

WhatsApp Messenger As a Tool to Support English Foreign Class

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ABSTRACT

While WhatsApp Messenger has extended its utility beyond mere communication, studies exploring its pedagogical significance, particularly in the context of teaching and learning, still need to be explored. This paper aims to present a comprehensive perspective on the use of WhatsApp Messenger as a learning tool in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes. The research method employed in this study is library research, which involves an extensive review of existing literature on the topic. By reviewing various applications of WhatsApp Messenger, this article outlines its role in supporting EFL instruction. The discussion encompasses how WhatsApp facilitates the development of key language skills—speaking, writing, reading, and listening. Additionally, the paper evaluates the advantages and disadvantages of incorporating WhatsApp Messenger in the language classroom, providing a balanced view of its effectiveness as an educational resource.

Keywords:

MALL, WhatsApp Messenger, English Language Teaching.

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Introduction

Technology has become an essential means for humans in many aspects, one of which is teaching. Technology in language teaching is now widespread. Historically, technology and pedagogy were not often considered mutual terrains, but today, they have become closely intertwined through the development and expansion of learning tools. Implementing technology in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms can provide a meaningful and engaging approach to language learning (Andrade, 2014, Da & Huang, 2021). When referring to technology in education, most people think of computers and mobile devices, which have given rise to both non-computer and computer-assisted language learning (H.D Brown, 2015). In the 1990s, language laboratories were commonly used by schools to provide students with native-speaker models for speaking. In the 2000s, computer technology began to be integrated into classrooms. Presentations in the form of PowerPoint displayed with LCD projectors are examples that persist today. More portable devices such as mobile phones and tablets have emerged as tools for teaching languages. Consequently, applications on handheld devices have become platforms for students and teachers to interact in the language classroom (Ngaleka & Uys, 2013).

WhatsApp Messenger mobile app is just one among the most highlighted learning tools which have gained actual recognition from academic communities. It is not only simple, easy and cheap, but it also offers a unique collection of interactive and effective features for language teaching activities, especially in foreign language classes. WhatsApp messenger is one of messaging apps that offer many kinds of files to share, from picture, audio, video, pdfs, documents, slideshows more easily rather than email or sharing apps (WhatsApp inc, 2024). Moreover, it is a cross-platform mobile application that can be installed on smartphone from android, iOS, Windows Phone, Symbian even can be accessed on desktop pc or laptop through WhatsApp web. With those features, teaching English as foreign language steps into simpler ways to deliver various kind of teaching materials which are easily accessed in classroom.

Implementing WhatsApp in teaching English brings new interactions between teachers and students, creating a dynamic and flexible learning environment. Teaching English using WhatsApp Messenger can make the classroom borderless, allowing for teaching to occur both inside and outside the classroom. This approach supports a continuous learning process that is not confined to traditional classroom settings. Unfortunately, this app is still less implemented in teaching English, which limits the exploration of its full potential. Research indicates that only a few studies have investigated the use of WhatsApp Messenger in teaching English, highlighting a gap in the literature that this paper aims to address. Therefore, this paper was initiated to present a wide perspective on valuing the WhatsApp Messenger mobile app as a strategic learning tool in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes.

Method

This research employs a library research methodology. According to George (2008), this kind of research involves a systematic process of reviewing and analyzing existing literature related to the topic. This method involves a thorough examination of various scholarly works, identifying and annotating key components related to the study.

Previous studies from various countries related to WhatsApp utilization in English Language teaching are used as subjects. Data collection involves systematic searches using keywords like "WhatsApp in English teaching," "WhatsApp in English learning," and "WhatsApp in English educational technology." Data analysis involves a detailed examination of the collected literature to identify how WhatsApp has been utilized to support English classes. This research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of WhatsApp Messenger as a tool to support English classes.

