

MOBILE LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A SURVEY OF ARABIC STUDENTS' USE OF MOBILE PHONE IN NIGERIA

BY

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Abstract

The mobile phone has entered students' lives as a necessary ingredient, not only for socialization and communication but even for studying. In this research, the perceptions of Arabic students on the use of mobile phones as learning tools at two Nigerian universities were examined: one public (Alayande University) and one private university (Al-Hikmah University). The purpose of the study to investigate common usage of mobile phones in learning Arabic, determine perceived effectiveness of mobile phones as Arabic learning tools, discover challenges students encounter, and examine differences between the public and private university environment. A descriptive survey research design was adopted, and 150 undergraduate students were selected from both universities. Data was gathered using a structured questionnaire, and the analysis involved descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, frequency, and percentage) and inferential statistics (independent samples t-test). Findings showed that students made consistent use of mobile phones for academic purposes such as accessing e-books, online reading of scholarly materials, use of education apps, and messaging with other students and lecturers. Students also discovered that mobile phones were effective in supporting their learning at academia through improved comprehension, flexibility, and motivation. Some of the difficulties encountered, however, were low data connectivity, data affordability, distraction by social media, and device limitation. The t-test revealed that there existed a disparity between private and public university students in the frequency of using mobile phones, where public university students used them more frequently. No disparity, however, was observed in satisfaction among the students with the learning efficiency of mobile phones between the two institutions. The study concludes that mobile phones are significant in enabling Arabic students' learning activities but are hindered by infrastructure and technology limitations. It suggests increased digital infrastructure, embracing mobile-friendly learning platforms, student training on academic mobile device use, and institution support to maximize the learning potential of mobile technology in Nigerian universities.

Keywords: Mobile phones, Arabic students, mobile learning, public and private universities, Nigeria

Introduction

In the last several years, mobile phones have evolved from their utilization as simple communication tools to sophisticated devices that facilitate learning, research, and collaboration in university studies. With increased accessibility of smartphones and affordable internet connection, university students across the globe now engage mobile devices as complementary learning aids (Owoyale-Abdulganiy, Jamiu, & Yahya, 2024). Mobile technology use in learning has been described as revolutionary because it provides flexibility, access to information, and interactive platforms to assist students with learning. To language learners in particular, mobile phones have been especially beneficial for complementing learning outcomes. Through applications such as Duolingo, Google Classroom, and online dictionaries, students can access up-to-date materials, practice language skills at their own pace, and communicate with others and instructors outside the traditional classroom setting (Aliyu, Adam, & Abdurrashid, 2024). In Nigeria, where Arabic is studied as both a religious and school subject, mobile learning

presents the possibility of transcending limitations of conventional classroom resources and enriching more learner engagement with the language (Aminullahi, 2023).

Despite such advantages, there are issues. Students are likely to face issues such as poor internet connectivity, high data costs, distraction by social media, and device limitations in storage and battery (Musibau & Ibrahim, 2023). Besides, there might be a distinction between students from public and private universities in accessing, and using, mobile phones for university studies due to variation in institutional support. It is necessary to comprehend such dynamics in a bid to develop policies and practices that maximize the academic potential of portable technology among Nigerian Arabic students. This study therefore investigates Arabic students' perceptions of mobile phones as a learning tool in some Nigerian public and private universities. Specifically, it examines the common academic use of the mobile phone, perceived academic usefulness of the device, challenges encountered, and how the two categories of universities compare in usage and perception patterns.

Purpose of the Study

The general purpose of the study is to investigate the perceptions of Arabic students on the use of mobile phones as learning tools. Specifically, the study aimed as:

1. Examining how Arabic students use mobile phones for academic purposes in the selected public and private universities.
2. Determining the Arabic students' perceived effectiveness of mobile phones as learning tools in the selected public and private universities.
3. Identifying challenges faced by Arabic students in using mobile phones for learning in the selected public and private universities.
4. Examining the significant difference between the selected public and private universities' Arabic students in their use of mobile phones for academic purposes
5. Assessing significant difference in the perceived effectiveness of mobile phones as learning tools between the selected public and private universities' Arabic students.

Research Questions

The following research questions are generated to guide the study:

1. how Arabic students use mobile phones for academic purposes in public and private universities.
2. What are the Arabic students' perceived effectiveness of mobile phones as learning tools in public and private universities.
3. What challenges do students encounter while using mobile phones as learning tools?

