The Impact of Mobile Phones on English Language Learning: Perceptions of EFL Undergraduates

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Abstract—Researchers across the world are examining the educational value and effectiveness of integrating the latest electronic gadgets with teaching-learning activities in the classroom. In spite of the availability of latest electronic gadgets like iPods, tablets, and smartwatches, researchers are more interested in the educational value of the mobile phones for the teaching-learning of English. In a technologically advanced country like Saudi Arabia, the third and fourth generation (3G, 4G) mobile devices are available at affordable prices, and people of all streams find it necessary to own a mobile phone for connecting with their friends and relatives. Moreover, it has become a common trend among undergraduates to carry a mobile phone to the classroom as well. The present study examines the impact of mobile phones on students' English language learning. A field study was conducted on fifty-two undergraduate male students majoring in English language and literature at Aljouf University, Saudi Arabia. The methodology of data collection included a self-report for students and a teacher questionnaire. Findings of the study are significant for EFL teachers and researchers for introducing innovative methods and resourceful materials for the English classroom.

Index Terms—English, learning, undergraduates, mobile phones

I. RATIONALE

Technological advancements in Saudi Arabia have paved the way for its citizens and expatriates to easily and quickly connect with their family and friends inside and outside the country. This quick and easy way of communication has accelerated the demand for the latest electronic gadgets multiple purposes uses like voice calls, messaging, chatting, web browsing, multimedia, and translation. These latest communication systems are easy to operate and available at affordable prices. The demand for touch screen electronic gadgets with advanced features like electronic dictionaries, translating and language-learning software has increased due to its educational value. Electronic dictionaries have made it easier for students to search for the meaning of difficult words quickly and with less effort. Due to their educational value, students at the college level find it essential to carry mobile phones to the classroom. In the regular classroom sessions, there are language teachers who allow students to use mobile phones to refer to electronic dictionaries or to access information for the completion of assignments.

Mobile phones with internet connectivity can search thousands of web pages and provide details of a high degree of accuracy to the reader. They almost replace reference books and avoid the physical labor of visiting the university library. In spite of their effectiveness in gathering information for classroom assignments, there are also teachers and parents who may not encourage their children or students, respectively, to use mobile phones in the classroom. There are also many educational institutions across the world which have imposed a ban on using mobile phones during regular college and class hours. An over-dependence on mobile devices may hinder students from activating cognitive skills like brainstorming and recalling that are necessary for creativity. Since students can have quick access to information on their mobile devices, they may not find it necessary to store the information in their minds. There are some researchers who are of the opinion that the information which would actually have to be stored in the students' minds is rather stored in the memory cards of their mobile phones. Shudong and Higgins (2006) points out that in order to view images and text, mobile phone makers have made their screens larger, but these screens cannot be made too larger because mobile phones would not be portable or convenient. A disadvantage of mobile technology is that students often spend long hours for chatting with their friends on social networking sites and browsing non-academic websites, which, in turn affects their classroom performance. Kuznekoff, J., and Titsworth, S. (2013) are of the opinion that the potential distraction caused by students using their mobile phones to play games, text messages, check Facebook or engage in other activities has become a concern to many classroom instructors. However, the availability of free language learning software programs, portability, speed, audio output and visual features in the latest mobile phones makes it an important tool for EFL students to learn English.

The impact of mobile phones on academic life of the university students is enormous, and so the present research examines the impact of mobile phones on English language learning at the undergraduate level. The researchers administered self-report inventory to elicit students' and English teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of mobile phones in the teaching-learning process of English. This study also seeks to find out the relevance and usefulness of mobile phones in imparting English language education in the students' academic and non-academic environments.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In this section, theoretical background to the present research provides a short description of different studies carried on the effectiveness of mobile phones in classroom instruction. This section also presents the views of different researchers about the impact of mobile phones in teaching-learning contexts.