Result and discussion

MOBILE DEVICES IN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

Mobile devices in the classroom can detract from or reinforce the language classroom. This can be seen in numerous studies about teachers' and students' perceptions of mobile devices in learning (Gikas & Grant, 2013; Alamer, 2015; Song, Y. & Siu, C.K, 2016; Broadbent, 2017; Kartal, 2019; Al-Mubireek, 2020; Tragant et al., 2021). Of course, some factors can detract from mobile phones in language classrooms. Hulme & Shield (2008) stated that "anytime" and "anywhere" were ignored because the material was sent to the learners when they could freely have access to it. Moreover, students did not get material unless the teacher sent the material. In addition, Smartphones in classrooms have the potential to enhance learning, but implementing proper rules and guidelines is essential to minimize distractions and ensure the preservation of face-to-face interactions (Anshari et.al, 2017). Moreover, Teachers infrequently use handheld devices for classroom teaching, primarily utilizing them for online exercises and tend to be distracted by students using mobile phones for non-classroom activities, which can negatively impact the learning experience (Rolls & Kiely, 2018; Al-Mubireek 2020).

Besides that, some studies revealed the positive results of implementing mobile devices based on teachers' and students' perspectives. Communication through mobile apps such as Email, SMS, Facebook groups, Twitter, and recently WhatsApp has become popular in recent decades, and each of these apps has its characteristics and influence on teaching and learning inside and outside the classroom (Calvo, Arbiol & Iglesias, 2014; Ok & Ratliffe, 2018). The integration of mobile technologies into learning and teaching gradually increased as educators understood how to use them to support various kinds of learning (Hulme and Shield, 2008). There are some benefits from integrating mobile technology into the classroom, Kim and Kwon in 2012 stated that (1) MALL enables students to more efficiently and more promptly access language learning materials and communicate with people at any time, from anywhere, (2) the nature of digital technology facilitates students' participation in both collaborative and individualized language learning activities synchronously and asynchronously allowing rapid development of speaking, listening, reading, and writing, skills, (3) mobile technology provides various resources and tools for language learning that encourage learners to be more motivated, autonomous, situated (site-specific), and socially interactive. In addition, mobile devices are more effective than traditional methods for language learning. The effectiveness is notably influenced by factors such as the target language skills, the specific language being learned, and whether the language is the learner's first or second language (Chen et al., 2020). Moreover, we can see that mobile devices in the classrooms positively affect students and teachers in teaching-learning activities.

The use of WhatsApp in language classrooms also revealed positive results from teachers' and students' perspectives on its use in teaching-learning activities. Using WhatsApp in teaching also brings a new platform for teachers to make simple social networks in class. This platform allows teaching and discussion between students and teachers outside the classroom. Moreover, WhatsApp effectively extends language learning beyond the classroom by fostering interaction between teachers and students, as well as among students themselves, despite a gradual decline in student participation over time; it proves to be a valuable educational tool for both formal and informal settings, enhancing active learning, decision-making, motivation, and various skills (Tragant et al., 2021; Suárez et al., 2022). In line with the previous statement, WhatsApp brings technical, educational and academic advantages (Bouhnik., & Deshen, 2014). Moreover, numerous studies have already been done to reveal the use of WhatsApp in teaching English, which is discussed in the following section.

USING WHATSAPP IN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

As a new tool in education, previously Email, SMS, Facebook Group, and twitter, WhatsApp has similar positive as previous but has some up-to-date features that encourage students and teacher to better understanding (Bouhnik, D., & Deshen, M. 2014, Tragant et al., 2021; Suárez et al., 2022). Its offers feature to share not only written information but also provide picture, audio, video, document sharing even a website link to some specific subject. This feature can provide teacher to do blended learning, where teaching can happen outside classroom.

WhatsApp already used as tool to support teaching in some field other than language. Raiman, Antbring and Mahmood (2017) reveal in their study the utility, feasibility and acceptability of WhatsApp Messenger in supplementing teaching for third year medical students. Aljaad (2015) inform the broader use of WhatsApp in educational purposes such as developing curriculum, activating the role of student's club, and serving scientific research in King Saud University. While previous study focusses not in language teaching, using WhatsApp in teaching English will discussed in following section.

Using WhatsApp in Listening and Speaking class

Teaching listening used to be done in a language laboratory, but now, mobile devices can take their place. Previously, iPods, sound recorders, and MP3 players were devices to play audio material and teach listening, especially vocabulary (Ok & Ratliffe, 2018). Nowadays, mobile phones or smartphones can replace those devices. WhatsApp's audio-sharing feature can help teachers use it as a tool to support their teaching. Students significantly improved their English listening comprehension by implementing WhatsApp group exercises, which they perceived as effective and entertaining (Setyowati, 2019). Utilizing WhatsApp as a tool for helping students' English language acquisition and motivation facilitated the development of speaking skills, expanded vocabulary, and fostered learning through observing peers' errors (Hamad, 2017; Halim & Awalyah, 2022). Teachers can also share videos to complement listening material, particularly vocabulary.

