Original Research Article

A Survey on the uses of Mobile Phones in Facilitating English Learning for Students at Transport and Communications University in Ho Chi Minh City

Tran Thi Thanh Loan[1*]

[1]University of Transport and Communications, No.3 Cau Giay Street, Lang Thuong Ward, Dong Da District, Ha Noi, Vietnam

*Corresponding Author: Tran Thi Thanh Loan
University of Transport and Communications, No.3 Cau Giay Street, Lang Thuong Ward, Dong Da District, Ha Noi, Vietnam

Abstract: With the development of modern technology and high education, the mobile phone is not only an essential piece of equipment to use in life but also becomes an ideal tool for students to improve their knowledge, so it cannot be denied that students can use mobile phones to improve their English effectively. Therefore, mobile-assisted language learning is considered a new multidisciplinary field of educational technology. We hope that the results of this study could serve as the basis for other researchers to do research on the effects of mobile phones when improving English in an academic environment and provide people who have an interest in this topic with the relationship between students and the necessity of using mobile phones to support learning in classes, especially in English. This study could be helpful for teachers to pay more attention to developing a new way to bring knowledge to their students instead of focusing mainly on the old method like books, boards or fundamental theories.

Keywords: Mobile phones, technological devices, facilitate, improve, learning English.

1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, there are many different ways to learn English; with the development of technology, we are receiving many resources and excellent conditions to understand language. Technology, day by day, also becomes one of the essential parts to help for giving knowledge from teachers to their students. The most attractive way for people to quickly learn is by using a mobile phone; However, using small technology equipment has its limitations, but there is no denying that a mobile phone is the most popular choice for learning a language. Moreover, students who can access the internet through technological devices like mobile phones have more benefits when studying at school or doing homework. This research will, in turn, present the features and related issues of mobile phones in learning English.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. The Background Information about Smart Phone:

According to Lusekelo & Juma (2015), the smartphone combines phone and computer functions. It has its operating system and installs the application to work as a computer connecting to the internet. Moreover, we can use smartphones anytime we need, like taking photos, listening to music, watching videos, searching websites, … and bringing them to any place we want just to put them in our pocket. Muhammad & Tariq (2013) stated that a smartphone is a mobile phone. Still, it can display photos, play games, record, send and receive an email, … despite some traditional functions like calling or sending messages. Thus, the smartphone is a mobile phone with more advances than conventional phones. It can have an extensive system of up to the double gigabyte as a mobile phone, so it can have many different kinds of methods like iOS, Android, Blackberry OS, and Windows phones following some famous brands like iPhone, Samsung, Blackberry, Nokia, …

2.2. The support of mobile phones in learning English:

Using the most current technical communication devices to facilitate the learning process, especially learning English, scholars tried to put them at the heart of the educational process. Therefore, Personal Digital Assistants, laptops, the Internet and Smartphone are used in mobile learning. However, the mobile phone is the most common object for investigation. There have been few studies that focus specifically on my research. As a case in point, the use of mobile phones in language learning, Saran (2008) proved that students liked the use of mobile phones for their vocabulary learning; they did not face any difficulties while using the mobile learning application and that it was effortless to use since they were used to use SMS (short message device) and MMS (multimedia message) in their daily lives. Besides, E-learning is learning at home or the workplace, readers will discover how to design learning materials for delivery in mobile technology and become familiar with the best practices of other educators, trainers and researchers in the field as well as the most recent initiatives in mobile (Mohamed Ally, 2009). In the research written in the same year, Butgereit (2009) stated that parents and teachers could help students and their children in their studies. They said that teachers and parents could create spelling lists for pupils and children using either a cell phone or an internet-based workstation, and pupils and children could practice their spelling on a medium they enjoy.

Therefore, instead of banning mobile phones in classes or at home, parents and teachers should teach their children how to use these devices in studying to get high scores in classes and level up their skills in English. According to another research conducted by Moghtada & Masoud (2013), using mobile phones had a significant effect on not only vocabulary learning but also vocabulary retention of Iranian intermediate EFL (English as a foreign language); there was not a substantial difference between male and female learners in the vocabulary learning and retention while using mobile phones. In a review of integrating mobile phones for language learning, Darmi & Albion (2014) claimed that using mobile technology in education offered new learning experiences and flexibility in learning – learning anywhere and anytime – with increased opportunities for decisions to be made by the learners. Moreover, mobile technology offers ubiquitous and immediate access to information and saves resources. Furthermore, in 2016 Sinem Bezircilioglu did a study on MALL (mobile-assisted learning language), and he showed that students used mobile devices in vocabulary learning and translation; students used their mobile devices for the social purpose such as music, social media, and games after class hours compared to aim to improve their English; however, the teaching materials to be used after class hours can be adapted for mobile devices and be shared with the students to attract them for educational purpose.

