

THE STUDENTS' PERCEPTION ON THE USE OF WHATSAPP GROUP FOR PRACTICING ENGLISH

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Abstract

Fun learning situations will determine the success of learning process. This research is conducted to find out the students' perception on the use of WhatsApp Group for practicing English. The methodology used qualitative method by applying coding of qualitative data. The main instrument of this research is data in the questionnaire and interview. This research finds out that there are several benefits of using WhatsApp Group for practicing English. They are: (1) WhatsApp Group can be used as a means of one of the reachable source for practicing English; (2) WhatsApp Group is considered as one of the best media for learning English in a relax and unstressed situation; (3) WhatsApp Group provides partners for practicing students' English skill in writting that will lead to their reading and speaking skill; (4) WhatsApp Group gives some valuable feedback for teachers in determining students' error and mistake in sentence construction; and (5) WhatsApp Group enable teacher to provide direct situation in correcting students' error and mistake.

Keywords: *WhatsApp Group, Students' Perception, teaching media*

INTRODUCTION

In today's era, technology has a pivotal role which affects to the change of the process of students' learning. Learning is not only limited by four walls classroom which places the teachers as the main sources for the students. Technology helps the teachers to create innovative teaching strategy by providing interesting activities helping the students improve their competence. One of the most effective ways used is digital communication. Digital communication between groups of students and between students and teachers has be-come popular during the last decade through various channels: Email, SMS, Facebook groups, Twitter, and recently WhatsApp (Calvo, Arbiol & Iglesias, 2014).

Using technology as instructional media certainly can produce better learning experience for the students. Costley (2014) argues that technology is a powerful contributor to learning if it is used to deepen students' engagement in meaningful and intellectually authentic curriculum. Technology can create interesting and various activities for the students until students can interact with their peers and teacher by the help of technology.

One of the forms of technology used in this era is social media. Social media is defined as a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and

technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content (Kaplan &Heanlein, 2010, p.61).

Rapid improvements in mobile technology and social media have resulted in an increasingly sophisticated number and range of messaging applications. One such application is WhatsApp, a messaging application for smart devices that can be used as an alternative to SMS. WhatsApp is an Internet based social network tool that provides greater functionality than SMS and allows users to send and receive messages in a variety of media formats: text (that can be longer than SMS text), documents (e.g., PDF), emoji, photos, videos, user locations, and voice or video calls. WhatsApp is particularly popular because its enhanced capabilities allow users to interact in a variety of ways. For example, WhatsApp allows users to exchange text messages one-to-one or as group conversations. Additionally, users can share documents and a variety of multimedia types as well as making voice or video calls. With this functionality, WhatsApp is a useful learning tool that makes posting, sharing content and engaging in online discussions easy and available anywhere and anytime (Jain, Eddy Luaran, & Rahman, 2016).

The reason of using WhatsApp Group for learning English is that it makes the learning process effective and efficient. Students do not need paper anymore. They can simply practice their English through their smart phone. The teacher can use the media to present the materials and the tasks. Then, they can also use the media to submit their answers directly and quickly. The effectiveness and the efficiency of the use of the social medium is not only occurred in the classroom. By using the media, teacher can also ask students to practice their English at home and monitor them through the media.

WhatsApp is rated as a great societal connection that connects individuals to get and share the humongous worldwide information rapidly. It is also as part of the social media growth. Whenever humans are sharing stories and influencing others, it is viewed as social networking (Nicholson, 2011). Besides, the production of knowledge among students is based on online social interactions (Vygotsky, 1978). He explained that “learning can also be influenced by numerous variables, including the cognitive and psychological state of the learner, teacher professionalism and nature and complexity of the pedagogical approach”, (Vygotsky, 1978). Overall, the effectiveness of learning and teaching can be improved through social interaction and this benefits the students in sharing information which parallels with the social development literature (Vygotsky, 1978).

Moreover, the simple operation of WhatsApp service makes it available to all ages and backgrounds. By having a smartphone, subscribing to the internet data plan and installing the application, it allows communication with everyone. It allows the user to create WhatsApp groups among the teacher and students by separating each group according to certain practicums to communicate among each other

Solomon and Schrum (2007) claimed that WhatsApp provides a conversation platform to everyone which allows the existence of a relationship among them. It promotes information and knowledge sharing unconsciously. It is supported by Patient (2013) who stated that the conversations between and among students using WhatsApp (smartphone application) demonstrates the sharing of academic information. Mar (2013) also emphasized that via WhatsApp, the majority of the

students were highly satisfied and agreed with this application, not only could it increase their willingness to read in English but also it gave positive impacts on their reading habits, thus resulting in more regularity and confidence. These studies showed that WhatsApp could help a lot in enhancing students' learning performance especially in English subject.

Therefore, the research questions of this study are as follows.

What are the students' perceptions about the use of WhatsApp Group for practicing English?

