

## Using Mobile Phones in Learning English: The Case of Jordan

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### Abstract

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This study investigates Jordanian EFL students' attitudes towards the use of their mobile phones in learning English as a foreign language. The aim of the study is to gain insight into the awareness of Jordanian EFL students to the importance of implementing technology appropriately (mobile phones) in learning English. Moreover, it also aims to examine the effect of their gender and academic major (English - Translation), on their attitudes towards using mobile phones in learning English as a foreign language. The study sample consisted of 101 students enrolled in English (417) a course in semantics taught at English Department, Yarmouk University, Jordan. A questionnaire was used to investigate the subjects' attitudes and use of their mobile phones. The findings reveal that the subjects' mean score of using their mobile phones was 3.85 out of 4, a result that displays a high usage of mobile phones in learning English. The subjects also have positive attitudes towards using their mobile phones in learning English. The data also show that neither the subjects' gender nor their academic major has any significant effect on their use or attitudes.

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**Keywords:** EFL, Mobile phones, Language learning, English, Jordan.

### Introduction

Technology is transforming the way we communicate, socialize, play, shop and conduct business. Besides, the social networking revolution makes the world a small village and gives people opportunities to be independent learners rather than receiving knowledge merely from teachers in a traditional manner. These recent, profound changes place pressure on the traditional models of language learning and teaching, such as teaching in a formal classroom setting. They also present us with challenges to re-design the way we teach and learn English. One new facet of our life today is the wide spread use of mobile phones. This widespread use of mobile phones makes it necessary for educationists to find means of utilizing this new trend in teaching. TEFL can benefit from this technology in a number of ways especially that the use of mobile phones can extend far beyond the classroom where it is more convenient to the student allowing for more freedom and time. In addition, the students' easy access to the Internet through their phones enables them to make use of learning resources which had not been within reach in the past.

It has been argued that mobile phones have various education benefits to learning like giving students a chance to collaborate with each other, or connect with peers in other countries. They can also be used for high-tech alternatives to boring classroom lectures, letting students take part in interactive assignments like classroom polls. They can serve as notepads or as an alarm for setting study reminders. Besides, they can be recording devices, letting students record impressions during field trips and create audio podcasts and blog posts. With this in mind, the author plans to investigate the issue with the aim of finding out whether the new changes necessitated by these technological advances can affect the design of EFL syllabi and the methods employed in carrying out study plans. More specifically, it is hoped that the study will provide insights into matters of interest pertaining to the issues related to students' gender, their study major and their attitudes towards the use of mobile phones in learning English and the extent of such use.

## Review of Related literature

Brown (2001: 181) asserts that “language is for communicating with people (whether through oral or written modes), and the more they engage in such face-to-face communication, the more their overall communicative competence will improve”.

Salameh, (2017) conducted a study to investigate the attitudes of Saudi students towards knowledge and skills in the web page of Facebook. He found out that Facebook has a potential of supplementing students' education with a secondary source that could enhance knowledge and skills among students with the target to further improve students' achievement. The participants of his study possess high, positive attitudes towards the use of Facebook in gaining knowledge.

In their study, Darmi & Albion (2014) review previous studies about the use of mobile phones in language learning contexts. They assert that the integration of mobile phones in second language teaching is acceptable to learners and has a significant role in improving language skills and related language areas.

Abbasi and Hashemi ( 2013) have conducted another study that investigates the effect of using mobile phones on the retention of vocabulary of intermediate EFL learners and the effect of learner's gender in vocabulary retention while using mobile phones. The study concludes that the use of mobile phones by intermediate EFL learners has a significant effect on their vocabulary retention. The study also reveals that gender does not have any effect on learners' vocabulary retention.

Al Aamri (2011) has tried to investigate the use of cell phones in the process of learning English by Sultan Qaboos University students. The study sheds light on the behavior, the attitudes and the problems that Omani students face in using their mobile phones in the process of learning. Results of this study show that the use of mobile phones in the classroom is still limited because teachers discourage students from using their phones while students prefer to do so.

Ally et al (2007) have reviewed several studies in integrating the use of mobile phones in teaching English and they have come up with good results indicating that the use of mobile phones has increased the ability of the students to improve their results in language learning.

