

# UTILISING MOBILE PHONE APPLICATIONS TO ENHANCE ARABIC LANGUAGE COMMUNICATIVE SKILLS AMONG ISLAMIC STUDIES UNDERGRADUATES IN EKITI-STATE UNIVERSITY, NIGERIA

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## Abstract

This paper extensively explored students' aptness to mobile learning and their perceptions about their application and difficulties of using mobile phone applications in Islamic Studies communicative skills. The participants are undergraduate students studying Islamic Studies at Ekiti State University Ado Ekiti. To collect data, a questionnaire is used on whether Arabic students use their mobile phones as educational tools while learning, reading Arabic aspect of Islamic Studies and how they give the interpretation. The results showed that, the use of mobile phone is gradually becoming popular among undergraduates of Ekiti State University. Learners used a variety of applications as educational tools outside the classroom. However, the results indicated a lack of adequate support on the part of many teachers who either do not allow the use of mobile phones in class or provide limited guidance for using mobile applications in independent learning. Results also showed that students use a variety of mobile applications to support their learning Arabic aspect of Islamic Studies although they mostly use them informally without their teachers' direction or guidance, and sometimes face technical and functional challenges. The results showed that many Islamic Studies students have a generally positive attitude toward using mobile-phones in aspect of Islamic Studies. Based on the findings, it was suggested that, in order for Islamic Studies students to take advantage of the available mobile phone applications, Teachers should be more involved in guiding the students on reliable applications and helping them in effective use of these Arabic applications.

**Keywords:** Mobile-phone, Arabic aspect, undergraduate Islamic Studies students, Ekiti State University

## **INTRODUCTION**

Arabic is one of international languages commonly used in legal sources such as Qur'an, *Hadith*, *Ijma'*, and *Qiyas*, or other scientific sources. Understanding Arabic is one of the requirements to study various legal sources in Islamic Studies. The current development of civilization causes various impacts and changes in the structure of human life. Ease of access to technology, information, and communication allows anyone to access some services more easily without spending much time, cost, and energy. As an example, a lot of standard communication devices have helped someone to interact easily with one another anywhere, anytime, and even at a distance. However, some irresponsible people abuse those technologies, information, and communication advances to commit various crimes. It means that the emergence of new problems is one of the impacts of those advances. In this case, human interaction patterns have changed much.

Therefore, the structure of human life needs a law to control human behaviour. In Islamic civilization, Qur'an and *Hadith* are the first and foremost basic-law to control the life structure. Additionally, *Ijma'* and *Qiyas* are also as the basic-law supplement. Qur'an and *Hadith* not only control worship or ritual worship to the Creator, but also control an interaction pattern between human and human, and even between human and nature. Furthermore, Qur'an is also called "the mother of all knowledge" since it is the main source of various sciences (Zailani et al., 2014). Qur'an is revealed in Arabic to human being and so are *Hadith* and other Islamic references. Thus, Islamic Studies learning is one of ways to understand the content of Qur'an, *Hadith*, *Ijma'*, *Qiyas* or other Islamic references (Mat & Wan Abas, 2016).

Arabic is one of the international languages like English. In this case, learning Arabic like other languages include mastering of four skills such as speaking, listening, reading, and writing (Hussien, 2018; Rohman, 2014). In general, the material in Arabic learning is divided into three parts, namely phonology, morphology, and syntax (Wekke, 2017) and phonology being the basis for mastering speaking and listening skills (Taha & Haddad, 2017). Meanwhile, from linguistics views, Arabic is a rich language with its vocabulary. Thus, knowledge of word forms, article functions, pronouns, genders, numbers, to meaning differences caused by the difference of the structure is as the basic knowledge needed when learning Arabic (Zailani et al., 2014).

### **Integration of Mobile Phones for Mobile Learning**

Communication and entertainment were once to be the main purposes of mobile-phones. But over time they have changed to be a tool for everything. To download a ringtone was once the most exciting thing to do with your mobile-phone. This day mobile phone users have hundreds of millions free downloadable mobile software applications (apps) to choose from and the choice is not easy. According to Johnson, Adams and Cummins (2020), "these simple but useful apps have found their way into almost every form of human endeavor. More so, education is not an exception where "new literacy practices in online contexts" (Hafner & Miller, 2022) have clearly emerged. The general concept of e-learning which includes Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) has evolved by the arrival of mobile devices to form a new concept known in literature as mobile learning. Brown (2015) considered mobile learning as an extension of e-learning. It can be simply defined as "a dynamic learning environment through the use of mobile technologies especially in the field of education" (Keengwe & Bhargava, 2021).