METHOD

The method of this study is qualitative study, which investigates the student's perception on the use of WhatsApp Group for learning English. The respondents of this study are vocational school students in SMK TKM Purworejo and SMK Institut Indonesia Kutoarjo and also many students from SMA 1, SMA 2, SMA 11 and SMK 2 Purworejo that were involved in Bina Siswa Cendikia Course. It was conducted during three months. To deal this study, researchers do the following steps:

1. *Establishing WhatsApp Group*

As a teacher the researchers had made the WhatsApp Group in July, right after the new academic year starts. It is to facilitate the researchers in communicating with the students, such as sending announcements, assignments and also sharing subject matter. Here the researchers found that WhatsApp Group leads to two-way communication between teacher and students. Students can consult learning difficulties for certain materials and the teachers can provide online learning assistance.

To have a conducive WhatsApp Group to practicing English, researchers make a number of rules, such as a) all group members must install English digital dictionaries on their smart phones, so there is no reason not to write in English, b) all group members may ask researchers anything, here the role of researchers is as friends and mentors c) all group members must write messages in English, those who do not use English will not be replied by the researcher.

Here the researcher makes WhatsApp Group not only to share information about school matters but also other interesting things that can motivate students to learn English, such as poetry, music, jokes, quotes, and articles. The main purpose of this group is as a medium for practicing English.

2. *Distributing Questionnaire and doing interview*

After observing the students' performance in practicing English in WhatsApp Group, the researchers generating 20 questionnaire statements to dig the students' perception in using WhatsApp Group for practicing English and 5 question to interview respondents as follow;

- a. Which one makes you more confident speaking English on WhatsApp Group or speaking directly in class? Why?
- b. What difficulties do you encounter when speaking English?
- c. What did you do to overcome the difficulty?
- d. What benefits do you get in WhatsApp Group?

- e. What is your suggestion to make WhatsApp Group better for learning English?
3. Analysing the data of Questionnaire and doing interview
The respondents were given a questionnaire containing 20 statements to dig their perception about the use of WhatsApp Group in practicing English. After filling the questionnaire, interview is given to them in order to clarify the data from questionnaire. The researcher draws conclusions from the questionnaire and interview data and also from the activity of respondents in the WhatsApp Group

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This research finds out that there are several benefits of using WhatsApp Group for learning English. They are:

1. *WhatsApp Group can be used as a means of one of the reachable source for learning English.*

To master English, as a foreign language for students, they need sufficient language input. In the digital era students can learn independently via google or youtube. But the questionnaire and interview reveal that very few of students use google and youtube to learn english. Most students only use the internet to learn english when the teacher gives an assignment. Some students said that they did not know the site addresses that can be used as a reference for learning English. They are very enthusiasm involved into WhatsApp Group that provide english videos, articles, and jokes. It can be seen from their comments when getting a video or English article posting on WhatsApp Group. 75% of WhatsApp Group members respond to these posts and are involved in active discussions in English.

2. *WhatsApp Group is considered as one of the best media for practicing English in a relax and unstressed situation.*

From the interview and questionnaire data, students' difficulty in speaking was lack of vocabulary and fear of making wrong sentences.

Unlike speaking directly in class or making sentences while working on tests, in WhatsApp Group students have a relaxed atmosphere and enough time to think and search for vocabulary. Students also do not feel embarrassed when making wrong sentences. In fact, he was grateful when his sentence was corrected by another friend, because there was an agreement from WhatsApp Group that "It's OK to make mistakes" but shame if it rarely commented on the group.

3. *WhatsApp Group provides partners for practicing students' English skill in writing that will lead to their reading and speaking skill;*

Being able to speak English fluently is a habit, then the environment and friends are very influential in developing the ability to speak English. From questionnaire and interview data, beside vocabulary, the of students' difficulty is

the absence of mentors and partners in practicing English. WhatsApp facilitates students to connect with each other in groups and practice their English.

Vocabulary and expressions in regular English conversations in WhatsApp Group will be absorbed in by students and will automatically be used again when replying messages or commenting on their friends' opinions. It is seen that 60% of the vocabulary that exist in conversation is words that have appeared in previous dialogues.

Based on the interview, respondent says, "WhatsApp Group gives me the opportunity to interact with other students in virtual classroom". Students are also given the chances to interact and do collaborative activity with their peers such as doing exercise and consulting some English material.

4. *WhatsApp Group gives some valuable feedback for teachers in determining students' error and mistake in sentence construction; and*

Observing sentence patterns that exist in conversations on WhatsApp group, researchers can see that the tendency of students' mistakes are 1) grammar errors that refer to Indonesian sentence patterns, 2) students often make sentences that are too complex so it is not clear they uses verbal sentences or non verbal. 3) Diction errors, it seems that students only translate the bahasa into English word by word without thinking about the context and expressions commonly used in English

WhatsApp Group enable teacher to provide direct situation in correcting students' error and mistake.

In this case, WhatsApp Group has a function a means of reflection for teachers. Error and mistake are common things in learning foreign languages. And the teacher may not blame the student precisely. The type of error and mistake is valuable feedback for the teacher. If teachers understand the parts that are considered as the students' error and mistake, they can give solution, correct, and give feedback for students so that they understand more about the materials or lesson given.

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