In the same vein, Darmi& Albion (2014) have reviewed studies using mobile phones in language learning contexts. They conclude that mobile phones are accepted by learners of second language learning and that past studies have substantiated their integration to improve language skills and related language areas. They call upon researchers in the field of language learning and acquisition to do more research to examine the integration of mobile learning, especially that mobile phones with recent design and features can be used as learning tools that aid secondlanguage learning and language learning acquisition theories. (p. 99).To summarize, this paper has reviewed studies using mobile phones in language learning contexts. Mobile phones are accepted by learners of second language and past studies have substantiated their integration to improve language skills and related language areas. Learning can take place in formal or informal settings allowing learners to learn at their own time and anywhere. With recent designs and features of mobile phones, future studies on improving the language skills are recommended to keep up with the pace of technology. Other potential areas of research include learning strategies, learner attitude and collaborative learning. Mobile phones are only a learning tool to aid language learning; therefore, future studies should also examine its integration in second language acquisition theories.

Thornton and Houser (2004) have completed several projects using mobile phones to teach English at a Japanese University. One of these projects focuses on providing vocabulary instruction by short messaging service(SMS). The results indicate that SMS students, learn over twice the number vocabulary words as the web students who receive materials through e-mail, and that SMS students improve their scores by nearly twice as much as students who have received their lessons on paper. Most of the subjects prefer SMS instruction and they wish to continue such lessons.

In the same line, Kennedy and Levy (2008) have arranged a similar program and got similar results in Australia by sending vocabulary and idioms, definitions, and example sentences via SMS in a scheduled pattern of delivery and requesting feedback in the form of quizzes and follow up questions.

Shalbag, (n.d.) claims that most students nowadays carry wireless mobile phones, small computers graphics, iPads and many other technological aids. He also adds that many of the students panic of the writing tasks especially when such tasks require pen and paper because of the linguistic complexity of these tasks. Moreover, some students frequently complain that as soon as they pick up their pencils, their minds go blank. Also, some of them are afraid of the mistakes that they might make in spelling, grammar, mechanics or vocabulary when they start writing their tasks. Today, students have the chance to enjoy ungraded classroom writing in English using their small electronic devices, i.e., mobile phones.

Mtegaetal (2012) investigate how mobile phones have been used for teaching and learning purposes in higher learning institutions at Sokoine University in Tanzania. Their study assesses the extent to which mobile phones facilitate the teaching and learning process; they attempt to identify the mobile phone applications used for teaching and learning, investigate the types of learning activities facilitated through mobile phones and assess the common limitations of m-learning. Their study reveals that mobile phones are used for teaching and learning purposes among both teaching staff and students. Most of the respondents use their mobile phones for teaching and learning process. They also assert that income hinders some of the participants from accessing useful m-learning applications as they are too expensive to get. Moreover, limited mobile storage spaces limit some from storing large multimedia contents suitable for teaching and learning. Furthermore, limited Web 2.0 skills exclude the majority from using social media which are believed to enhance interactions and collaborations thus being suitable for teaching and learning.

Muhammed (2014) has investigated m-learning amongst EFL Sulaimani University students in Iraq. His study aims at determining the extent to which mobiles are effective in language learning since all the participants use mobile phones as mobile tools to improve their language learning. A variety of mobile phone applications associated with language skills and systems and international tests are used by the participants to engage in activities related to the English language. The study concludes that 99% of the participants consider mobile phones as an effective mobile resource in the process of English language learning and that mobile phones do affect the process of English language learning. A great number of applications can be found in mobile phones about English language learning. Thus, applications such as radio programmes, free PDF books and articles, vocabulary, advanced grammar, TOEFL, spell checking and proofreading are used by the targeted university students. They encompass listening, reading, speaking, writing, vocabulary and grammar, and increase awareness of international tests. These are major aspects of English language, particularly for EFL students in a CLT classroom. As a result, they are effective, not only outside the classroom, but also within the ELT classroom.

Dang (2013) conducted a study to explore Vietnamese learners' experience and attitudes towards mobile phone use in English language learning. He asserts that despite its infancy, the use of mobile phones has drawn many researchers and educators' attention for its potential contributions to education in general and language learning in particular. Findings of this study indicate that most students use their mobile phones to study English. Also, these students express their welcome towards using this technology to study English in the future. It provides teachers and educators in Vietnam with useful information regarding the teaching of a novel. Furthermore, it is hoped to change their negative attitude towards the use of mobile phone learning in the classroom setting.

