.

4. Results and Discussion

Participants' responses were systematically analyzed. Table (2) shows means and standard deviations of students' attitudes toward the use of smartphone applications in learning English vocabulary.

Table (2)
Means and standard deviations of participants' opinions about utilizing smartphone applications.

No.	Statements	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	M.	Std.
1	I have instructional apps on my phone.	12	3	9	2	4	4.20	0.84
2	I enjoy using smartphone applications to learn.	17	6	3	2	2	4.09	4.09
3	Using smartphones applications enhance my skills.	15	5	7	1	3	3.91	3.91
4	Using smartphone applications enables me to communicate effectively.	12	3	9	2	4	4.24	0.77
5	Using smartphone apps helps me remember more words.	17	6	3	2	2	4.26	0.77

6	I utilize smartphone apps to test my vocabulary.	15	5	7	1	3	3.86	1.00
7	Using apps on my smartphone helps me remember more words.	12	8	7	1	3	4.26	0.77
8	I use smartphone programs to review the terms introduced in earlier classes.	19	4	2	3	2	3.58	1.07
9	I utilize texting apps to improve my vocabulary.	13	10	2	4	1	3.91	0.87
10	I use certain applications to create my own vocabulary list.	14	9	3	3	1	3.63	1.10
Average							38.2 7	15.3 4

To fill this gap, the present study is conducted to investigate Iraqi EFL students' attitudes and perceptions of using smartphone applications in vocabulary learning and its effect on their learning. The questionnaire items (which are listed in Tables 1 and 2 below) answer to the main question raised by the current study: How do EFL learners feel about using smartphone applications to learn vocabularies? The results of the analysis showed that learners had a positive attitude toward using applications in general, with an average score of 38.27 and a standard deviation of 15.34. Mobile app use and vocabulary the majority of the participants reported that they improved their vocabulary proficiency by using smartphone applications, and they intended to continue using similar apps for learning in the future. These results are consistent with the first hypothesis of the

study stating that EFL learners who use smartphone applications for vocabulary practice have positive attitudes towards using these tools. These findings show that mobile apps help learners build vocabulary and improve their overall language learning experience, though there may be some minor hitches along the way (usually easily handled).

5. Conclusions

The primary purpose of the present study was to explore whether vocabulary learning is affected by smartphone applications. Results show that Iraqi EFL preparatory students possessed positive attitudes towards using these apps and feel motivated to use them more in the future. Participants also believed that their vocabulary was enhanced following use of these tools. In sum, the findings suggest mobile apps as an effective and useful tool to augment vocabulary learning in EFL learners.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Questionnaire

Part (A) Information regarding EFL pupils

Please place (x) in the relevant location.

Part (B) Mark the appropriate answer by assigning (X).

No.	Statements	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	I have instructional apps on my phone.					
2	I enjoy using smartphone apps to learn.					
3	Using smartphone apps improves my talents.					
4	Using smartphone apps allows me to communicate effectively..					
5	Using smartphone applications helps me remember more words.					
6	I utilize smartphone apps to test my vocabulary.					
7	Using smartphone applications helps me remember more words.					
8	I use smartphone programs to review the terms introduced in earlier classes.					
9	I utilize texting apps to reinforce my vocabulary.					
10	I use specific apps to generate my own vocabulary list.					