Although students have time to relax with their phones, they can recognize that the most important activity they can do with their phones is to study. In the same year, another study by Khawla & Amel illustrated that mobile devices were helpful for students to record their pronunciation in mobile phones and could also accelerate their English learning abilities. Investigating students' attitudes towards new technology involved in the process of university learning, Chase and Meghan (2007) surveyed students at Slippery Rock University to determine their engagement with and attitude towards technology on campus. Their study indicated that their research subjects revealed more and more satisfaction with using technological devices in the educational process.

3. METHOD:

3.1. Population and Location:

Our research indicated the assistance of using mobile phones in improving the aptitude English of students in four grades at the University of Transport and Communications in Ho Chi Minh City (UTC2). The investigation was conducted within a group of about 424 students (first-year, second-year, junior and senior) ranging in age from 18 to 20. Students are chosen from 8 different classes: A2, B1 and ESP.

3.2. Materials:

This survey used a questionnaire as the primary data collection method and Google form as the data analyzing tool for drawing appropriate conclusions. The first three questions were to get information about the privacy of respondents, such as their gender, grade and major. Question number 4 asked for the types of mobile phones they have. The fifth question was designed to point out the times of day that students use their phones to learn English. Next, number 6 could answer the question if students agree that mobile phones are a valuable tool for learning English. Following were two questions (numbers 7 and 8) that support the above question, including the advantages and disadvantages of mobile phones based on students' opinions. While questions 10 and 12 showed the frequency of the students using mobile phones with their purpose and application installed on their phones, question 11 asked readers to rank the skills according to the level of preference that they like to learn English on their mobile phones. The 13 questions also wanted to investigate the position of 12 activities found to the level of students' needs. The last question was written to give ideas to the researchers to upgrade my knowledge.

3.3. Procedures:

I realize the importance of understanding and learning English through mobile phones. However, most students frequently need help with using this kind of mobile device than understanding it when studying. Therefore, I decided to

conduct in-depth research on the attitude toward using this tool to update English among students learning this subject in UTC2. The means of collecting data used in my study was a questionnaire. The content and the options for multiple-choice questions were filtered and arranged logically. The complete questionnaire included 13 multiple–choice questions and one open-ended question.

The paper-based survey was conducted within the main schedule written on Google Classroom, the best place to seek students. The processing time was chosen carefully to accompany the students' class time while I was teaching them. I decided to finish the survey in weeks 13 and 14 (From November 14 to 27) right after the Introduction lesson in class to stay caught up. The research was carried out on a small scale by questioning 424 students. Each student was given a questionnaire and required to answer all the included questions within 15 minutes. The information was then collected and analyzed to achieve accurate results.

4. RESULT

The survey was designed to research the uses of technological devices in facilitating English learning for students at the University of Transport and Communications in Ho Chi Minh City. A group of 424 students were selected to complete the survey questionnaire. Below are the results of my investigation.

Table 4.1: General information about the participants of the survey

Gender	Grade				Major			Type of mobile phone	
	First-year	Second year	Third year	Last year	English for Economics	English for Civil Engineering	English for Electronics and Telecommunications	Traditional phone	Smartphone
Female	311	83	76	69	83	172	13	126	14	297
Male	94	26	27	25	16	52	6	36	9	85
Others	19	9	2	5	3	10	2	7	-	19
Total	424	118	105	99	102	234	21	169	23	401