Wang (2013) describes an ongoing language-learning project, in which he examines both the feasibility and the limitations of developing English reading and grammar skills through the interface of mobile phones. Throughout the project, reading and grammar materials are regularly sent to students' mobile phones. Students read or take part in any aspect of the materials that appeals to them. Information gathered from participants and server logs indicate that reading and learning grammar using mobile devices is regarded as a positive language experience. However, the data also indicate that the success of any mobile learning project could be limited unless certain criteria are applied. These include (a) providing engaging learning materials that are neither too long nor overly-demanding; (b) a proper degree of teacher monitoring; (c) student involvement; (d) the need for incentives; (e) a respect for privacy; and (f) a safe and secure mobile-learning technical environment.

### **Significance of the Study**

The significance of the present study stems from the fact that our world is changing and technology is affecting everything around us. Moreover, the communication revolution and the widespread use of social networking have surely affected all aspects of our life today.

Teaching methods and curricula are not out of the scope of this change. The use of mobile phones is affecting our life today as almost every person has a phone including most, if not all, young students. The spread of this handy device surely has implications and effects on students lives. This study is an attempt to shed light on the use of mobile phones by Jordanian EFL university students in learning English. It also aims at investigating students' attitudes towards the use of mobile phones as a learning device since this issue is new. More research is needed to gain insight into this issue in order to provide students with better learning opportunities and provide teachers with a better understanding of their students' attitudes and needs to improve their learning through the use of mobile phones. Shehri (2011) and Bosch (2009) claim that English language teaching suffers from the limitations of the inability to transfer learning outside the classroom. Currently social networking sites that students can use through their mobiles phones can help students enjoy easy access to the Internet through their phones thus enabling them to make use of learning resources which had not been within reach in the past and which might cater for this limitation of the classroom.

Moreover, this study should give us the opportunity to assess the degree to which students are motivated to learn outside the classroom which should give educators the chance to develop materials that match students' needs by using the technology of mobile phones which can offer teaching materials that are cheap and available to almost everyone. Besides, the present study is an attempt to fill the shortage of research regarding this issue in Jordan. The study will basically try to investigate the extent to which Jordanian students make use of their mobile phones to improve their English and it will also examine their attitudes towards this use.

### Questions of the study

1. To what extent do Jordanian EFL students use their mobile phones in learning English?
2. Are there any significant differences between students' use of their mobile phones due to the difference in their gender?
3. Are there any significant differences between students' use of their mobile phones due to the difference in their major(Englishvs. Translation)?
4. What are Jordanian EFL students' attitudes towards using their mobile phones in learning English?
5. Are there any significant differences between students' attitudes towards using their mobile phones in learning English due to the difference in their gender?
6. Are there any significant differences between students' attitudes towards using their mobile phones in learning English due to the difference in their major (Englishvs. Translation)?

### Methodology

#### Sample of the Study

The subjects of the present study were purposely chosen from the students registered in the First Semester of the Academic Year 2016/2017 in English 417, a course in semantics taught at the English Department, Yarmouk University, Jordan. The sample consisted of 101Jordanian students, both male and female, whose major was either English or Translation. Table (1) shows the details of the sample.

**Table 1: The Distribution of the Sample According to Gender and Major.**

Variable		Number	Percentage %
Gender	Male	23	22.8
	Female	78	77.2
Major	English	62	61.4
	Translation	39	38.6

#### Instrument of the Study

The main method of inquiry used in this study is a five-point Likert-type questionnaire which was designed by the researcher with help from experts in the field of teaching English. The questionnaire included two dimensions: usability of mobile phones and attitudes towards using them in learning English. The questionnaire consisted of sixteen statements that the students were asked to decide at which level they agreed with each statement (ranging from 1[strongly disagree]to 5 [strongly agree]).

### Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

To assess the reliability of the instrument, Cronbach's Alpha correlation coefficient was computed. Results obtained from this test indicate the reliability of the instrument since Cronbach's Alpha value was more than (0.60). Table (2) below shows the results.