A. Relevance of Electronic Gadgets in Teaching-learning Contexts

The power of portable computing in the form of mobile devices is accessible to everyone, and it is the time to consider using mobile devices for education (Goundar 2011). A study was conducted by Hashemi and Abbasi (2013) on 180 third-grade high school students to investigate whether using mobile phones had an effect on the learners' vocabulary retention. The results of the study proved that using mobile phones was helpful to EFL learners in terms of vocabulary retention. The findings of the study also reveal that a greater attention to the features of a new word and its text environment will facilitate its memorization. In a study carried out by Warschauer (2011) on the use of iPads in K-12 schools in the United States, it was observed that students of a private school had regular access to iPads and laptops. The researchers compared the use of iPads and laptops in a science class and findings suggests that students prefer using iPads to laptops due to the tablet's attractive features like touch screen, mobility, and light weight. The study concluded that iPads are more helpful for practical laboratory work as students carry the devices around to enter data on the go. A project was initiated by Ison et. al. (2004) to motivate the disengaged youth aged between 15-19 in learning programs by using mobile learning strategies and mobile phone technology in order to guide them to lifelong learning skills. These students were not successful in the traditional classroom-based learning and so the researchers used the option of mobile learning. They focused on improving students' language skills through collaborative and networked learning environments. The project documented that the youth were motivated to learn through messaging and that they successfully participated in communicating in the target language through mobile phones. The findings of the study suggest that mobile learning enhances students' participation and encourages them to meet deadlines for assessment and also contributes to learning. An important function that makes the mobile phone reliable is its ability to transmit learning modules electronically and enable learners to communicate with their instructors and peers (Brown 2003).

B. The Impact of Mobile Technology on Classroom Instruction

Vota (2011) points out that regardless of the educational features of mobile-device technology, it may fail if teachers are not trained to use the technology to improve their teaching activities. English language teachers have to be educated on the effectiveness of mobile technology in teaching activities. In addition to training the teachers on mobile device technology, they should also be encouraged to examine and envisage innovative ways through which technology can be used to create new prospects for classroom instruction. Universities and teacher training institutions across the world should recognize the relevance of mobile technology in creating effective language lessons. Weinberger, (2011) states that in educational technology, the failure of almost all initiatives is due to the additional burden placed on the teacher. He thinks that teachers' work can be facilitated by using technology.

A skilled teacher is aware of the ways to utilize technology that helps students to progress in their educational paths (Goundar 2011). Educational software companies, teachers, and researchers have to coordinate and develop digital content for successful learning outcomes for making teaching-learning process effective and resourceful (Gliksman 2011). Ally (2009) is of the opinion that people across the world wish to access learning materials on their mobile phones rather than acquiring another technology to receive learning materials. The number of mobile devices across the world have already surpassed the number of computers and other electronic gadgets, and it is indeed an opportunity for English language teachers to innovate methods and materials for interactive and enjoyable sessions to motivate the students in their classroom. In a regular classroom, EFL students often complain that they learn vocabulary but find it difficult to remember. Hedge (2008) states that there has been a greater awareness concerning vocabulary learning in recent years, and it is the responsibility of researchers, materials designers and teachers to increase the pace, using the latest technology in the classroom. In this era of technological advancements, the majority of the undergraduate student population possess latest mobile phones and use it for a wide variety of purposes. Considering the education value, most of the EFL undergraduates depend too much on these devices for electronic dictionaries and rarely use hard copies of Standard English dictionaries. Also, most of the undergraduates find it convenient to read from portable mobile screens and decipher the meaning of unfamiliar vocabulary. However, the mobile phones have the potential to attract students towards non-academic information which can have serious consequences in students' academic career. In spite of the disadvantages with the uses of mobile devices, many studies in the field have uncovered the motivation of the young students towards mobile integrated classroom instruction.

III. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study will be guided by the following research questions:

1) What is the impact of electronic gadgets on English language learning of Saudi undergraduates?
2) To what extent do undergraduates depend on mobile phones for communicating in English?
3) How do students and teachers perceive the effectiveness of mobile phones in improving English language skills?
4) Does the use of mobile phones accelerate or hinder English language learning abilities of undergraduates?

