



## The Engagement of EFL Learners in Speaking Class Using WhatsApp

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### ABSTRACT

This study was conducted under qualitative design. It aimed to unveil the use of WhatsApp in engaging EFL learner in speaking class. This mode of learning did not intend to replace the face-to-face speaking class meeting which was done once a week. This research was used as input for the teachers to engage more students to use English after speaking class. The subjects of this study were 9 students of speaking 4 class. To obtain the data, this study used the printed WhatsApp communication and written open ended questions. This study revealed two findings: firstly, WhatsApp has helped students to speak English as indicated as follows: WhatsApp improved students' vocabulary; feedback made in WhatsApp help students learn what is correct and incorrect; WhatsApp engaged the students with global issues which help students develop their ideas when addressing their conversation; WhatsApp could improve other language skills, such as grammar, writing, reading, and vocabulary; WhatsApp improved students' confidence in speaking class. Secondly, the challenges faced by the students to participate actively in WhatsApp group of speaking class are: unmanaged time, assignments, and irrelevant comments. This study found that students did not really consider financial, grouping them with students who have similar interest, and use of other social media as the barrier for them to participate actively in WhatsApp group of speaking class.

**Keywords:** *WhatsApp; EFL learners; speaking class.*

### INTRODUCTION

The emergence of communication technology has tremendous effect on the field of education. Some experts believe that it has both advantages and disadvantages. In relation to the advantages of WhatsApp, it helps the students to learn language better and improves their English competence to the higher level of proficiency; the use of WhatsApp could help the low achievers and high achievers to share information each other and help learn together (Mistar, Izyani binti (2016). The flexibility of WhatsApp is potential to bridge the diverse of learning needs through circular writing and collaborative writing (Fattah, S. F. E. S. A, 2015). The students work together in a group to produce a piece of writing (Harmer, 2007). While its disadvantages are it is about privacy matters (Wang, et all., 2012), students tend to be distracted while using it for studying (Fewkes, A. M., & McCabe, M., 2012)., and the fact that the discussions appear to be disorganized. This research will seek and discuss how WhatsApp has supported students' engagement in speaking class and unveil the students' challenges in participating WhatsApp speaking class



actively.

A qualitative study done by Bouhnik and Deshen in Israel, discussed the advantages of using WhatsApp in improving the communication quality in a group (Bouhnik, D., & Deshen, M., 2014). This study presents that WhatsApp groups were used for four main purposes: communicating with students; nurturing the social atmosphere; creating dialogue and encouraging sharing among students; and as a learning platform. The down sides of using WhatsApp according to this study are: There is the technical difficulty that not all high school students possess a Smartphone; Teachers are apt to be annoyed by the flood of irrelevant and nonsensical messages; Also, educational difficulties may arise, such as incompatibility of language between students and the students' assumptions that their teachers should be available every day.

This strengthens the foundation of this research, in which they mostly analyzed the improvement of language skills of the students and did not analyze the problem faced by the students to participate actively in WhatsApp group of speaking class. With regard to the design of the research, this research will be conducted in the form of qualitative, to show and describe how the selected subjects perceive WhatsApp in their speaking class.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

In response to the objective and research questions of this research, a qualitative study will be employed. Nunan (1992), categorizes this research as a case study because in this research the researcher will examine the characteristic of a group of students who are currently first semester, studying speaking 4. This study aims at a better understanding of the phenomenon and the meaning people attribute to it, rather than a quantitative scheme directed towards definitive questions and answers or the examination of specific hypotheses (Shaked, 2012). The use of open written questions enables the subjects to share a variety of experiences that are unobtainable through closed end questions. They will be able to tell their story in a flowing narrative that teaches us a great deal about the phenomenon. The present research will work towards a better understanding of the function of WhatsApp groups constructed for students and teachers, relevant activities, and the way that they affect both educational and academic processes were considered. The participants of this study will consist of a group of fourth semester students. The students are enrolled in English Education Department. The numbers of the students were 9. There are very good students, 3 average students, and 3 shy students.

The primary data for this study will be the students responds from written questions. The secondary data will be printed WhatsApp conversation. This study used two instruments suggested: Printed messages of students' WhatsApp communication. This means all students' chat will be printed and will be highlighted to mark changes that students have made and Written open-ended questions. This aims to provide students feedback on how WhatsApp has helped them with their studies. This data will also dig how feedback provided by their peers help them learn English. This data will be used for outlining the positives and challenges of using WhatsApp. The collected data from WhatsApp writing, English Interview Test, and the students' feedback will be analyzed using the following ways: data reduction, data display, and drawing conclusion or verification (Miles & Huberman, 1994).



