



## The Perceived Effectiveness of WhatsApp as a Supplementary Tool for Enhancing English Language Skills among Master's Level EFL Learners

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### ABSTRACT

The world is dominated by technological advancement and information technology. Different fields of daily life are overpowered by such advancements. The world of education has also been dominated by technology. Use of different apps have made it to the classrooms. The study taken is to analyse the perceptions of the learners in the use of one such App known as WhatsApp in English Language Classes. The method used here is Qualitative in approach, where the selected participants were interviewed to see what they perceive of WhatsApp in their classes. Theoretical lens taken up by the researcher is Connectivism by Siemens (2008), which purports the knowledge is generated by interacting in the society. Population of the study were all the students of English language in universities. The sample selected were students of NUML University studying English language. The participants were selected randomly. It was analyzed through the study that WhatsApp is considered a very useful App in language learning. It not only enhances the four communication skills but also the vocabulary and Grammar. The role of teacher in using WhatsApp in classrooms was also considered important by the learners. However, it is also suggested in the study that more organized methods of using such apps must be introduced in the classrooms to ensure maximum productivity among students.

#### Keywords:

English and WhatsApp usage, English language teaching and technology use, language learners perception towards WhatsApp use



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## INTRODUCTION

Today's world is an advanced world, a lot of inventions in technology have made quite a difference in the world. These advancements have altered life of human beings altogether. Health sciences, educational fields and businesses are likewise affected. Education system is also quite transformed in the process of these advancements. Today a complete new education system has been placed in the classrooms. Online educational system and distance learning systems are introduced in the institutes (Raja & Nagasubramani, 2018). A similar trend has been observed

in English language teaching and learning, where these technological inclusions have brought a lot of changes. Younger generation's attachment with their mobile gadgets and English being the universal language used in these gadgets, resulted in its more robust presence in language learning rooms. Now people are rapidly shifting towards online or distance learning. Platforms like twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram, they have all played a role in the development of this association. A study conducted by Fattah (2015) highlighted that these gadgets being easily adjusted in pockets or bags and being mobile have made a lot of educationists to use them in the educational settings. Digital learning has also erased the boundaries of being limited to classroom there are different methods of e-learning for example classroom management system (CMS). One can use different tools using a classroom management system (CMS), which students can login and access all the learning material from anywhere in the world and interact to other learners and teachers from all over the world (Tavangarian et al., 2004). Different institutes have a certain method or system to utilize online material and resources, but they all are generally the same as they use boards for material or announcements and provide video or audio lectures (Downes, 2005).

One can utilize online learning and adapt it according to their own academic plan. It ranges from accessing the lectures, the course material put on the site, to all the interaction, discussions and talks related to learning a specific course. One just must keep up with the pace and be updated with the requirements of the class for better results. The courses are run through a schedule, which is very similar to the schedule of traditional classes. The complete websites provide all the information which is required by the students. They get all the contact details of their teachers; the deadlines are also set for submitting assigned works (Clark & Mayer, 2016). Only teaching (Evans, 2008). Hence, a study was taken up by the researcher to analyse how language learners perceive this digital inclusion in their language learning classrooms.

E-learning has numerous benefits. One has access to his/her doorstep. The schedule, venue and the pace to which a learner wants to acquire knowledge is dependent on the choice of the learner. It helps in covering the learning resources aptly and repeatedly without returning to the classroom repeatedly and having the access of teacher all the time. The problems of physical presence are also mitigated to a large extent. Neither there are issues of travelling to the class, nor there are expenses for food, housing, or other necessities. One can take a class anywhere and anytime. According to recent studies, students learning through e-learning have a better grasp over the material than through physically present classes, mainly due to the facility of repeating every word.

Understanding e-learning is easy. It is any such learning where traditional classrooms are not used, rather learning is done by using electronic devices. It is generally used for any education which is acquired through online resources. There are many terms used for e-learning which include learning through online or internet resources, use of computer, learning from distance. These all terms describe learning through online resources. E-Learning is defined as giving education to the teachers but outside classrooms. These courses are not taught through resources like DVD or CD-ROM, video tape or via TV channels, but rather through interacting with the students and teachers. It is a two-way process where students and teachers communicate with each other continuously. Lectures are delivered on the site where students can raise their hands by using icons, they can interact in live sessions and can also listen to speeches which are pre-recorded. Students are also graded online, for their participation and other assigned work. More

interactive and collective functions can be used to widen the circles of learning through new ways and methods.

### **Objective of the Study**

The objective of the study is to explore students' perception towards WhatsApp in including it as a language learning and teaching tool.

### **Research Question**

What are the perception of students towards WhatsApp as alternative source of teaching English language skills?