In order to elicit factual information for the above-mentioned research questions, a field study was conducted at Aljouf University, Saudi Arabia. The details of the field study are presented in the section that follows.

A. Field Study

The present study examines the impact of mobile phones on English language learning skills of university undergraduates. Further, a preliminary study of this kind at the micro level would give possible insight into pursuing a similar type of research at the macro level in the future.

B. Participants

Fifty-two male undergraduate students studying in the sixth, seventh and eight level, respectively, with English as their major subject voluntarily participated in this research. All the students are natives of Saudi Arabia, and their mother tongue is Arabic. The researchers took the permission of the concerned officials in the university administration and the teachers before conducting the field study. The undergraduates who participated in the study were informed that their responses are meant for research purposes only.

C. Self-report Inventory for Students

A *self-report inventory* is a questionnaire which gives a description of personality traits. The self-report inventory consisted of two yes-no questions (Q.3 and Q.4) and twenty-eight self-report statements (Q.10 – Q.37). Four scales (Agree - Strongly Agree – Disagree - Strongly Disagree) were given below each of the statements. Students had to read each of given statement and circle the scale that reflected their opinion most appropriately. Students were instructed to express their views objectively.

D. Questionnaire for English Teachers

A questionnaire was used to elicit English teachers' opinions about the effectiveness of mobile phones in improving undergraduates English language skills. The teacher questionnaire consisted of four open-ended questions. Teachers were requested to express their views in writing. Since teachers have an important role in the teaching-learning process, their perceptions would be useful for classroom research. Five English teachers responded to the given open-ended questions.

E. Limitations of the Study

The present study is limited in the following ways.

• The focus of the research was limited to the impact of mobile phones on English language learning.

• The study was confined to the students majoring in English language and literature, and the faculty of English department, Aljouf University.

• The data was collected from 52 male students majoring in English Language and Literature at the undergraduate level.

• The findings were based on the students' response to the above-mentioned self-reports and the answers given by teachers (qualitative teacher questionnaire).

In the following section, the data analysis of the self-report inventory and teacher questionnaire will be presented.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS

The quantitative data analysis, described in this section, is based on students' responses to the self-report, while the qualitative analysis is based on students' and teachers' responses to the open-ended questions.

A. Analysis of the Self-report Inventory

It was noted that the majority of the students who responded to the self-report inventory are currently pursuing English language and literature courses in their seventh semester. The self-report inventory had four scales:

A - *Strongly Agree*

B – *Agree*

C – *Disagree*

D - *Strongly Disagree*

The number of responses for each item is given in percentages.

Scales added up for clarity

The percentages of *Agree* and *Strongly Agree* (number of responses given for the scale *Agree* + the number of the responses given for the scale *Strongly Agree* = Total percentage) have been added up and are presented as the overall percentage. Similarly, the percentage of *Disagree* and *Strongly Disagree* (the number of responses given for the scale *Disagree* + the number of responses given for the scale *Strongly Disagree* = Total percentage) have been added up and are presented as the overall percentage.

Thus, for clarity, the data analysis was based on two major factors; students who circled *Agree* and *Strongly Agree* are considered to support the given statements while those students who circled *Disagree* and *Strongly Disagree* are considered to be of a different opinion than the one given in the statement. In Question No.1, it is observed that all the undergraduates mentioned that they belong to English department while in Question No.2, as stated earlier, the majority of the undergraduates mentioned that they belong to the seventh semester.

The table below gives an overview as to whether students purchase a mobile phone to communicate in English.

TABLE1:
ENGLISH ON MOBILE PHONE

Q.No.	Statement	Yes	N0
3	I use a mobile phone which has features like an English dictionary and the internet access.	87%	13%
4	I purchased a mobile phone because I can use it to learn English	67%	33%

An analysis of the data presented in the above table indicates that 87% of the students use mobile phones that have features like an English dictionary and web connectivity. 67% of the students agree that they have purchased a mobile phone because they can use it to learn English while 33% of students possibly had other reasons for purchasing a mobile phone.