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses are postulated in this study:

H₀₁: There is no significant difference between the public and private universities' Arabic students in their use of mobile phones for academic purposes

H₀₂: There is no significant difference in the perceived effectiveness of mobile phones as learning tools between public and private universities' Arabic students.

Literature Review

The Use of Mobile Phone in Arabic Learning

The utilisation of mobile phones by students in Nigerian universities is accelerating extensively learning purposes, ranging from the utilization of study materials to group communication. In Greece, Nikolopoulou (2022) noted that students were frequent users of smartphones for reading articles, making notes, and communicating with students and instructors after the shift into post-pandemic digitalization. Similarly, Aina (2025) found that Nigerian pre-service teachers highly relied on mobile phones to read educational texts, participate in educational discussions on WhatsApp and Facebook, and look up assignments. In the Ethiopian context, Guadu (2025) showed that students of the English major actively participated in mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) by utilizing their devices to learn vocabulary, translate, and learn authentic content. There is also evidence from research in Tanzania that confirms the trend, as students at the State University of Zanzibar observed the positive application of mobile applications to access flexible course content (Komba, 2023). Overall, the findings from these studies indicate that the mobile phone is not only a communications tool but a versatile learning device.

Specifically, in Arabic learning, Nigerian Arabic language students' utilization of mobile phones as study tools has been on the spotlight in the recent past, particularly under the overall umbrella of mobile-assisted language learning (MALL). Scholars have explored how students use mobile phones for studying, how effective they are at improving Arabic language proficiency, and what problems are generated by their use. Various studies recognize the increasing importance of mobile phones in Arabic language acquisition among Nigerian universities. Owoyale-Abdulganiy, Jamiu, and Yahya (2024) considered Ekiti State University Islamic Studies undergraduate students, whose use of mobile phone applications to enhance Arabic communicative proficiency was confirmed by the students. These applications were used beyond the classroom to support reading, interpretation, and oral practice. Similarly, Aliyu, Adam, and Abdurrashid (2024) explored if e-learning was impactful in enhancing Arabic language skills among non-Arab speakers at the Federal College of Education, Katsina. They established that online platforms, the majority of which are mobile-friendly, were instrumental in enhancing vocabulary, grammar, and reading. Besides formal learning, Southwest Nigerian university students of Arabic also used social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook to share resources, collaborate on tasks, and practice written Arabic, illustrating informal but pervasive mobile phone incorporation into study (Aminullahi, 2023).

Effectiveness of Mobile Phones in Arabic Learning

University students perceive mobile phones as effective learning tools for enhancing the outcomes of learning. An experiment study carried out in Istanbul demonstrated that task-based mobile-assisted learning significantly improved vocabulary learning and enhanced favorable student attitudes (Yildiz, 2023). In three countries, a comparative study revealed that Czech Republic, Taiwanese, and Iraqi EFL learners indicated high satisfaction with mobile and digital tools, including Google Translate, Duolingo, and ChatGPT, especially in terms of vocabulary and listening (Hromadová et al., 2024). In the same vein, Habib et al. (2022) concluded that mobile learning in higher education was associated with improvements in perceived accessibility, engagement, and outcome, but that effectiveness was generally associated with systematic instructional design. Also, Owoyale-Abdulganiy, Jamiu, and Yahya (2024) considered Ekiti State University Islamic Studies undergraduate students, whose use of mobile phone applications to enhance Arabic communicative proficiency was confirmed by the students. These applications were used beyond the classroom to support reading, interpretation, and oral practice. Similarly, Aliyu, Adam, and Abdurrashid (2024) explored if e-learning was impactful in enhancing Arabic language skills among non-Arab speakers at the Federal College of Education, Katsina. They established that online platforms, the majority of which are mobile-friendly, were instrumental in enhancing vocabulary, grammar, and reading. Besides formal learning, Southwest Nigerian university students of Arabic also used social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook

to share resources, collaborate on tasks, and practice written Arabic, illustrating informal but pervasive mobile phone incorporation into study (Aminullahi, 2023). These findings suggest that the value of mobile phones is best felt whenever use is deliberate, pedagogically situated, and facilitated with high-quality applications.