Recently, the interest level of m-learning has increased among many Islamic Studies educators because these devices are possessed by almost every Arabic student and supported with amazing applications that make learning of every single element in any field

attractive and accessible anytime and anywhere. Consequently, these Arabic devices with their huge potentials would definitely revolutionize the learning process (Ayub, 2019). A learner of Islamic Studies becomes hesitant of what to download if he/she looks for a dictionary for example. There are countless sorts of free Arabic dictionaries with very cheap ones available in the market. All the hard copies of Arabic dictionaries that Arabic students used to buy in the past now are available online and many of them can be used even offline by installing them in their mobile phones as hard copies of books are being replaced by electronic versions (e Books), and it is becoming the trend going forward to be the norm (Abachi & Muhammad, 2021). In fact, using these Arabic devices normally requires many competences that are also needed in education, such as communicating, organizing, ordering, planning, assessing, evaluating, producing, etc.

### **A Change in Generation and Contextualizing Mobiles Phones**

Although widening access to and ownership of smart devices by all students should be recognized by Arabic and Islamic Studies teachers, there are teachers who are still reluctant to allow their students to touch these Arabic devices during class time. To many teachers, these devices are for communication and entertainment, and not for education. They think that these devices should not be used in class as they may cause disturbance to both teachers and students (Ayub, 2019). In fact, mobile phones can be used for educational purposes as there is much useful educational software which students can install and use inside and outside the classroom as their mobile devices are available with them all the time. Al-Busaidi and Tuzlukova (2023) stated that Arabic and Islamic Studies students learn at their own pace and become more autonomous because such applications give learners a less controlled environment and thus, an opportunity to improve their skills. Therefore, Islamic Studies educators cannot ignore what is happening around them and they need to accommodate themselves to new changes that are taking place so the gap between Arabic learners and teachers can be bridged; otherwise, the whole process of both Arabic teaching and learning will be affected.

### **Bridging Formal and Informal Learning by Mobile Learning**

Abachi and Muhammad (2019) believed that not computers, but mobile phones that are currently banned in many schools, are the most important tools that would engage the 21st century students. Some mobile phones have sensors, fingerprint readers, and voice recognition, and what more. Additionally, mobile phones are being constantly improved. In language learning, Chinnery (2018) argued that these functions help to “communicate language practice, access to authentic content, and task completion”. He concluded that what these benefits indicate is “the potential MALL has in expanding social inclusion in language learning”. Besides, Chinnery (2018) supported this idea that “outside the classroom, mobile and wireless technologies enable learning to be more directly connected with real world experiments and artefact”. Likewise, Reinhardt and Nelson (2016) and Shin (2019) argued that technology can engage language learners with authentic and meaningful materials and can enhance their sense of community with contextual elements of an out-of-class learning environment.

### **Leaning and Social Network**

Smartphones come loaded with apps (like WhatsApp, Facebook, etc.) that connect people to a global community. These social networks act like virtual spaces where users can exchange ideas, information, and even emotions. Research shows these social media tools can be effectively used in mobile learning (Taylor, 2015; Fisher, 2017). By incorporating social media, mobile learning can become more engaging and interactive, fostering collaboration and creating a more autonomous learning environment for students (Benson,

2014). For example, mobile blogs can facilitate student-to-student interaction in various language situations, even creating opportunities to connect with native speakers.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Informal social media such as Facebook increased students' engagement in the learning task and motivated them to implement contextual elements from their own environment. Mobile learning has become a viable platform for contextual learning that bridges formal and informal learning environments in and beyond the classroom. Since undergraduate Arabic students in Ekiti State University generally use mobile phones extensively and for almost everything, there is a need for a study to explore how Islamic Studies students at Ekiti State University deal with mobile phones when dealing with Arabic aspect of Islamic Studies and how they use these mobile devices as educational tools inside and outside classrooms.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study aimed at finding out the use of mobile-phone applications for language communicative skills by undergraduate students of Islamic Studies in Ekiti State University, Ado Ekiti. Specifically, it examined:

1. Undergraduate Islamic Studies students' perceptions on how they use their mobile phones in dealing with Arabic aspect of Islamic Studies inside and outside classrooms.
2. Undergraduate Islamic Studies students' views about mobile phone educational application that can be used to enhance aspect of Islamic Studies inside and outside the classroom,
3. Challenges faced when using their mobile phones in Islamic Studies learning.