TABLE2:
POSSESSION OF A MOBILE PHONE FOR LEARNING ENGLISH

Q. No.	Statement	Smart Phone %	iPod %	Tab %	Smartwatch %
5	I possess the following Gadgets	75	15	8	2
6	Which of the following Gadgets do you use you to learn English?	75	15	8	2

The above data indicate that 75% of the students possess smartphones, and the same percentage of students rely on them to learn English while only 15% of the students use iPods, 8% Tablets, and 2% smartwatches to learn English.

TABLE 3:
MEDIUM OF COMMUNICATION

Q.No	Statement	English	Arabic	Both
7	Which software do you use on your mobile?	23%	40%	37%
8	Which language do you use more often for chatting on the mobile phone?	15%	85%	-

The above data indicate that 40% of the students use Arabic software, and 85% of the students use only Arabic as a medium of communication for chatting on the mobile phone. The data indicate that 37% of the students use Arabic and English software on their mobile phones. It is also observed that only 15% of the students use English as a medium of communication while chatting on the mobile.

TABLE4:
DURATION OF TIME SPENT ON MOBILE PHONE

Q.9	In 24 hours a day, I spend _____ hours of my time on mobile phones			4 hours – 18 hours	
	Statement	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %
Q.10	I spend a lot of time, chatting with my friends on my mobile phone.	33	29	25	13

The data presented in the above table indicate that there are students who spend 18 hours in a day on their mobile phone while the majority of students spend almost 4 hours every day on their mobile phones. Of these students, 62% (33+29 =62) agree that they spend time chatting with their friends while (25+13 = 38) 38% of students say that they do not spend a lot of time chatting with their friends on the mobile phone.

TABLE5:
USING A MOBILE PHONE FOR THE PURPOSE OF COMMUNICATION IN ENGLISH AND ARABIC

Q.No	Statement	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %
11	I need a mobile phone to understand English words and sentences	48	38	10	4
12	I use English as a medium of communication while chatting on WhatsApp Messenger.	27	25	29	19
13	I use Arabic as a medium of communication while chatting on WhatsApp messenger.	67	21	6	6
14	I use English as a medium of communication while chatting on Facebook.	17	15	31	37
15	I use Arabic as a medium of communication while writing an email to my friends	27	37	15	21
16	I use English as a medium of communication while writing an email to my friends	38	24	25	13

The data presented in the above table indicate that 86% of the students depend on mobile phones to understand English words and sentences. These data reveal that 52% of the students use English as a medium of communication for chatting on Whatsapp messenger, 32% on Facebook, and 62% for the purpose of writing an email.

The data in above table also reveal that 88% of the students use Arabic as a medium of communication for chatting on Whatsapp messenger, 68% on Facebook and 36% for the purpose of writing an email.

TABLE6:
USING MOBILE PHONES FOR THE PURPOSE OF IMPROVING ENGLISH LANGUAGE SKILLS

Q, No	Statement	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree%
17	During free time, I watch English videos on my smartphones.	44	33	10	13
18	During free time, I watch Arabic videos on my smartphones.	42	25	17	16
19	Mobile phones can help me to improve my English speaking skills.	54	23	15	8
20	Mobile phones can help me to improve my English writing skills.	54	19	17	10
21	Mobile phones help me to learn new words of English.	42	50	8	0

The data presented in the above table indicate that 77% of the students watch English videos on mobile phones. 77% of the students believe that mobile phones can help in enhancing their English speaking skills, 73% believe that mobile phones can contribute to improving their English writing skills while 92% of the students believe that mobile phones can help them to learn new English words.

TABLE7:
DEPENDENCE ON MOBILE PHONES FOR TRANSLATION

Q, No	Statement	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %
22	Mobile phones are necessary for me to translate English words into Arabic.	56	32	6	6
23	I use mobile phones to translate Arabic words into English.	48	35	13	4
24	I can understand English words without using a mobile phone.	33	35	17	15
25	The software I use on my mobile phone can translate English words correctly into Arabic.	37	31	25	8
26	The software I use on my mobile phone can translate Arabic words correctly into English	35	40	19	6

The data presented in the above table indicate that 88% of the students find mobile phones useful for translating English words to Arabic while 83% of the students use mobile phones to translate Arabic words into English. The statistics show that 68% of the students believe that the software used on the mobile phones can translate English words into Arabic while 75% of the students are confident that the software used in their mobile phones can translate Arabic words into English accurately.