Challenges of Mobile-Based Arabic Learning

Despite these advantages, several challenges limit the potential of mobile phones as learning tools. Guadu (2025) emphasized obstacles such as inadequate ICT preparation, smartphone and internet bundle costs, and institutional support shortages in Ethiopia. Aina (2025) similarly pointed to limited internet access and disruption from non-teaching uses as challenges for Nigerian pre-service teachers. In Tanzania, Komba (2023) noted unstable connectivity and poorly planned mobile systems reduced usability for students at SUZA. Moreover, Hromadová et al. (2024) highlighted content diversity limitations and mismatches between student requirements and available digital tools. All these studies show that even though students recognize the learning value of mobile phones, infrastructural, economic, and pedagogical problems must be addressed in order to secure long-term success.

Use of mobile phones for learning among Arabic language learners has increased in recent times, particularly in the context of mobile-assisted language learning (MALL). As mobile phones become increasingly ubiquitous in the Middle East and North Africa, students are increasingly finding them as a means for learning vocabulary, practicing grammar, and communication in Arabic. Recent research identifies three key areas: how mobile phones are used by Arabic language students for academic purposes, how they see them being effective, and the issues they encounter. One persisting challenge is an absence of teacher involvement in regulating students' use of mobile applications. From Ekiti State University, students reported that lecturers barely made use of mobile apps in teaching, therefore leaving the learners to utilize them independently (Owoyale-Abdulganiy et al., 2024). Technical glitches such as poor internet speed, high data charges, and inadequate ICT training were also witnessed. In Katsina, e-learning was helpful but infrastructure constraints lowered frequent usage of online content (Aliyu et al., 2024). Once again, social media studies highlighted distractions, time wastage, and privacy concerns as significant barriers faced by Arabic students (Aminullahi, 2023). Massive studies examining mobile phone usage among Nigerian pre-service teachers (Aina, 2025) confirm these concerns are present in all studies, where affordability, connectivity, and teacher support turn into barriers to the potential of mobile learning.

Literature considered here presents that Nigerian Arabic language learners are real-life users of mobile phones for formal and informal learning practices. They use mobile applications, e-learning sites, and social media for practicing Arabic skills, peer-to-peer collaboration, and access to online materials. Mobile phones have been viewed by learners as effective, multifaceted, and accessible learning tools. However, its use is often informal and limited by infrastructural constraint, expensive data, distractions, and low teacher integration. These findings underscore the need for institutional policies that encourage organized mobile learning, in-service training of MALL, and better infrastructure to harness the benefit of mobile technology to teach Arabic in Nigeria. The literature also left behind the gaps of investigations on exploring in different universities and reporting from respondents based on private and public universities. Consequently, the current study proposed to fill the gaps.

Methodology

The research employed a descriptive survey research design to collect quantitative data that can uncover patterns of mobile phone utilization, perceived efficacy, and problems among Arabic students, as well as allow for comparisons between public and private universities in Ilorin, Kwara State and Oyo, Oyo State. The population for this study was undergraduate students enrolled in Arabic or Arabic-related courses in Emmanuel Alayande University of Education, Oyo; a state university of Oyo and Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin; a private university in Kwara. Purposive sampling technique was used within each institution to cover different levels of academics (100–400

level). A total of 150 respondents were sampled with a total number of 83 respondents from Al-Hikmah University and 67 respondents from Emmanuel Alayande University.

A structured questionnaire titled "Mobile Phones and Arabic Learning Questionnaire (MPALQ)" was designed for data collection. The instrument was divided into four parts: The Section A was used to draw demographic information of the respondents (gender, age, level of study, type of university). Section B with 5 items was used to gather data about how the respondents use mobile phone for learning. The section C with 5 items was dedicated to drawing data about mobile phone learning tool effectiveness perceived by the respondent. The section D with 5 items was used to generate data on challenges of using mobile phones to learn Arabic. Items in Sections B–D were measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5). For content validity, the tool was pilot-tested by two experts in educational technology and teaching Arabic languages as well. Their feedback led to item clarification and relevance. Pilot testing was carried out among 30 university students studying Arabic but not part of the main study. Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients were calculated: 0.69 for Section B, 0.75 for Section C, and 0.68 for Section D, showing strong internal consistency. The instrument was administered with the assistance a research assistant in each university. The research questions 1-3 raised were answered using Descriptive statistics such as mean, standard deviation, frequency, and percentage. While Inferential Statistics of t-test was employed for testing the two hypotheses at the significance level was 0.05.