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the undergraduate Islamic Studies students' perceptions on how they use their mobile phones in learning Islamic Studies inside and outside classrooms?
2. What are the undergraduate Islamic Studies students' views about mobile phone educational application that can be used to enhance dealing with Arabic aspect of Islamic Studies inside and outside the classroom?
3. What are the Challenges faced by Islamic Studies students when using their mobile-phones in Arabic aspect of Islamic Studies.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The study was carried out in Ekiti State University, Ado Ekiti. The participants were 44 400 level students of Islamic Studies programme who are Using Mobile Phone Applications inside and outside the Islamic Studies Classroom. 22 students were from the Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies, Faculty of Arts while 22 were Islamic Studies Education students from Department of Arts and Social Sciences Education, Faculty of Education. Questionnaire was used for data collection. The format of the Arabic questionnaire was designed to get a wide range of information to serve the study. Questionnaire consists of ten questions. Some of them asked questions about the participants practices and perceptions on how they use mobile-phones in their dealing with Arabic aspect of Islamic Studies inside and outside the classroom. Hard copies of the questionnaires were distributed to three sections of undergraduate Islamic Studies students, and one electronic version was sent by email to one section of students but the researcher got only 44 responses.

**Table 1** Demographic Information

Faculty	Level	Males	Females	Total
Arts	400	11	11	22
Education	400	11	11	22
Total	-	22	22	44

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Utilization of mobile phone application inside and outside the classroom by undergraduate students of Islamic Studies in Ekiti State University

S/N	STATEMENT	AGREE	NOT SURE	DISAGREE
1	Undergraduate students of Islamic Studies have access to internet in Ekiti State University	62%	10%	15%
2	Undergraduate students of Islamic Studies only sometimes have access to internet in Ekiti State University	25%	10%	55%
3	Undergraduate students of Islamic Studies used their mobile phone inside and outside the classroom in Ekiti State University	68%	13%	30%
4	Undergraduate students of Islamic Studies never used their mobile phone inside and outside the classroom in Ekiti State University	20%	10%	68%
5	Lecturers allow the Undergraduate students of Islamic Studies to use their mobile phones during the lecture inside the classroom in Ekiti State University	20%	15%	55%
6	Lecturers never allow the Undergraduate students of Islamic Studies to use their mobile phones during the lecture inside the classroom in Ekiti State University	62%	10%	20%
7	Lack of access to internet usage in Ekiti State University	10%	10%	65%
8	Undergraduate students of Islamic Studies applied the use of internet and mobile phone to their knowledge in Ekiti State University	68%	15%	20%
9	Undergraduate students of Islamic Studies never applied the use of internet and mobile phone to their knowledge in Ekiti State University	13%	10%	55%
10	Use of internet and mobile phone have positive effect on undergraduate students of Islamic Studies in Ekiti State University	65%	8%	10%

Results show that all undergraduate students of Islamic Studies in Ekiti State University who participated in the study own mobile phones. 62% agreed, 10% not sure and 15% disagreed that they have access to internet. 25% agreed, 10% not sure and 55% disagreed that only sometimes they have access to internet. 68% agreed 13% not sure 30% disagreed that they used their mobile phone inside and outside the classroom. 20% agreed, 10% not sure and 68% disagreed that they never used their mobile phone inside and outside classroom. 20% agreed 15% not sure 55% disagreed that their teachers allow to use mobile phone inside the

classroom. 62% agreed, 10% not sure and 20% disagreed that their teachers never allow them to use mobile phone in the classroom. 10% agreed, 10% not sure and 65% disagreed that there is lack of access to internet usage in Ekiti State University. 68% agreed, 15% not sure 20% disagreed that the undergraduate students of Islamic Studies applied the use of internet and mobile phone to their knowledge. 13% agreed, 10% not sure 55% disagreed that the undergraduate students of Islamic Studies never applied the use of internet and mobile phone to their knowledge. 65% agreed 8% not sure and 10% disagreed that use of internet and mobile phone have positive effect on undergraduate students of Islamic Studies in Ekiti State University.

This result agrees with what Al Aamri (2023) found in her study. According to Al Amri (2023), students like to use mobile phones but their teachers do not allow them to do so for the reasons that those identified in our study. By looking closely at undergraduate students of Islamic Studies" responses, it becomes clear that some Islamic Studies students try to use their mobile phones during class to look up Arabic words while others feel reluctant as it is whether not allowed by teachers or teachers do not integrate mobile technology in their lessons. Those Islamic Studies students, who use mobile-phones in class, do it secretly without the teachers' permission. The participants had different views regarding using mobile phones in class. Some students thought it had two sides, positive and negative, while others thought it is either positive or negative. Those who said that using mobile phones in the classroom is positive mentioned specific uses of mobile devices that they thought they need in class. They mentioned that they need it to check the meaning of Arabic words by using Arabic dictionaries or check and search for some information from the internet or use it as Arabic calculator function in their mobile phones.