## RESULT

### *In What Way WhatsApp Has Helped Students to Speak English*

The data came from three groups of students: very good students, average students, and shy students. They revealed that:

- a. WhatsApp improved vocabulary  
“my vocabulary improves because before I write my WhatsApp I always read and use dictionary to resolve the unfamiliar words”, “I learn collocation” and “I learn new vocabulary from other members”.
- b. Feedback made in WhatsApp help me to learn what is correct and incorrect  
“I learn from the feedback given to others and myself”, “I can learn from what correct and incorrect post from other members”, and “I learn from the posted post and learn to correct others”.
- c. WhatsApp engaged me with global issues  
“I can upgrade myself with global issues”.
- d. WhatsApp enhanced speaking skill  
“I could improve myself evaluation and monitoring to every language production I make”, “I could control my language production because it has been corrected many times in WA”, “I could use the knowledge from WA around 75% in speaking class”, and “the writing process in WA help me produce my ideas when speaking”.
- e. WhatsApp improved other language skills  
“the continuance of feedback and posts help improve my Grammar, Writing, and Vocabulary”, “the persistent feedback from the members and the teacher help improve my Grammar”, “I could improve my grammar, vocabulary, writing and reading, because I need to read and understand the posted information”, “I could improve my writing and reading because I have to make sure what I have written and red before I write in my WA”.
- f. WhatsApp improved students’ confidence in speaking class  
“Since I have practiced it in WA and so I am not shy to express my ideas in the class”, “I am not shy”, and “I gain more confident in the class, it is just my voice sounds a bit trembling when I start speaking”.

### *What are the Challenges of the Students to Participate Actively in WhatsApp Group of Speaking Class*

From five provided challenges: financial reasons, use of other social medias, pile of assignments, variety of interest among the members of the WhatsApp group, and posted irrelevant comments, the students revealed quite interesting result.

Firstly, unmanaged time was rated very high, only one students did not have problem with time management. They said that “I need time management training because I still find it difficult to organize my time”, “I need it because I sometimes feel very exhausted after doing all the assignments”, and “I haven’t been able to organize my time well”. Secondly, assignment was rated as the second high after unmanaged time. Students said that “assignment breaks my concentration



to write regularly in my WA group, but I always write once I am done with my assignment” and “assignments sometimes make me forget to participate the conversation in WA”. Next, followed up with irrelevant comments. From nine students, four of them said that “I don’t know how to write and respond it”

6 students are rated that placing them with different people could not help them learn better. “I want to practice my English and need to be responded” and “I want to be placed with people who have good vision and mission so they could influence me to learn better”. There subjects revealed that “no need to be placed with people who have similar interest, because I learn more from variety” and “I like to study with all my classmates”. The use of other social media was not considered as a barrier to reduce the students’ active participation in using WhatsApp group of speaking class. Only one student who said that “because once I get involved with them (other social medias), it is very difficult for me to write in my WA group of speaking class. While the rest of the subjects said that: firstly, “I only use WhatsApp”, secondly, “I can manage them”, finally, “other social media enrich my ideas about what to write in my WA group”.

## **DISCUSSION**

To begin with, the discussion will outline the nine chosen subjects in this study. These subjects were chosen based on their level of engagement in the class. Three very good, three average and three shy students. The subjects were categorized very good, if they were not linguistically challenged, such as they can express their ideas with any hesitation throughout the teaching and learning process. Subjects who were very reluctant to speak, and always think before they uttered their conversation and mostly mix their language with native language (Bahasa Indonesia) will be considered average. While, students who are only reluctant and seems to be anxious when speaking will be considered shy ones. To ensure their reliability of their responds, these subjects were given instructions of how to feel the open-ended questions prior to answering the questionnaires.