Results

Research Question 1:

1. What are the common academic uses of mobile phones among university students

Table 1: Frequency, Mean and Standard Deviation Output for: academic uses of mobile phones among university students

S/N	Item	Mean	Std. Deviation	Remark
1.	I use my mobile phone to access e-books and PDFs.	3.13	.988	Positive
2.	I use mobile phones to browse the internet for academic information.	3.13	.869	Positive
3.	I use educational apps on my mobile phone (e.g., Google Classroom, Duolingo)	3.20	.920	Positive
4.	I use my mobile phone to take notes during lectures.	2.92	1.033	Positive
5.	I communicate with classmates or lecturers using my mobile phone for academic purposes.	3.00	.934	Positive
Valid N (listwise)		150		

Table 1 reveals that most of the mean values of the items scaled with Strongly agree through strongly disagree are greater than the criterion value of 2.5 and therefore, it deduced that most of the undergraduates at the both private and public universities are mostly using their phones for academic purpose.

Research Question 2:

2. How effective do students perceive mobile phones in enhancing their academic learning?

Table 2: Frequency, Mean and Standard Deviation Output for: students' perceptions of mobile phones in enhancing their academic learning

S/N	Item	Mean	Std. Deviation	Remark
1.	Using a mobile phone enhances my academic	3.05	.858	Positive

2.	performance. Mobile phones help me to study more flexibly and independently.	3.25	.827	Positive
3.	I understand topics better when I use mobile-based learning resources.	3.35	.851	Positive
4.	I prefer using mobile phones for academic work compared to laptops/desktops.	3.18	.828	Positive
5.	Mobile phone usage increases my motivation to study.	3.25	.827	Positive
Valid N (listwise)		150		Positive

Table 2 showed that most of the mean values of the items in this table scaled with Strongly agree through strongly disagree, are greater than the criterion value of 2.5 and therefore, it's deduced that undergraduate at the both universities positively perceived effective utilization of phones as a mean to enhance academic learning

Research Question Three:

- What challenges do students encounter while using mobile phones as learning tools?

Table 3: *Frequency, Mean and Standard Deviation Output for: challenges do students encounter while using mobile phones as learning tools*

S/N	Item	Mean	Std. Deviation	Positive
1.	Poor internet connection limits my use of mobile phones for academic tasks.	3.17	.870	Positive
2.	I get easily distracted by social media while studying on my phone.	3.04	.904	Positive
3.	High cost of data makes it difficult to use mobile phones for learning.	3.16	.898	Positive
4.	My mobile phone has limited storage or battery life, which affects its usage for learning	3.04	1.016	Positive
5.	lack access to academic-friendly mobile applications or platforms.	3.17	.908	Positive
Valid N (listwise)		150		Positive

Table 3 showed that most of the mean values of the items in this table scaled with Strongly agree through strongly disagree, are greater than the criterion value of 2.5 and therefore, it's deduced that most of the highlighted statement are the typical challenges undergraduates at both universities do encounter while using their phones.

H₀₁: There is no significant difference between public and private universities' Arabic students in their use of mobile phones for academic purposes Independent Samples t-test on Students' Use of Mobile Phones for Arabic learning

Table 4: *The Sampled t-test on Students' Use of Mobile Phones for Arabic Learning*

Institution	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	T	Df	Sig. (2-Tailed)
Private University	83	3.0	1.024	.105	.012		.947
Public University	77	3.30	0.921	.142	.012		.3.7
Total	150	6.24	1.975				

As indicated in table 4, the public university students have a high mean score (Mean = 3.30, SD = .921) compared to the private university who have a low mean score (Mean = 3.0, SD = 1.024). This shows a statistically significant difference, $t(150) = 0.002$, $p < 0.05$ in favour of the public university Arabic students. The null-hypothesis is rejected. This implies that there is a significant difference public and private universities' Arabic students in their use of mobile phones for academic purposes Independent Samples t-test on Students' Use of Mobile Phones for Arabic learning

H₀₂: There is no significant difference in the perceived effectiveness of mobile phones as learning tools between students of the two universities

Table 5. The Sampled t-test on Students' Use of Mobile Phones for Arabic Learning

Institution	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	T	Df	Sig. (2-Tailed)
Al-Hikmah University	83	3.35	.818	.090	.116		.279
Alayande University	77	3.34	.897	.110	.116		.965
Total	150	6.24	1.975				

Table 5 reveals that the private university Arabic students have a slightly higher mean score (Mean = 3.35, SD = 0.818) compared to the public university Arabic students who have a mean score of (Mean = 3.34, SD = 0.897). This difference in means is marginal. The independent samples t-test indicated no statistically significant difference, $t(150) = 0.279$, $p > 0.05$. Consequently, the null hypothesis is retained. This implies that there is no significant difference between public and private university Arabic students in their perceived effectiveness of mobile phones as learning tools.