Similar findings have been also reported by Al Aamri (2023) who found that teachers fear that these devices will cause distraction for both teachers and students. She also found that some students play video or music which caused noise in the classroom. It is also worth mentioning that there were students who did not use their devices in the classroom at all. Some Arabic students still have this idea that these devices should not be used in class as students used to have this rule at school before they joined university. The Islamic Studies students listed six (6) free mobile phone apps that they use in learning Islamic Studies inside and outside classroom, Among these are sixteen different Arabic dictionaries and translation services and/or tools, e.g. Merriam Webster, Google translate, Arabic translator, Arabic online dictionary, Arabic Dictionary.com, Free Arabic dictionary. According to Arabic students" responses, WhatsApp can help them to "share ideas", "discuss topics they study in class", "study new Arabic words", "improve Arabic spelling", etc. In his study, Shin (2019) found out that using "informal social media such as Facebook increased students" engagement in the learning task and motivated them to implement contextual elements from their own environment".

Since millions of students use these social networks in their mobile phones, Bosch (2017) and Eren (2019) affirm their Using Mobile Phone Apps Inside and Outside the Islamic Studies Classroom 69 usefulness and potential as an educational tool. Besides, the social media websites and learning languages are inseparable because they found that they enrich the language learning experience of learners, these social networking websites increase and facilitate interaction with native speakers around the world. Faizi et al, (2020) reported that social media, such as Facebook and Twitter have become areas where learners can practice language and communicative skills with native speakers.

In spite of all the positive impact reported by the Islamic Studies students in dealing with Arabic aspect in Islamic Studies, some of them mentioned that they face challenges when using mobile phones for study whether in or outside the classroom. These included, for example, Teachers" negative reaction when mobile phones were used during class time;

technical issues (e.g. slow internet, bad internet connection, etc.); lack of perfect applications for individual learning needs and pace of learning; etc. Some Islamic Studies students pointed out that when they use mobile phones in class they often get distracted. To exemplify, one of the Islamic Studies students wrote: "When we want to use it for study, we use it to play." Some of these challenges were also found by Al-Aamri (2019), such as, for example, teachers preventing using these devices in the classroom and misuse of mobile phones which causes distraction and loss of focus in class. Other challenges can be resolved by raising the awareness among teachers regarding the potentials of using mobile phones in education. Technical problems are always a challenge but improvements are constant and day by day mobile devices are much faster, affordable and accessible.

## CONCLUSION

This paper discusses how 400 level undergraduate Islamic Studies students in Ekiti State University use mobile phone applications to support their study in dealing with Arabic aspect in Islamic Studies inside and outside the classroom. Findings show that all Islamic Studies students, who participated in the study, own mobile-phones and over 70% always have access to the internet. Results also show that students use a variety of mobile applications to support their reading of Arabic language aspect in Islamic Studies although, they mostly use them informally without their teachers' directive or guidance and sometimes face technical and functional challenges. The results showed that many students have a positive attitude toward using mobile phones in dealing with Arabic language aspect in Islamic Studies. They report that they use them in class if teachers allow them to look up meanings from Arabic dictionaries installed in their mobile phones or search the internet, and so those applications are perceived by most to be useful to their learning. On the other hand, some students reported that they hardly use their mobile phones inside the classroom because teachers do not allow mobile phones in their classroom, as they cause distraction and noise. Nevertheless, when Islamic Studies students find a chance to check their social networking applications during the class, they do, but in doing so, they lose attention and focus on both the lesson and teacher.

Additionally, findings revealed that Islamic Studies students are finding their way to try out other supportive Arabic applications that may connect them to Arabic language aspect in Islamic Studies outside their classrooms. They practice some informal activities and engage themselves in some popular social networking websites to find other ways to relate with the language. Results showed that Islamic Studies students are already informally using different well-known social Arabic applications like WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube for handling the Arabic language aspect in Islamic Studies. Therefore, learning happens naturally and takes place voluntarily and autonomously. However, in order for Islamic Studies students to take advantage of the available mobile phone applications, Islamic Studies teachers should be more involved in guiding the students to reliable applications and helping them in effective use of these Arabic applications in learning the Arabic aspect in Islamic Studies.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **The study recommended as follows:**

- 1- Students of Islamic Studies should be allowed to be using internet classroom for effective reading and dealing with Arabic aspect in Islamic Studies.
- 2- Islamic Studies teachers should permit their students to use mobile phone to check the meanings of some Arabic vocabularies in Islamic Studies class.
- 3- Frequent workshops should be organized for Islamic Studies teachers on the relationship Arabic Language and Islamic Studies.
- 4- Information Communication Technology (ICT) should be introduced as one of the major courses that should be taken by Islamic Studies students at all levels of education in Nigeria.
- 5- Internet services should always be available for accessibility at all tertiary institution in Nigeria.

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