**Table (2): Reliability of the Questionnaire of the Study.**

Variables	Cronbach Alpha Value
Students' use their mobile phones in learning English	0.69
Students' attitudes towards using their mobile phones in learning English	0.65
<b>Total</b>	<b>0.70</b>

To ensure the validity of the research instrument, a jury of five university English instructors from Yarmouk University and Al-Huson University Collegewere requested to validate the instrument. Their recommendations and comments were taken into consideration in modifying the instrument before it was used. To ensure the content validity of the instrument of the study, Pearson correlation coefficient between total instrument value and each item in the instrument was computed. Table (3) below shows the relevant statistics.

**Table (3): Pearson's Correlation Test of the Questionnaire of the Study.**

No.	Questionnaire Statement	Pearson correlation
1	I think that having a mobile phone is essential to my study at the university.	.215
2	I use my mobile phone to listen to songs in English	.295
3	I encourage my colleagues to use their mobiles to improve their English	.599**
4	I use my mobile to watch famous English-speaking movies	.600**
5	I use my mobile to watch movies based on famous literary works like Shakespeare plays, Dickens and Austin's Novels	.566**
6	I select those literary works available on the internet which are related to American/British literature.	.442**
7	I use my mobile to visit various sites that are designed to teach English.	.484**
8	I visit those sites on a regular basis.	.230*
9	I share those sites with others.	.528**
10	I use English more than Arabic to write my comments on Facebook, Twitter etc.	.472**
11	I use my mobile phone to visit sites that teach English vocabulary more than other things	.560**
12	I use my mobile phone to visit sites (dictionaries) that give the Arabic translation of English words	.245*
13	I use my mobile phone to learn the correct pronunciation of new vocabulary items in English	.446**
14	I use my mobile phone to learn the correct spelling of new English vocabulary	.451**
15	I use Arabic rather than English for oral communication on the phone with my friends	.278
16	I use English more than Arabic in writing text messages	.221*

### Data Collection

The researcher obtained permission of the instructor who taught the two sections of English mentioned above to conduct her study. The participants were divided into two majors: English and Translation. The researcher used the same questionnaire for the two groups to investigate the differences between their attitudes and use of mobile phones in learning English. The participants were requested to state their true responses. Moreover, the researcher answered all the participants' inquiries about the questionnaire to ensure that they give true responses.

## Data Analysis

As already mentioned, the present study basically sought (1) to investigate Jordanian EFL students' attitudes and their use of mobile phones in learning English, and (2) to investigate the role of gender in this respect. For the purposes of the study, the data collected from the questionnaire were analyzed in terms of frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations and t-tests using the Statistical Package for Social Studies (SPSS).

## Findings and Discussion

The aim of this part is to introduce the analysis of the data collected for the sake of this study. The first question of this study aimed to investigate the extent to which Jordanian EFL learners use their mobile phones in learning English. To answer this question, mean scores, standard deviations were computed and the expected value (significance) of each statistic (weak, moderate, or high) according to their responses was determined based on their responses. If their response is strongly agree, it gets 5 points; agree, 4 points; neutral, 3 points; disagree, 2 points; and strongly disagree, 1 point). Data obtained from Table (4) shows that students tend to use their mobile phones in learning English quite frequently since their overall mean score of using their mobile phones in learning English was (3.85), a score that represents a high use. Statistics also show that the highest mean score goes to I encourage my colleagues to use their mobiles to improve their English while the lowest goes to I use English more than Arabic in writing text messages.

**Table (4): Mean Scores and Standard Deviations of Students' Responses on the Questionnaire Items According to their Use of Mobile Phones in Learning English**