This study uses 14 open-ended questions, aim to display: firstly, in what way WhatsApp has helped fourth semester students to improve their speaking skills and secondly, what were the challenges of the Students to Participate Actively in WhatsApp Group of Speaking Class. To display the result of the first one, then the following issues were asked: vocabulary development; the importance of learning in group; advantages of being active in WhatsApp group; the extent of oral skill development when joining WhatsApp group of speaking class; level of shyness to express ideas after getting involved in WhatsApp group of speaking class Improvement of other skills when joining WhatsApp group of speaking class. Whereas to investigate the result of the second one, the following questions were asked: Does financial reason become your constraint in using WhatsApp group; does other social media bother you to participate actively in WhatsApp group; does assignments bother you to participate actively in WhatsApp group: do you need time management training to improve your active participation in WhatsApp group; do you need to be placed with people who share similar interest with you; and does irrelevant comment decrease your motivation to participate actively in WhatsApp group of speaking class.



There was one question which tried to evaluate what students usually write in their WhatsApp group of speaking class and explained the reasons why they write them. This is very important to be known because we can provide decent scaffolding for them to write in WhatsApp group of speaking class. The result showed that there were two things that they wrote in their WhatsApp: daily activities and experiences. Experiences here entailed their what they have done in and out of the class. This can be seen in the following WhatsApp excerpts.

“[7/1 01.19] MSY: After dreaming blood curdling, it made me tremble...I think the best ways to forget about my dream tonight is taking ablution...I am so scared till now, trought writing this...the silhouette in my dream still pictured. .....أستغفر الله.....”

“[7/1 06.26] W.Z.A: Last night I spend my time for looking for some book for my sister. I asked Ellen to company me. But as long as we looking for it we do not find the book. We went to Gramedia, Mandonga and other book store but there's no book. Maybe I have to buy it in online shop”.

These two excerpts exhibit that students were confident enough in writing their story. The only problems that they have in their writing were subject and verb agreement and wrong tenses. Those problems have been highlighted and underlined. If this could be identified then the scaffolding will discuss and provide the students ample of examples of how to fix such problems so they could improve their writing in WhatsApp.

With regards to the students' mistakes, one of the subjects revealed that she did not really feel that WhatsApp has helped her improve her speaking. She said that “WhatsApp does not really help me, because sometimes I don't really get enough feedback” to know what should or should not be done in improving my speaking skill. However, all eight subjects convinced us that the provision of feedback made by the teacher help the students not to repeat the same mistakes. This is line with what a study by Stockwell, G. (2010) stated that the teacher plays a principal role in guiding students in online lectures.

In fact, Lu, M. (2008) extent the result of the study. The study revealed that that the students could construct and share knowledge through the pertinent role of the instructor, as the following written interview excerpt since their vocabulary is mounted. This means that students can be more independent learner as long as the online learning can be managed well. This is illustrated in the following excerpt “I could control my language production because it has been corrected many times in WhatsApp”, and “the persistent feedback from the members and the teacher help improve my Grammar”.

Hamad (2017), in his study unveil similar result with the result of this research in which students could learn interactively and improve their learning awareness (Fewkes, A. M., & McCabe, M, 2012). This can be seen in the following excerpt: “I learn from the feedback given to others and myself”, “I can learn from what correct and incorrect post from other members”, and “I learn from the posted post and learn to correct others”.

In response to engaging students with collaborative work, WhatsApp in this study as an online mode of learning provided the students great amount of time to develop their social interaction. In Contemporary Educational Technology, Yücel & Usluel (2016) approved such social interaction development. Yücel & Usluel (2016) noted that technological factor that



improved online social interaction among group members in learning communities. In this study, we can see how positive social interaction benefited the member of WhatsApp group.

“I learn new vocabulary from other members, I don’t need to wait for the teacher, my friends could provide me feedback and I can improve my grammar”.

From the above, we can also testify two things: WhatsApp could engage students to learn independently and trigger reflective practices. Bouhnik & Deshen (2014) recommend teacher to create the framework that enables students to test their ideas with each other, critically, whether with the educator or not. They maintain that students need to be encouraged to feel safe to take risks and receive feedback on their work. This according to Bouhnik & Deshen (2014). will help students improve their learning because they engage with what they are doing.

Moving on discussing how WhatsApp benefited the students in speaking class. Firstly, students felt they were not learning alone. They could observe and reflect the posted information. The learning process was presented vividly and naturally. They write their sentences like they utter their normal real daily conversation, as it is presented in the following excerpt of WhatsApp conversation.