Table 4.1 displays some general information such as gender, primary, and mobile phone types of students studying in UTC2. Students are divided into four groups according to their grade: first year, second year, third year, and last year. According to the table, the number of students involved in the survey was 424. Most of them come from English for Economics and Electronics and Telecommunications majors. The number of English for Economics hits a high of 234, and the English for Civil Engineering bottoms out at 21. However, in the result, over 94.5 per cent of students have smartphones (male: 85 students, female: 297 students and another gender: 19, 424), and only 23 students still use traditional phones. It shows that student at UTC2 highly appreciates the use of the smartphone.
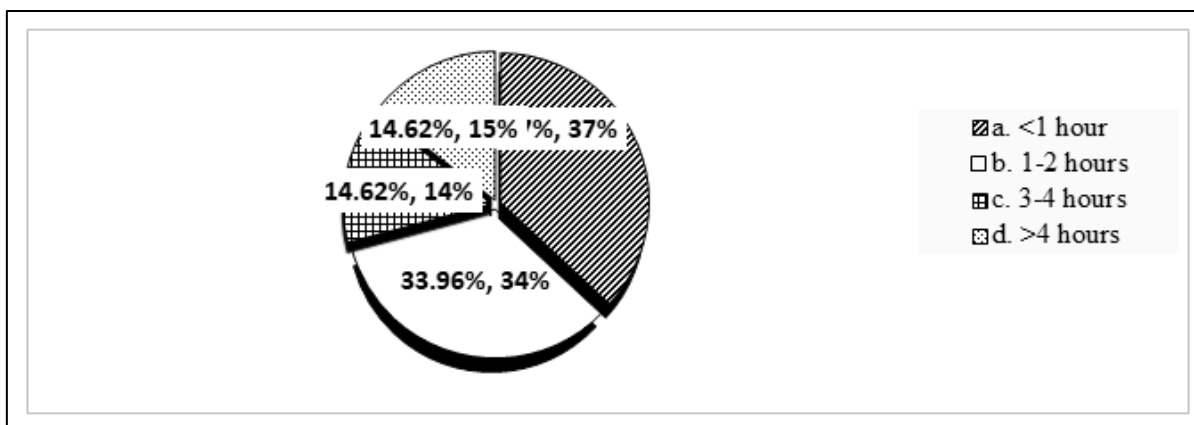

Figure 4.1: The percentage of time per day students spend learning English

Figure 4.1 presents the percentages of time per day students spend learning English. According to the survey, 33.96% of the students spent 1 – 2 hours a day using mobile phones learning English. Students who spent under 1 hour learning English by mobile phone take 37%. This is also the highest number given by the survey. However, the number of students spending 3 – 4 hours to use mobile phones helping their study is 14.62% the same as others are taken 4 hours to do their job. It means that most students spend about under 2 hours completing their homework or their need to study English.
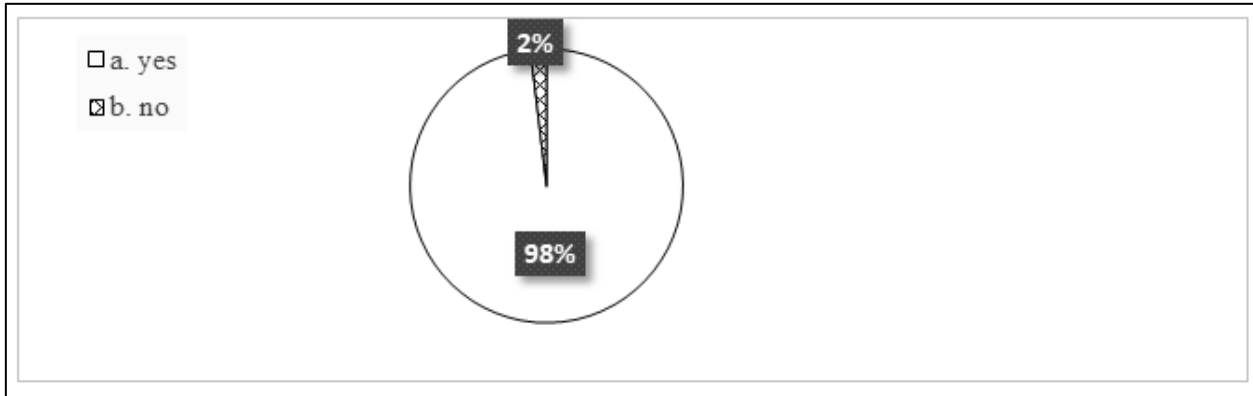

Figure 4.2: The percentage of students who think that mobile phones are or are not a helpful assistant tool to study English

Figure 4.2 demonstrates the percentages of students who think a mobile phone is a valuable tool for learning English. It could be seen from the chart that almost students (98.11%) believe that mobile phone is absolutely a helpful tool to help them with their English. However, only 1.89% of students think oppositely. This result showed that many students use the mobile phone as a valuable tool to improve their English.