The data presented in the above table also specifies that 68% of the students are confident in understanding English words without using a mobile phone while 32% of the students possibly feel that mobile phones are necessary for understanding English words.

TABLE8:
MOBILE PHONES FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSES

Q, No	Statement	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %
27	I scan and save the study-related reading materials to my mobile phone.	33	27	29	11
28	My mobile phone helps me to improve my English language skills.	44	38	13	5
29	My teachers of English allow me to use a mobile phone to learn English words in the classroom.	21	25	29	25

The above data indicate that 60% of the students scan their academic reading materials on their mobile phones while 82% of them believe that mobile phones help them to improve their English language skills. 46% of the students indicate that their English teachers allow them to use mobile phones in the classroom for the purpose of learning English words. 54% of the students, however, say that their English teachers do not permit them to use mobile phones to learn English words in the classroom.

TABLE9:
READING ON THE MOBILE PHONES

Q, No	Statement	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %
30	During the exams, I read notes from my mobile phone.	21	25	27	27
31	I can remember everything if I read from my mobile phones.	21	27	40	12

The data presented in the above table indicate that 54% of the students do not use their mobiles during exams during exams while 46% of them read notes from their mobile phones during exams. 52% of the students are of the opinion that they cannot remember everything that they read on their mobile phone while 48% of the students say that they can remember everything that they read on the mobile phone.

TABLE10:
INFLUENCE OF MOBILE PHONES ON TEACHING-LEARNING PROCESS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

Q, No	Statement	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %
32	My English teacher allows me to take notes on my mobile phone.	16	42	21	21
33	Because of the mobile phones, I stopped writing notes on paper.	16	31	33	20
34	I can improve my English spelling by using a mobile phone.	30	37	23	10
35	I do not need to learn English spelling because I can always use a mobile phone.	19	23	29	29
36	I do not need not to learn English language because I can always use a mobile phone.	17	29	40	14
37	Mobile phones are the main cause of my poor performance in the exams.	29	23	27	21

The above data indicate that English teachers allow students to take notes on their mobile phones, and also, a majority of the students are of the opinion that they can improve English spelling through mobile phones. 52% of the students, however, believe that mobile phones are the main cause for their poor performance in exams.

B. Analysis of Students' and Teachers' Written Responses

The qualitative analysis is based on an open-ended question (Q.38) given in the students' questionnaire and four open-ended questions given in the teachers' questionnaire. Students and teachers responded to the open-ended questions related to the effectiveness of electronic gadgets on English language learning. Only 19% of the students (*Q.38 Please write your opinion about using a mobile phone / iPad / Smart watch / Tablet for learning English*), and five English teachers responded to the open-ended questions. An overview of the students' and teachers' perceptions is presented in the table below.

TABLE11:
STUDENTS' WRITTEN STATEMENTS ABOUT USING ELECTRONIC GADGETS FOR THE LEARNING OF ENGLISH

Sl.No	Students' Statements on Question 38:	Relative Share
1	Using Google translation to know a new word, watch youtube, using social applications.	6%
2	A good way to learn English.	19%
3	In this century, we can't imagine our lives without a mobile.	2%
4	In general, technology is helpful to improve your knowledge.	2%
5	The mobile phone is always easy to carry and so during our free time we can learn.	2%
6	Inside the classroom, I sometimes use it for translation and outside the classroom, I use it to chat in English.	12%
7	Smartphones are good for communication, but not for learning. Not all people use smartphones to learn.	2%
8	Smartphones are helpful, but, as a student, you always need real books to learn.	2%
9	I think using a mobile phone in the classroom is very bad.	2%
10	If you need to search for a word from a book (hard copy), sometimes you need to turn many pages, but in the mobile phone, it is easy to search and find a word.	2%
11	My mobile phone helps me to take online English.	2%
12	My mobile phone helps to improve my spelling.	4%
13	It is good to use mobile phones to communicate with people in English or any other language.	2%
14	Mobile phones are bad for people who use them most of the time for things that are useless, and who do not care about their studies.	2%

The above data indicate that most of the students are of the opinion that electronic gadgets can help them to improve their English language skills. There are many students who depend on mobile phones for the purpose of translation. However, there are also a few students who think that using the mobile phones in the classroom is not appropriate. The statements presented below is an overview of the English teachers' opinion on the impact of mobile phones.