No.	Statement	Mean Scores	SD	Significance
1	I use my mobile phone to listen to songs in English	3.90	.96	High
2	I encourage my colleagues to use their mobiles to improve their English	4.28	.84	High
3	I use my mobile to watch famous English-speaking movies	4.01	1.02	High
4	I use my mobile to watch movies based on famous literary works like Shakespeare plays, Dickens and Austin's Novels	3.55	1.05	Moderate
5	I use my mobile to visit various sites that are designed to teach English	4.24	.80	High
6	I use English more than Arabic to write my comments on Facebook, Twitter etc.	3.42	1.08	Moderate
7	I use my mobile phone to visit sites that teach English vocabulary more than other things	4.15	.92	High
8	I use my mobile phone to visit sites (dictionaries) that give the Arabic translation of English words	3.99	.99	High
9	I use my mobile phone to learn the correct pronunciation of new vocabulary items in English	4.06	.99	High
10	I use my mobile phone to learn the correct spelling of new English vocabulary	3.97	.98	High
11	I use Arabic rather than English for oral communication on the phone with my friends	3.35	1.12	Moderate
12	I use English more than Arabic in writing text messages	3.30	1.04	Moderate
Total		3.85	.42	High

The second question aimed to examine the effect of gender on the use of mobile phones in learning English. To answer this question, the researcher computed the t-test to compare between students' responses on the questionnaire items to see if their gender affects their use. Table (5) below shows the results.

**Table (5): Mean Scores and T-test of Students' Responses on the Questionnaire According to their Gender.**

Gender	N	Mean Scores	SD	T	P-Value
Male	23	3.7536	.34677	-1.269	.207
Female	78	3.8793	.43533		

Table (5) shows the independent sample t-test to compare between students' use of their mobile phones due to the difference in their gender, the results show that there are no significant differences between students' use of their mobile phones due to the difference in their gender because the T-value is (-1.269) and the P-value is (0.207) which is more than (0.05).

To answer the third question which aimed at investigating the effect of students' major (English vs. Translation) on the tendency of using their mobile phones in learning English, the researcher did a t-test to compare between students' mean scores regarding their major to see if it affects their use of their mobile phones to learn English. Table (6) below shows that.

**Table (6): Mean Scores and T-test of Students' Responses on the Questionnaire Items According to their Major (English vs. Translation).**

Major	N	Mean Scores	SD	T	P-Value
English	62	3.7997	.39129	-1.553	.124
Translation	39	3.9316	.45196		

Data obtained from Table (6) shows that students' major has no effect on their use of mobile phones in learning English as the T-value was (-1.553) and P-value was (0.124) which is more than (0.05). The fourth question that the present study attempted to answer is related to the attitudes of the students towards using their mobile phones in learning English. To answer this question, the researcher computed the mean scores and the standard deviations for each item of the questionnaire to investigate the attitudes of the students. Table (7) shows the results.

**Table (7): Mean Scores and Standard Deviations of Students' Attitudes towards Using their Mobile Phones in Learning English**

No.	Statement	Mean Scores	SD	Significance
1	I think that having a mobile phone is essential to my study at the university.	4.56	.62	High
2	I select those literary works available on the internet which are related to American/British literature	2.69	1.00	Moderate
3	I visit those sites on a regular basis	3.40	.85	Moderate
4	I share those sites with others	3.47	1.06	Moderate
Total		3.53	.51	Moderate

Data presented in Table (7) shows that the participants of this study have moderate attitudes towards using their mobile phones in learning English. Their overall score on the statements that reflect their attitudes was (3.53) out of (5). This score is considered moderate as it is in the moderate rank (2.5- 4). The high rank is (4.1-5) and the weak rank is (1.00- 2.4). Table (7) also shows that the higher mean score goes to I think that having a mobile phone is essential to my study at the university, while the least score goes to I select those literary works available on the internet which are related to American/British literature.

The researcher did a one sample t-test of equality to the means of students' responses to determine their attitudes towards using their mobile phones in learning English. Table 8 below shows that the students have significant positive attitudes towards using their mobile phones in learning English because their overall mean score was (3.53) and it is bigger than (3) the value of the mean of the test.

**Table (8): One Sample T-test to Test Students' Attitudes Towards Using Their Mobile Phones in Learning English.**

Test Mean = 3				
N	Mean	SD	T	Sig.
101	3.53	.51	10.433	.000

The fifth question sought to investigate the effect of gender on the attitudes of the students towards using their mobile phones in learning English. To answer this question, a t-test was computed to compare students' attitudes towards using their mobile phones in learning English due to the difference in their gender. Table (9) below shows that.