Table 4.2: The students' opinions toward these statements

	Allow to use	Educate students	Encourage inside class	Easier to use	Better than computer	Enhance interaction	Hinder collaborate
Strongly disagree	13	15	14	31	20	15	10
Disagree	13	26	49	131	85	73	53
Neutral	93	133	201	163	174	141	216
Agree	207	148	108	67	108	146	106
Strongly agree	98	102	52	32	37	49	39

Table 4.2 illustrates the amount of agreement or disagreement of students in UTC2 toward seven sentences. It could be seen from the table that 207 students agree and 98 students strongly agree that mobile phones should be allowed as learning material, it is also the opinion which gets the highest agreements from students. In comparison, 131 students disagree with the other sentence as mobiles can be easier to use than pens; sentence four also gets the highest disagreement from students (31). 201 is also the number of students who feel regular with the opinion that mobile phones should be encouraged inside the classroom. However, sentence 7 can get at 216 neutral thoughts from the students, and this sentence also receives the lowest disagreement from students (10). Almost all students feel impartial to these opinions, but there are also some significant differences between them. The table means that most students have the same idea about smartphones' convenience and valuable functions. However, they feel they need help to use them effectively.

Table 4.3: The frequency of their use of mobile phones for personal purposes in classes

	Social network	Take photo	Listen to music	Chat	Watch film	Study English	Play game	Read online books	Take notes
Always	150	71	125	128	57	63	52	33	52
Usually	139	120	132	129	97	177	70	84	120
Sometimes	78	130	78	80	106	112	11	116	128
Seldom	27	71	33	35	65	32	108	112	56
Never	30	32	32	28	69	6	49	45	34

It can be seen from the table that students have many personal purposes to do in class time; 35.4% of students always spend their class time going online networks like Facebook, Instagram or Snapchat. 29.5% listening to music and 30.2% chatting with friends instead of studying English (14.9%). However, over 41.4% of students usually learn English,

and 28.3% other taking notes for knowledge in class to do homework later. Although they typically concentrate on improving their English skills, they still spend their time on other purposes without learning. Besides, 16.3% of students never watch the film in class, and 11.6% of them never play games; students do not fancy reading online books with 11.5%. Students keep spending much time in class for personal work without help improving their English skills or knowledge. The reason may be that students do not have to think critically about using mobile phones in class; they should recognize which is the suitable time for chatting and studying. If they can change how they use this kind of technology device, the teacher will support them to level up their skill without any limitations.
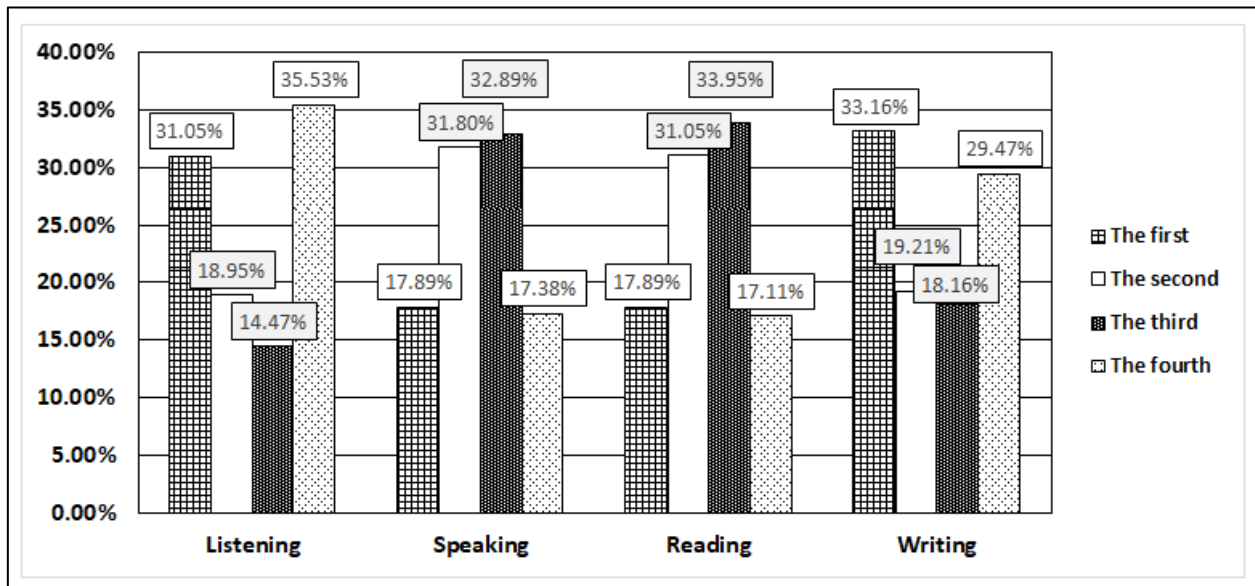