“[8/1 20.40] NS: Just now, I had dinner with my friends in ma’had. We ate in aula ma’had. I like togetherness and I feel very full now 😊

[8/1 20.45] RKI: I find it difficult to understand people who I text, they just read my msg without replay anywords. 😞 for example my sister, I text her that I wanted to talk with my mother but she ignores it 😞.....better I go sleep than I think about them. Honestly I really miss my mother, that's reason I want ring her... 🗣️ ♀ it doesnt matter. In shaa allah next time.

[8/1 20.46] RKA: Now, I am very sleepy maybe all day I work on my assignment so, I felt tired. I will go to sleep and In shaa Allah I will get up at midnight to read my article because tomorrow, I will make a video with my friend.

[8/1 20.46] JB: Tonight I am confused because my mom tell me to back in home now because something that she want talked to me. I say mom I can not back to home now because I am so tired and I can not foccus if I driving so maybe tomorrow I can back to home. I think my mom really want talk about something important.

[8/1 22.43] SHN: I think I will get mad now because I am writing my assignment and them the lamp turn off. I am confuse that I cannot finish it tonight”.

Such conversation depicted great natural engagement within a group which helped students produce the language unconsciously. Students did not realize that they have thought about how they keep maintaining the flow of the conversation. In the above conversation, they forget their worries about grammar. Such conversations have tremendous contribution to the development of speaking skill of the students. A couple of subjects of this study revealed that “I could improve myself evaluation and monitoring to every language production I make”, “I could use the knowledge from WhatsApp around 75% in speaking class”, and “the writing process in WhatsApp help me produce my ideas when speaking”.

Such revelation link to the positive of peer review which students have experienced in WhatsApp group throughout this study. A study done by Moore and Teather in 2013 strengthened what the subjects have stated above. Moore and Teather stated that feedback help students



experience the opportunity to: work collaboratively with others; obtain different perspectives on their work; get new ideas from others; receive constructive feedback; work with people in a similar position to them – people who could empathize with them; learning to read critically; learning what to do or not to do; seeing what was done well and what could have been done better; and the insight they gained into how to do their own assignment better.

This study also discussed other language skills development, such as reading, writing, vocabulary, and grammar. They are integrated in one learning process. Students naturally practiced multiple learning styles. The posted different information, such as daily activities, responding each other comments, reviewing assignments, describing something, criticizing posted videos and so on to some extent also broaden students' horizon about global issues. The revelation of these could be seen as follows:

“I can upgrade myself with global issues”, “the continuance of feedback and posts help improve my Grammar, Writing, and Vocabulary”, “the persistent feedback from the members and the teacher help improve my Grammar”, “I could improve my grammar, vocabulary, writing and reading, because I need to read and understand the posted information”, and “I could improve my writing and reading because I have to make sure what I have written and read before I write in my WA”.

Finally, in connection to the students' barriers in using WhatsApp, this study will discuss three issues: unmanaged time, assignments, and irrelevant comments. These needs to be addressed prior to introducing WhatsApp in the classroom. Some subjects of this study disclosed that their attention was diverted with such issues. With unmanaged time, students perhaps need to be well informed when they have to access and use WhatsApp. They also need to understand the function of WhatsApp. Whether WhatsApp it is used to replace the absence of their face-to-face meeting or as their main mode of teaching and learning process. For the assignments, teacher needs to provide intensive consultation. This way might help students see their way around to complete their assignment. For the irrelevant comments, the teacher and the class need to set rules. This will guide students to write appropriate posts and comments in WhatsApp.

## CONCLUSION

Since the nature of this study was unveiling the use of WhatsApp in engaging EFL learner in speaking class. This mode of learning did not intend to replace the face-to-face speaking class meeting which was done once a week. Students' engagement in WhatsApp in this study was not marked. Students' participation in this research was used as input for the teachers to engage more students to use English out of the class which in turn will help the students improve their language productions. This study concluded that: WhatsApp has helped students to speak English as indicated as follows: WhatsApp improved students' vocabulary; feedback made in WhatsApp help students learn what is correct and incorrect; WhatsApp engaged the students with global issues which help students develop their ideas when addressing their conversation; WhatsApp could improve other language skills, such as grammar, writing, reading, and vocabulary; WhatsApp improved students' confidence in speaking class. The challenges faced by the students to participate actively in WhatsApp group of speaking class are unmanaged time, assignments, and irrelevant comments. This study found that students did not really consider financial, studying in



WhatsApp group with students who have similar interest, and the use of other social media as the barrier for them to participate actively in WhatsApp group of speaking class.

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