TABLE12:
OPINIONS OF ENGLISH TEACHERS ON IMPACT OF MOBILE PHONES ON ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING

Sl.No	Statements by Teachers of English (Qualitative Approach)
1	Mobile phones help learners to learn independently.
2	Mobile phones enable learners to use varied sources.
3	Students can learn at their own pace.
4	Mobile phones can be used for a variety of purposes
5	Mobile phones can store useful information, such as dictionaries, and can access websites on the internet.
6	Care should be taken on the security of the device and personal data.
7	Mobile phones will certainly improve students' language skills.
8	Mobile phones are within our reach at any time, and we can use them without any time limit.
9	Mobile phones are helpful for checking pronunciation.
10	Mobile phones are helpful to verify the usage of English words.
11	Via mobile phones, materials related to grammar can be accessed.
12	Mobile phones help students to record and memorize lists of words.
13	Applications like *WhatsApp* help students to form groups and contribute to improving their writing, reading, and speaking skills.
14	Smartphones provide easy, fast and efficient access to thousands of useful sources.
15	The use of mobile phones for language learning can contribute positively to students' learning processes.

All the five teachers who participated in this questionnaire are of the opinion that electronic gadgets are necessary for improving students' English language skills. Thus, the English teachers are aware of the effectiveness of electronic devices in the teaching-learning process.

V. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The findings of this study are based on the quantitative and qualitative data obtained from students' response to the self-report inventory and teachers' response to the qualitative questionnaire. In this section, the major findings from the self-report inventory and the teachers' questionnaire will be presented in relation to the research questions mentioned in Section 3.0.

A. The Impact of Electronic Gadgets on English Language Learning of Saudi Undergraduates

Findings of the present study indicate that 75% of the students possess smartphones while the remaining 25% of them possess other electronic gadgets like iPods, Tablets and smartwatch. An analysis of the findings suggests that the impact of mobile phones in students' everyday lives is more dominant than that of other electronic gadgets. It is observed that 60% of the students scan study-related reading materials on their mobile phones while 46% of the students read notes from their mobile phones during exams. These students spend between four hours and 18 hours per day on their mobile phones for chatting with their friends. The findings of the study suggest that many students use mobile phones that come with English software like English electronic dictionaries so as to look up unfamiliar words.

English teachers can introduce tasks related to writing skills through which students can use the mobile keyboard to compose and edit short written messages for the purpose of communication. Most of the students who use mobile phones have only limited knowledge about the features of mobile technology. During the undergraduate education, students at all levels and branches should take the imitative to learn the basics of mobile technology. English teachers' and undergraduates' awareness of navigational issues, file formats, the size of files, types of files, memory cards and the effectiveness of operating systems can lead to successful outcomes.

B. The Extent to Which Undergraduates Depend on Mobile Phones for Communicating in English

The findings of the study suggest that 87% of the students use Arabic while only 15% of the students use English when communicating via their mobile phones. The findings also reveal that 86% of the students use translating software, available on the mobile phones, to understand English words and sentences. However, the inability of the various available language translating software to give accurate meaning to different English sentences can hinder students' understanding of the exact meaning. It is becoming habitual among students to make use of their mobile phones to translate the meanings of English words into their mother tongue. On the positive side, mobile phones can be helpful to connect and communicate with people living in other countries. A disadvantage of mobile phones is that the students' language learning abilities may be hindered when machine translation displays inaccurate meanings of a given English word. Lack of guidance while using these translation software programmes can lead to students comprehending inaccurate meanings and thus leading to the breakdown in the communication process.