Figure 4.3: The rank of four skills based on mobile phones

Overall this chart shows the rank of four skills based on mobile phones. Almost students use mobile phones for listening skills. 35.53% of students choose to listen as their first option when they study English through mobile phones as the second position reading is the following choice after listening with 33.95% of students. This is an excellent point that speaking has the third after reading when students use mobile phones to study English with 32.89%. Moreover, writing is becoming the last choice with 33.16% because students have to write their idea and opinion. In conclusion, students always need a mobile phone to support their studying to improve their English skills.

Table 4.4: The frequency with which students use applications to support learning English

	Call & sms	Camera	Video	Game	Bluetooth	Social network	Language apps	Dictionary	EmailEmail	Document reader	Notes	Mp3
Never	70	66	36	55	124	40	11	16	41	25	27	29
Seldom	64	60	79	88	134	21	23	16	69	56	93	38
Sometimes	111	133	130	130	103	88	127	48	140	145	144	93
Usually	55	95	115	63	29	154	174	170	100	118	114	141
Always	124	70	64	64	34	121	89	174	74	80	46	123

Table 4.4 displays the percentage of students using some applications to learn English through mobile phones. Out of a hundred students, 41% said they usually use language applications installed on their mobile phones to study, especially English. In contrast, 40% of students use their dictionaries to search for English words. Moreover, students always use this application to study English because they can have a good online or offline dictionary. On the other hand, 29.2% of students never learn English through Bluetooth because they can send and fix files through a document reader. This application gets 34.2% of the frequency; sometimes, students use it thanks to its convenient function. As they found it possible to use mp3 to listen to English songs, 29% of students use this application, social networks get 28.5%, and document readers get 18.9%. Bluetooth and notes get 8% and 10% for always use, as they are seen to be the application which does not have much support in studying English.

In conclusion, there are many learning English applications. Still, only some applications, which can connect to the internet quickly, help students have more information about the word or knowledge they need, becoming more practical with their case. So, usability and mobility are the important factors that students need when they want to have a mobile phone to help them when studying English.

Table 4.5: The frequent activities students do on mobile phones to learn English

	Text sms	Make calls	Study online	Watch clip	Play games	Use social network	Learn vocabulary	Use dictionary	Do exercises	Record lesson	Listen to English songs
1	69	59	36	29	39	24	20	44	33	40	37
2	39	70	44	28	38	39	44	43	25	38	42
3	47	39	69	22	39	39	47	23	32	34	23
4	55	47	47	37	43	37	43	36	24	39	26
5	37	38	38	39	47	30	36	29	68	34	29
6	25	19	36	27	42	55	46	25	48	47	32
7	20	20	36	45	44	37	44	39	47	46	34
8	28	19	38	38	35	40	54	45	45	47	40
9	36	39	30	57	25	43	40	28	45	30	45
10	39	38	29	43	38	32	29	64	30	38	41
11	29	36	21	59	34	48	24	48	27	31	75

The table indicates the frequent activities students do on their mobile phones to enhance their studying English. Listening to an English song could be seen as the most used activity with 75 choices out of 424 students, while searching English words through the dictionary got the second position with 64 opinions. Doing exercises got the following part with 45 options. However, students must do their homework or exercises; they still need to choose this activity, usually with their mobile phones. With the decrease from 8 to 5, we can easily find out that learning vocabulary is the one students choose to learn English and 44 students choose to play games instead of social networking. From the result, we can see that students play educational games to study English and use social networks to do other things besides learning. Getting in the top 6 is watching clips, and this also shows us that students spend much time watching online clips on their mobile phones to support their learning. Besides, 38 students attend online English classes, which can provide them with anything they need without going to class, and they also have their teacher to solve their problems immediately. Students do not have the habitat to text messages and make calls in English because they have to spend much time thinking about what they are going to write or talk about; they also get confused with the hard work that they do not know how to translate it, sometimes while calling in English, they have to use their phone to search the word they want to talk, and that is a waste of time. However, in conclusion, students need to pay more attention during class to answer correctly whenever they have a sudden conversion. Moreover, they should use mobile phones to make more calls in English so they will have quick reflexes with the circumstances and they can improve their English as soon as possible.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS:

