

USING WHATSAPP AS AN INSTRUCTIONAL TOOL TO ENHANCE READING AND WRITING SKILLS: INDONESIAN EFL LEARNERS' PERCEPTION

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Abstract. This study explores Indonesian EFL learners' perception of using WhatsApp as an instructional tool to improve reading and writing skills. Covid-19 pandemic has made online learning compulsory for both teachers and students in which it is such a novel experience of instructional mode for some. WhatsApp as a pedagogical tool is thought to be feasible and readily available for the students and teachers to use at any time. With its features and capabilities to send multimedia messages such as images, recordings, audio, videos, and PDF files, it is believed to be potential to be used as a pedagogical tool. A five-point Likert scale questionnaire (1=strongly disagree; 2=disagree; 3=neutral/no opinion; 4=agree; 5=strongly agree) was employed to answer the research question. The result shows that the students perceived that using WhatsApp as a pedagogical tool can enhance reading and writing skills (average response = 3,53). It indicates that as a pedagogical tool, WhatsApp can be taken into account to be integrated into online learning.

Keywords: *WhatsApp, an instructional tool, Indonesian EFL Learners, perception, reading and writing skills*

INTRODUCTION

During the pandemic, teaching and learning activities are carried out online to minimize the transmission of the Corona virus. The Covid-19 pandemic spreading worldwide necessitates various aspects of life to change. Such change includes the way the teaching and learning in educational setting is conducted. The utilization of WhatsApp application becomes one of the options in teaching English. WhatsApp is a very popular, simple, and versatile messaging app which is currently used in more than 180 countries, and as of February 2020, more

than 2 billion people have been actively using WhatsApp, making it the world's second-largest social network (Alderman, 2017; Dean, 2021). Indonesia alone constitutes the fourth largest users of WhatsApp with 68.8 million users as per August 2020 (Dean, 2021).

This context makes WhatsApp desirable to be used as a tool for learning English outside of the classroom along with the smartphone ownership, that is relatively huge. Through WhatsApp, teaching materials can be delivered in various forms as texts, voice recordings, YouTube links, and images. WhatsApp

allows teachers or students to create a group where communication within specific participants takes place. The affordances of WhatsApp support Vygotsky's (1978) social learning theory where the basic principle is that students learn most effectively by engaging in carefully selected collaborative problem-solving activities, under the close supervision of instructors.

Studies on mobile-assisted language learning (MALL), including WhatsApp use, have been popular in the last two decades (e.g., Gutiérrez-Colon, Gibert, Triana, Gimeno, Appel, & Hopkins, 2013; Darnawati, Jamiludin, & Uke, 2016; Mistar & Embi, 2016; Hamad, 2017; Mbukusa, 2018; Rajendran & Yunus, 2021; Davie & Hilber, 2015; Ally & Prieto-Blázquez, 2014; Zang, 2012; Warman, 2018). The majority of these studies shows positive contribution of MALL and WhatsApp in language learning. For instance, Darnawati et. al (2016) find out that students consider the use of WhatsApp in the classroom as a pedagogical tool to be effective. Hamad (2017) claims that the use of WhatsApp enhanced students' learning and enthusiasm, developed English skills, enriched vocabulary and created peer learning.

The study by Mbukusa (2018) indicates that students enjoy using WhatsApp as a tool for learning, but it can impact negatively on the performance of tertiary students. Similarly, Gutiérrez-Colon et.al. (2013) find out that WhatsApp use results in a high level of satisfaction and create willingness to read in English

increased, a positive impact on their reading habits, and more regularity and confidence. Warman (2018) reported that a positive perception of WhatsApp use in blended learning on reading comprehension is shown by the majority of learners. The learners, in Warman's (2018) study, are said to be enthusiastic about learning to read through WhatsApp and prefer to interact and communicate with their friends about assignments or tasks via WhatsApp rather than directly in the class.

The previous studies, however, did not cover the diverse learners of English with specific language learning context. Thus, it cannot be theorized if English language learners are in favor of using WhatsApp in language learning classroom. The purpose of this study is to investigate the use of WhatsApp as a pedagogical tool to enhance reading and writing skills based on Indonesian EFL learners' perceptions. It is important in language pedagogy domain since understanding learners' learning preference will contribute to learning effectiveness.

METHOD

The design of this study was a survey research using a five-point Likert scale questionnaire (1=Strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neutral, 4=Agree, and 5=Strongly Agree) as the instrument to collect data. As the study was to explore learners' perception on WhatsApp use as an instructional tool to enhance reading and writing skills, the questionnaire included statements related to reading and writing skills such as if WhatsApp contributes to learners' vocabulary

development, grammar, reading comprehension, and writing fluency (see Table 2 for detailed list of the questionnaire items)

There were 90 Indonesian EFL learners who completed the 12 items questionnaire. The learners ranged from the 2nd to the 3rd year of university. Learners were relatively good at operating mobile applications as WhatsApp and no technical assistance was needed regarding the use of WhatsApp and its native features.

The average responses were obtained by calculating the number of responses per item and multiply the number of responses by the actual rating score. The grand total was then divided by total number of respondents (N=90). To interpret the average responses, the following formula was used.