While sharing audio and video files is possible through the WhatsApp chatroom, teachers also do oral production. For example, teachers can share discussion topics in a WhatsApp group and encourage students to record their opinions (Samaie, Nejad, and

Qarachollo, 2016). Asking students to send voice notes via WhatsApp helps them practice speaking in addition to the traditional face-to-face method with their friends or teachers.

Using WhatsApp in Reading and Writing class

Teaching reading and writing using WhatsApp mainly focus on vocabulary. From WhatsApp features it can be a good tool to consciousness-raising for vocabulary which can help teacher illustrate and explain the words (Man. 2014). Because WhatsApp is a text-based platform, teaching writing can be done via its chatroom. Moreover, Man (2014) stated that this text-based platform can help teacher to identify common problems by students. Besides, WhatsApp group that utilized as English-medium groups provide students the chance to engage in authentic language practice, particularly in written communication, beyond the limits of the classroom (Ahmed, 2019; Sari & Putri, 2019; Arifani et al. 2020). Additionally, these groups serve as a source of motivation for students, fostering reciprocal learning.

There are some ways to teaching reading and writing through WhatsApp, first is creating groups on WhatsApp allow learners to share information within classmate. Second is share links for vocabulary games or worksheet in class instead of printed will enhance learner's interest and bring fun and novelty way of learning. Third is bring discussion to the groups by raising some topic that can be discussed. The topic can be simple one like favorite movie or recent news in students' context, students will share their opinion and their classmates will see and bring discussion in chatroom. In this stage, teacher role become facilitator and observer to guide discussion in teacher's objective. The discussion can be main activity or brainstorming before introduces material. Sharing link about some article or news will be the fourth ways to use WhatsApp. Students will directly lead to some specific online materials that related to subject, this can be supplement after previous ways. Last but not least is to share less information. Teacher's note, class announcement and assignment, or school information can be shared in WhatsApp group. By doing this, perhaps everyone in chatroom will not late for many information which related or not to language classroom.

Conclusion and Suggestions

Some of the studies cited above have already demonstrated the use of WhatsApp in language teaching. WhatsApp primarily aids in vocabulary development and provides students with opportunities to practice their English, both orally and in writing. However, as mentioned in the introduction, using mobile devices also has advantages and disadvantages. One of them is practical: only some students have a WhatsApp application on their mobile phones. Although one can access WhatsApp from a laptop or desktop PC, this will limit mobility. Teachers face practical issues related to WhatsApp, just as students do. There are still several teachers who need to become more familiar with the WhatsApp application or mobile phones. To address this issue, educators must comprehend the functionality of WhatsApp and the devices they plan to utilize. Students' readiness also needs to be considered by the teacher while implementing WhatsApp in their English classroom.

In addition to practical issues, privacy has become an issue that teachers and students face. Occasionally, teachers cannot control chatrooms on group WhatsApp, leading to spam messages that deviate from the intended topic and hinder learning.

Occasionally, inappropriate discussions or words surface in chatrooms. Social distance between students and teachers also affected how they communicated through WhatsApp. When students are unable to participate well in discussions, WhatsApp groups become passive. To minimize this, teachers can introduce a rule the very first time when a WhatsApp group is created to discuss topics only and what kind of language is used—formal, casual, or informal—in chatrooms. To sum up, WhatsApp brings many advantages to the classroom, such as being the primary tool for teaching language or supporting conventional ways of teaching.

Further studies might focus on many potential domains to further explore the utilization of WhatsApp as a tool in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes. Comparative research can be undertaken to examine the efficacy of WhatsApp in various educational settings and compare it with different apps like YouTube or Tiktok. Experimental study could investigate different teaching strategies and the integration of gamified components to improve learning outcomes. Furthermore, doing qualitative research on the perspectives of teachers and students could offer deeper understanding into their experiences and attitudes on using of WhatsApp for educational purposes.

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