### **Significance of the Study**

The study can prove to be helpful in making alterations in the teaching methodologies used by the language learners of Pakistani Universities. It specifically highlights the importance of the social media platform, WhatsApp, in its inclusion in the language learning classes. It can help stakeholders make decisions and policies to enhance the learning processes by digitalizing the classrooms so that learning can be maximized. The research gap identified by the researcher is the gap between theory and practise in the Pakistani Universities. The study creates a gap by providing practical implications on the use of WhatsApp in language learning process present in Pakistani universities generally and Universities of Quetta particularly.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Technology in recent times has become an integral part of the education system. Mobile gadgets have been quite famous among the people. Along with their inclusion in daily life, mobile assisted language learning has also become integral in education. New language learning methods have been imparted among the learners through training periods. It is also noted that distance learning has become quite an important factor in educational scenarios. Educational institutes are quite eager to impart the system in their particular programs (Marginson, 2002).

Mobile devices have changed the whole scenario of education, particularly in English language learning. The learners as well as the teachers are not bound to space and time. Being out of traditional setting helps making learning easier and accessible. Earlier, computers or other multimedia devices were present but they were fixed on a particular place and were not wireless but since the devices became wireless, through laptops, smartphones or ipods, learning methods of English language also transformed. Learners can access devices in their homes, offices, parks or anywhere in that matter (Fattah, 2015).

Fageeh (2013) posed that learners who use Mobile assisted language learning devices acquire better vocabulary and are quite motivated to learn. It was noted in the study that students helped retrieve data, get motivated and master the vocabulary.

Particularly talking, WhatsApp is one of the most popular software application in mobile phones. It is used on mobile phones, laptops as wells tablets. WhatsApp is a well-liked messaging programme that can be used on several gadgets, including smartphones, laptops, and tablets. It has become an integral part of daily life and is transcending slowly into the educational system

as well, although quite a study has to be taken up to see its benefits in educational system. There are many features of WhatsApp which can be used in classes to enhance the learning of the students in language learning classrooms (Jasrial, 2019).

Riyanto (2013) was of the view that students have started using WhatsApp for their educational benefits too. It is being used by students to enhance their language skills. Man (2014), is also of the view that WhatsApp and other apps help in enhancing the vocabulary. A comparative study was taken up to see how WhatsApp and physical classroom are different for learning. It was quite evident that learners who used WhatsApp were quite successful in learning while the students of physical classrooms were not very successful (Amry, 2014). In another research pre-test and post-test was conducted to check the vocabulary and writing skills of the learners. It was inferred that use of WhatsApp platforms had quite a positive impact on the learners (Hani, 2014).

Another study conducted in the University of Peshawar by Minhas et al. (2016) highlighted that how WhatsApp is used in language learning. Questionnaires were distributed among the learners. 84 percent of them were of the view that WhatsApp has positive impact on learning.

One of the study posed the pros and cons of ICT for the language learners of second language. Portuguese students were when examined, it was noted that learning is still quite impactful even beyond traditional classrooms (Ferreira-Meyers & Martins, 2020).

A study taken up in Pakistan by Ali et al. (2021) highlighted that WhatsApp is a tool for Mobile Assisted language learning. The study was conducted on the students of grade 8. They were selected through random sampling. A pre and post test was conducted on controlled and experimental groups. After one month, it was noted that WhatsApp made quite a positive impact on the learners.

Alfiansyah et al. (2022) posed that WhatsApp is very beneficial, especially when students and teachers interacted during the pandemic. It helped them communicate and access information even when they could not meet physically, however it is also noted that there are some obstacles too in using WhatsApp in classes.

After a thorough review of literature, it is highlighted that there are mixed views about the use of WhatsApp in educational settings. Particularly in Pakistan, there are not many studies or evidences on the use of WhatsApp in classrooms. Especially, no studies has been observed in the language learning classrooms of Balochistan, Hence, there is quite a need to understand the use of WhatsApp in these classes if found useful. The researcher has taken up the study so that such applications practical implication is studied and hence utilized in language learning classes.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Qualitative research approach is adopted by the researcher to conduct the study and collect data. Such an approach is quite apt in studies where social behaviours and attitudes are examined. One of the method of collecting qualitative data is to conduct in-depth interviews. Interviews conducted on focus groups help the researcher explore unproven ideas and notions (Ryan et al.,2013).

## **Theoretical Framework**

Theory in any study provides a specific lens to observe, analyse or perform an empirical study. The theory adopted in the research is that of Connectivism by Siemens, (2008). It highlights the idea that learning is a process generated by interacting in the society. Thus, by analysing what students perceive about the use of WhatsApp in language learning highlights the role that socially interactive platforms provide in the process.