In EFL classrooms, students are often frustrated with the traditional teaching methodologies, and it is time for English teachers to try and test mobile technology integrated activities to help students develop a positive attitude towards language learning. English teachers should encourage students to work productively and cooperatively on language learning activities, using mobile phone technology in the classroom. Introducing classroom activities that guide students to have control over their own learning while using a mobile phone can increase the amount of students' participation and create positive language learning environment in the classroom.

C. Students' and Teachers' Perceptions of the Positive Influence of Mobile Phones on Improving English Language Skills

The findings of the study suggest that 67% of the students think that mobile phones can improve their English spelling skills, and 45% of the students believe that they need not learn English spelling because they can always use a mobile phone. The belief that they can carry their mobile phones around at all times and that therefore, it is not necessary to learn English spelling may hinder them from reaching higher proficiency levels. It is observed that students often depend on their mobile phones when they are not sure of English spellings. Undergraduates may not feel it necessary to memorize or practice the spelling of unfamiliar English words because of the overall availability of portable mobile phones at all times. Students believe that electronic English dictionaries are effective in displaying the accurate spelling of words. Moreover, students can access electronic versions of standard English dictionaries like Oxford and Cambridge whenever they find it difficult to understand the meaning of unfamiliar English words. Only 2% of the students consider that using mobile phones in the classroom is inappropriate.

The findings of the study suggest that the teachers of English interviewed are aware of the effectiveness of mobile phones for improving the English language skills of undergraduates. The English teachers who participated in this study are of the opinion that mobile phones can certainly enhance students' communication skills and also make them independent of the teacher. Moreover, they think that students can develop independent learning habits and access resources repeatedly from different sources available on the internet. The English teachers believe that mobile devices are useful for students to record their pronunciation and, thus, improve their pronunciation skills. However, before introducing mobile technology to the classroom, issues like classroom management, variations in the mobile phone software programmes and an effective methodology have to be addressed systematically.

D. Mobile Phones as a Tool to Improve or Hinder Students' English Language Learning Abilities?

The findings of the present study reveal that English teachers - and most of the undergraduates - who participated in the survey are of the opinion that mobile phones can accelerate students' English language learning abilities. One of the teachers pointed out mobile phones "are in our reach any time, and we can use them without any time-limit" and another teacher stated, "helps to verify the usage of English words." A student expressed his view by stating that "inside the classroom, I sometimes use it for translation and outside the classroom, I use it to chat in English." Though the teachers of English interviewed are aware of the advantages of using mobile phones in the teaching-learning process, they strictly abide with the traditional course materials prescribed for the classroom use. 42^ of the students say that teachers do not allow them to take notes on mobile phones while 52% of the students are of the opinion that they cannot remember everything they read from their mobile phones.

In this context, English teachers need to find creative ways to integrate the mobile technology with the course materials for enhancing their students' English language learning skills. It is also important to note that using a mobile phone for unlimited hours in a day can cause health hazards and increases the potential for stress and insomnia. If these problems are not addressed at early stages in a students' academic life, the use of mobile phones can lead to poor performance in academic exams. The findings of the study reveal that 52% of the students believe that mobiles phones are the main cause for poor performance in their university exams.

VI. SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The present study was limited to 52 undergraduate students majoring English at Aljouf University, Saudi Arabia. As mentioned in section 3.5, the research findings were limited to the analysis of students' self-reports and a teacher questionnaire. Only five English teachers participated in the questionnaire and so, the results of this part of the survey cannot but indicate some vague tendencies. It will, therefore, be necessary to conduct another study with a bigger number of English teachers so as to verify – or falsify – the results presented in this paper. Such further research can be supplemented by designing and testing the effectiveness of integrating English language learning activities with mobile technology in EFL classrooms. However, the findings outlined in the present study give some basic insight into the improvement of English at the undergraduate level. Although these findings are related to the local context, they may, at least in part, be transferrable to the learning environments in other regions as the use of smartphone is becoming more and more prevalent worldwide.

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