**Table (9): Mean Scores and T-test of Students' Attitudes Towards Using their Mobile Phones in Learning English According to their Gender.**

Gender	N	Mean	SD	T	P-Value
Male	23	3.6087	.52671	.844	.401
Female	78	3.5064	.50641		

Data obtained from Table (9) shows that there are no significant differences between students' attitudes towards using their mobile phones in learning English that could be attributed to the difference in their gender as the t-value was(0.844) and the P-value was (0.401) more than (0.05). The sixth question sought to examine the effect of students' major (English vs. Translation) on their attitudes towards using their mobile phones in learning English. To answer this question, again the researcher did a t-test of equality to the means of students' responses on the questionnaire items regarding this respect. Table (10) shows the statistics.

**Table (10): Mean Scores and T-test of Students' Attitudes Towards Using their Mobile Phones in Learning English According to their Major (English - Translation).**

Major	N	Mean	SD	T	P-Value
English	62	3.5121	.53452	-.435	.664
Translation	39	3.5577	.47455		

Table (10) above shows that students' major has no significant effect on their attitudes towards using their mobile phones in learning English as the T-value was(-0.435) and P-value was(0.664) which is more than (0.05).

### Conclusions and Recommendations

The findings of the present study can be summarized in the following points. First, Jordanian EFL students display a high use of their mobile phones in learning English outside the classroom since their overall mean score of using their mobile phones in learning English was (3.85) out of (5) on Likert-type questionnaire. This result represents a call from the students to the teachers and curriculum designers to shift from traditional curricula to include new technology in the teaching process. And mobile phones are considered today the window through which the young generation is looking for knowledge and information through since it "might be considered a good supplementary material to curriculum". (Salameh, 2017: 5)

Moreover, researchers in the field, like Mason (2006), emphasize the idea that researchers might be able to make use of the social sites to improve education in knowledge and skills through motivating students to be positive inside the classroom. Besides with the massive use of mobile phones in our life we should think of wise and gradual introduction of such technology in learning, especially in language classrooms since all forms of mobile technology represent portability with smarter features and learning on the mobile phone can extend beyond the walls of the school or the confines of a class period as learning can take place in formal or informal settings allowing learners to learn at their own time and anywhere. (Darmi & Albion 2014:99). Shalbag, (n.d.) asserts that cell phones have become a central technology associated with both education and effective business communication practices. As a result, utilizing these small devices as an effective methodology in teaching process may meet the students' needs.

Second, neither the gender of the participants nor their major (English vs. Translation) has any significant effect on their use of mobile phones in learning English.

Third, the students demonstrated high positive attitudes towards using their mobile phones in learning English. This result goes in line with Salameh(2017) who found out that Saudi students display high positive attitudes towards using social networking sites in learning English.

Finally, neither the gender of the participants nor their major (English vs. Translation) has any significant effect on their attitudes towards the use of mobile phones in learning English.

From the above conclusions, the following recommendations can be drawn. First, teachers are invited to draw their students' attention to the importance of using this handy device wisely in learning English since it is a portable means of information that is available to almost everyone today. It is well acknowledged today that information and communication technologies have a positive effect on the pedagogical process (Rosado and Khuttum, 2013).

This recommendation is also supported by Mtega. et al (2012) who claim that awareness among students and teaching staff should be raised as these tools are believed to be efficient in teaching and learning. Moreover, teachers should be open minded and try to change their traditional ways in teaching by directing their students to use all means that lead them to success even if they are their mobile phones. Teachers should not ban the use of mobile phones in their classrooms, but they should use them wisely and under control; they should prepare appropriate materials that match their goals with the use of this technology and believe in their students' ability to be good learners as well as to show their students that such devices have important benefits in learning other than entertainment.

Furthermore, mobile phones applications have the potential of providing learners with a supplementary source that could enhance their language and knowledge as well as their skills for the sake of improving students' achievement and success.

Besides, teachers are also invited to utilize this popularity of using mobile phones among students as a means to direct them to find their own way and to take charge of their learning. This should enable learners to become autonomous and independent and eventually successful as it is the teachers' mission to prepare a generation that is well-equipped with the means of success. (Brown, 2001: 208-209).

Finally, it is recommended to repeat such a study by using a larger sample that includes participants from all the Jordanian universities as well as soliciting the attitudes of teachers regarding this issue, a matter that could yield more reliable and comprehensive results.

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