Scale	Range	Response	Interpretation
5	4.21-5.00	Strongly agree	Very high
4	3.41-4.20	agree	high
3	2.61-3.40	Moderately agree	Moderately high
2	1.81-2.60	disagree	low
1	1.00-1.80	Strongly disagree	Very low

Table 1. Response interpretation

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A. The Result of Indonesian EFL Learners' Perception on Using WhatsApp as Instructional tool.

Indonesian EFL learners' perception on using WhatsApp as an instructional tool to enhance reading and writing skills can be seen in Table 2 below.

		Average response
1	I like to use WhatsApp for my language learning	3,52
2	Using WhatsApp for language learning is interesting and enjoyable	3,41
3	Using WhatsApp English medium groups is effective for developing reading and writing skills	3,42
4	Using WhatsApp English medium group helped me to develop my vocabulary	3,57
5	Using WhatsApp English medium helped me to develop my grammar	3,32
6	Using WhatsApp English medium group helped me to develop my reading comprehension	3,5
7	Using WhatsApp English medium group helped me to develop my writing	3,54
8	Using WhatsApp English medium group helped me to learn from my friends	3,85
9	Using WhatsApp English medium group provide me time to practice my English	3,65
10	Using WhatsApp English medium groups motivates me to chat and learn	3,57
11	Using WhatsApp English medium groups makes me free to ask questions and learn	3,72

Table 2. Perceived usefulness of WhatsApp as an instructional tool

As can be seen in Table 2, the average response of each statement provided in a five-point Likert Scale was 3.53, suggesting that the learners perceived WhatsApp to be positive as a pedagogical tool to improve reading and writing skills. Many students agreed that the components supporting their reading and writing skills as vocabulary and grammar developed, and that through WhatsApp group they could discuss and learn from other students so that practicing English was well accommodated (see Figure 1 for detailed responses).



Figure 1. EFL students' responses regarding the use of WhatsApp to enhance reading and writing skills

This finding supports the previous studies (i.e., Plana, Appel, Gimeno, & Hopkins, 2013; Darnawati, Jamiludin, & Uke, 2016; Mistar & Embi, 2016; Hamad, 2017; and Mbukusa, 2018) that learners of English were avid for learning through WhatsApp. WhatsApp was believed to positively contribute to their increased understanding of reading and writing. The increased understanding might be attributed to the frequent use of such skills.

In this context, students extensively practiced reading and writing thought text messaging in the WhatsApp group where every group participant should contribute. Regarding the potential benefit of ICT integration in language learning classroom, Hamilton (2015) contends that students tend to talk (engage in the class conversation) when the technology (WhatsApp) is used. The students' talk is said to be more productive if the task provided is engaging. Students may want to talk to teacher or their peers to ask the task they are completing, the problems they face and the ideas they come up with. Chen and Bryer (2012: 97) add that "social media and networking technologies have significant potential to recreate the learning environment between student and teacher". Thus, using WhatsApp as an instructional tool allows EFL students to repeatedly type (write) and read English texts so that comprehension and fluency in the reading and writing can be attained.

Furthermore, Barhoumi & Rossi (2013) point out that mobile tools (e.g., WhatsApp) enhance online students' social interactions, cooperation and collaboration. WhatsApp provides online learners with opportunities to communicate and exchange knowledge. More importantly, since it allows learners to adjust the transfer and the access to knowledge to construct their skills and knowledge, this tool is considered to be the learner-centred learning and to fulfil the present approach to language teaching.

In language learning and teaching, understanding students' perception is important since it provides information

about their desirable learning. Effective learning may take place when the teaching practice meets the students' expectation. In other words, student perceptions of learning were highly correlated with teaching effectiveness (See Centra & Gaubatz, 2005; Ryan & Harrison, 1995; Cashin & Downey, 1992; 1999 for details). In this sense, the students' positive attitude towards WhatsApp use in EFL classroom may lead to effective language learning and teaching.

While the reading skill that might be affected by WhatsApp use as an instructional tool includes vocabulary size, sentence construction and cohesion, and reasoning, the writing skill covers spelling, punctuation, word choice, and grammar. Frequent exposure to English text messages in the WhatsApp is likely to improve EFL learners' reading and writing skills. Exploring the impact of WhatsApp on Dutch youth's school writing and spelling, Verheijen and Spooen (2021) reported that WhatsApp use had a positive effect on learners' story writing task and spelling. WhatsApp use is said to provide youths with greater orthographic awareness and to positively affect their spelling performance.

Some concerns might appear as whether the English text messages posted in the WhatsApp are students' own text, not copying from other online sources. It, however, can be overcome by making the tasks and activities as contextual and personal as possible so that the students' responses are more authentic. The tasks and activities should also require short responses. The longer the responses

required, the more likely the students to plagiarize.

CONCLUSION

The present study explored Indonesian EFL learners' perception on the use of WhatsApp as an instructional tool to enhance reading and writing skills. It was found that EFL learners perceived WhatsApp use to be positive and to help them improve the skill in reading and writing. This study is in line with the previous studies indicating that the integration of WhatsApp in language learning is favorable. It implies that WhatsApp use in language learning classroom is potential to help achieve language learning goals, especially in reading and writing skills.

The finding, however, might not be applicable to any context. Students with different learning context and different literacy skill may perceive WhatsApp use in the class to be ineffective. Therefore, the future research covering diverse setting and literacy skill is required to complement the previously investigated areas.

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