After surveying students toward the use of mobile phones assisted learning English, we discovered that: Although most students do not know how to use their time effectively in using mobile phones to improve their English, they know the way to find words or anything they need in mobile phones to serve their study. From that, several recommendations can be suggested:

❖ **For the teachers:**
- Teachers should open a class to teach students how to use their phones to learn English effectively, such as the practical applications for learning activities, including listening, speaking, reading and vocabulary.
- Teachers should allow the use of mobile devices inside classrooms as far as it is used for learning activities. Authorizing internet access inside as well as outside classrooms is urgent.
- More and more seminars should be held by professors who can show students the considerable benefit of mobile phones if they can use them correctly because mobile phones are easier to use than laptops or any mobile devices. Students can save time finding challenging problems when sending mail or listening to text because all the information nowadays can be synchronized on mobile phones.

❖ **For the students:**
- Students should use mobile phones for short periods and learning purposes from 1-2 hours a day.
- They need to use Smartphone applications which enable practising all English skills like listening, speaking, reading and writing. Besides, students can find all the information on the internet or App Store, CH Plays… with careful selection.

- They should use Smartphones either at home or in the classroom, but keep using them in a controlled way, not wasting too much time chatting or playing games as this will lead to adverse effects.
- Finally, based on the fact that a small sample of students successfully used mobile phones for learning, the last recommendation would be to use a larger student sample. The generalizations will become more valid and widely applicable if similar studies are conducted on other classes at other levels and other language skills and aspects.

6. CONCLUSION

This study investigates the effectiveness of mobile-assisted learning English applications in supplementing the English language teaching method at the University of Transport and Communications in Ho Chi Minh City. Additionally, it aims to explore the students' attitudes towards supplementing lectures through this kind of assistance. The results suggest that mobile phones, especially Smartphones, can bring significant positive effects on the students' achievement scores in the short term, which may well be due to excitement factors. The impact of mobile learning on education is likely only a matter of time before more schools and universities look to use cell phones in the classroom to enhance teaching and learning. They are flexible, powerful tools our students already own, and their capabilities are constantly growing. Although the effect is not significant in the long term, the findings still show a positive inclination in the scores of this method. When used correctly and with the proper safeguards, students can match the power and familiarity of a cell phone in the classroom.

REFERENCES

- Ally, M. (2009). *Mobile Learning: Transforming the Delivery of Education and Training*, Athabasca, AB: Athabasca University Press.
- Butgereit, L., Botha, A., & Van Niekerk, D (2009), *Using cell phones to improve language skills: The Hadeda Project. E-Infrastructures and E-Services on Developing Countries Lecture Notes of the Institute for Computer Sciences, Social Informatics and Telecommunications Engineering*, 2013 from http://researchspace.csir.co.za/
- Chase, E. M., Herrod, M. (2005). *College Student Behaviors and Attitudes Towards Technology on Campus*, Slippery Rock University, Slippery Rock, PA. (2007) Presented at the Broadcast Educators Association Conference, Las Vegas, NV.USA.
- Darmi R., & Albion P. (2014), *A Review of Integrating Mobile Phones for Language Learning*, 10th International Conference Mobile Learning (p93-100), Paper presented at mLearn 2005-4th World Conference on eLearning, Cape Town, South Africa. Retrieved from http://www.iamlearn.org/public/mlearn2005/www.mlearn.org.za/CD/papers/keegan1.pdf
- Hashemi, M., & Moghtada, A. (2013). The impacts of Using Mobile Phones on English Language Vocabulary Retention, *International Research Journal of Applied and Basic Sciences*, 4(3), 541-547.
- Kuznekoff J., & Titsworth S. (2013). *The Impact of Mobile Phone Usage on Student Learning*, Communication Education, 62(3), 233-252.
- Lu, M. (2008). *Effectiveness of Vocabulary learning via mobile phone, In Journal of Computer Assisted Learning*, 24(6), 515-525.
- Saran, M., Cagiltay, K., & Seferoglu, G. (2008). *Use of mobile phones in language learning: Developing effective instructional materials*. Wireless and mobile technologies in education. IEEE conference proceeding, p39-43.