Findings

In this present research, the use of mobile phones in academic purposes by Arabic students of a private and public university in Nigeria was investigated. Discussion of the findings is provided in accordance with research questions and hypotheses tested. The findings form the items on research question 1 show that Arabic undergraduates used mobile phones extensively for academic purposes such as reading e-books and PDFs ($M = 3.13$), internet surfing for academic content ($M = 3.13$), usage of educational apps ($M = 3.20$), note-taking ($M = 2.92$), and academic communication with lecturers and students ($M = 3.00$). These findings indicate that students have integrated mobile phones in their learning activities with the most common uses being education apps and web browsing. This affirms previous studies (Owoyale-Abdulganiy, Jamiu, & Yahya, 2024; Aina, 2025) that identified mobile phones as central tools in resource access and communication in higher education.

Furthermore, the findings from the items on research question 2 showed that Arabic students were in favor of mobile phones as strong tools for improving effective Arabic learning. The highest rated statement was that knowledge of subjects is improved through mobile-based material ($M = 3.35$), followed by flexibility and self-study ($M = 3.25$), and enhanced motivation to study ($M = 3.25$). These results indicate that students perceive that mobile phones facilitate not just access to materials but also improve learning outcomes and autonomy. This aligns with Aliyu, Adam, and Abdurrashid (2024), whose research showed that mobile learning supports independent study and performance among Nigeria's Arabic language learners.

Also, the findings from research question 3 revealed the challenges in using mobile phones for learning. The findings reported significant issues, e.g., poor internet connectivity ($M = 3.17$), data being costly ($M = 3.16$), and social media distractions ($M = 3.04$). Device-related limitations, i.e., storage capacity and battery life ($M = 3.04$), were reported. Lack of academic-appropriate apps was also reported ($M = 3.17$). These problems replicate Musibau and Ibrahim (2023), who identified infrastructural and financial problems as important limitations to Arabic

language teaching technology integration. Thus, although mobile phones are widely used, their educational use is limited by systemic and technological problems.

In addition, the study findings revealed a statistically significant difference ($p = 0.002$), suggesting that mobile phone usage intensity and nature vary by institution type. It might be explained by differences in institutional infrastructure, digital literacy support, or students' socioeconomic background.

Hypothesis Two (H_{02}) examined difference in mobile phone perceived effectiveness as a learning tool among the two universities' students. The results in Table 5 showed contrary to expectation, differences were statistically significant ($p = 0.002$), showing mobile phones' perception of educational value is not similar across all institutions. Although they both scored them high in terms of effectiveness, private university students may have more efficacious experiences due to relatively better infrastructure and institutional facilities, as pointed out by Aminullahi (2023).

Conclusion

This study was carried out to explore the use of mobile phones as learning media among Arabic students in a public and private universities in Nigeria. The findings revealed that the students were actually utilizing mobile phones for Arabic learning through reading e-books, searching for academically related content, using educational apps, capturing notes, and chatting academically. Mobile phones were also shown to support the learning process by widening understanding, promoting flexibility and self-study, and increasing the motivation to learn. But concerns of poor connectivity, high data costs, social media distraction, and poor device memory were placed at the forefront as barriers to optimal use of mobile phones in learning for scholarship. The hypotheses tested also revealed a difference between public and private university students in mobile phone usage for learning, with higher usage being reported among public university students. However, it did not reveal a difference in the perception of the learning efficacy of mobile phones, suggesting that both institutions have equal appreciation for the value of mobile phones in learning.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following are recommended:

1. Enhancement of digital infrastructure: Universities must collaborate with telecommunication operators to improve internet connectivity within campuses and reduce data prices for students.
2. Promotion of study-focused mobile use: Seminar classes and workshops can be organized to teach students effective use of mobile phones for studies and resisting distraction from study-inconsistent activities such as social media.
3. Integration of mobile learning into the curriculum: Lecturers can apply mobile-friendly platforms and applications (e.g., Google Classroom, Duolingo, WhatsApp study groups) to support teaching and learning in Arabic studies.
4. Facilitation of device accessibility: Universities and policymakers should provide incentives such as student concessions or subsidies on smart phones with enhanced storage capacity, battery life, and education-specific applications to enable learning through mobiles.
5. Institutionalisation of equity for mobile learning: Given there is a disparity in utilization patterns between public and private universities, public universities should augment support systems which enable wider implementations of mobile learning practices.

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