It is also highlighted in the theory that in today's world learning takes place dependent on mutual interests, perspectives, and viewpoints of learners as well as instructors, while they interact digitally. Network connectivity boosts this association. Internet creates a link among the members of society through different modes. Connectivism poses the notion that knowledge is received through different perceptions and viewpoints, hence different sources of information be provided to enhance the process of learning (Goldie, 2016). The purpose of selecting this specific theory is that it deals particularly with online education. This connectivity through internet has opened a wide horizon for learning and learning is now not limited to interpersonal activity of an individual rather it has spread to large group based activities. The fast world of internet has also made learners to adopt this quickness in their pace of learning too. Hence, the educational world has been made very competitive (Picciano, 2017).

## **Data Collection**

The approach in data collection for the study is qualitative in nature. Qualitative data collection includes interviews, questionnaires, direct observations, documents, focus group interviews and case studies. These methods include open-ended questions. The participants are students enrolled in evening and morning sessions of NUML University, Quetta Campus. The researcher has used a smartphone and a computer to record the conversation on campus and have selected interviews to collect data on language learners' perceptions of using WhatsApp in classrooms.

To make the results reliable, interviews were chosen to collect data. By keeping the research question in mind, learners are questioned about their perception on using WhatsApp in language learning classrooms. Seven interviewees were selected by the researcher. The study population consisted of the students of English language learning.

## **Sampling Method**

The researcher has adopted purposive sampling in particular. In such sampling the participants are selected deliberately dependent on specific characteristics. For instance, here specifically language learners are used because their perception about use of WhatsApp is required, other learners will not provide the apt data for language learners.

The researcher has taken only the language learners of National University of Modern Languages (NUML) as a sample for the study. The study focuses on the perception of language learners using WhatsApp in classes, making it convenient and purposeful to select only the language learners as a homogenous group for the study.

The sample participants for the study are selected purposively from the language learners of Quetta. This beginning point is a set episodic interval (K). This design consists of every n<sup>th</sup>

element of the population size  $N$ , beginning with an element picked randomly between 1 and  $n$ .  $K = N/n$  is the formula for the systematic sampling method (ibid).

$K$  = Systematic sampling interval

$N$  = Population size

$n$  = Sample size

According to systematic sampling, seven English language learners are selected, beginning with the first student on the class nominal list and progressing in third-student intervals. Due to the limited sample size, the researcher can thoroughly assess each case study and draw valid conclusions.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The research revolves around the notion that WhatsApp can be used as an alternative tool in language learning classes or not.

**RQ:** *What is the perception of students towards WhatsApp as alternative source of teaching English language skills?*

The research revolves around five main themes and thirteen sub themes. The first theme analyses the viewpoint of using WhatsApp in language learning classrooms and how it aids in providing convenience accessibility, motivation and engagement, including interactive learning. The second theme focuses on how WhatsApp is effective in achieving the four skills of communication in language learning. Whereas the third theme highlights the role of teacher in WhatsApp based language learning environment. The fourth theme explores the challenges and constraints of using WhatsApp in language learning.

The six stage thematic analysis was done by using the data from interviews. The researcher transcribed that data gather from interviews through a software called NVIVO, and reduced them into themes through codes. Braun and Clarke (2006) were of the view that data patterns can be looked at through the familiarization of data coding then, developing themes and revising it. The whole process was quickened and was time effective due to NVivo 12. The interviews were first listened by the interviewer, then the transcripts and audio recordings were imported to Nvivo 12, the coding was created.

Later on, the coding, created by using the information from data, was analysed for any information and patterns repeated by the participants. Further, the themes were developed by repeatedly reading the codes created out of patterns on Nvivo. Following an initial analysis, NVivo automatically counted the number of times the participants mentioned each of the seventeen main categories and their subcategories. The seventeen categories were combined into five themes, with thirteen sub-themes that received the most mentions. Computer aided results helped in accuracy and reliability of the data.

### **Findings**

The data analysed after taking interviews helped to identify the themes which are discussed below as the findings of the present study:

**Theme 1:** Students' Perception of WhatsApp as an Alternative Source of Teaching English Language Skills

This theme highlights the perception of students about the use of WhatsApp in English language learning class. It also involves the attitude of students in using the pattern or methods of using it and also the role played by teacher in their usage.

**Extract 4-1:**

The students combinedly talk to each other, share things with each other that helps, a lot in learning and saves our precious time. [Anwar 28-01-2023]

**Sub-theme 1:** Attitudes towards Using WhatsApp for Language Learning

The participant here mentioned that the group chats and discussions helped them in learning and collaborating.

After taking interviews of seven language learners, it became evident that all of the learners use WhatsApp very regularly. They also engage in its use during their English language learning class. The students find it very useful in learning and collaborating. It also helps them to interact among each other and with their teacher also. It does not only lead them to communicate but also help to give immediate response which further aides to discuss with each other the learning strategies. WhatsApp has created a sense of group and association among the class fellows too. The same approach is endorsed in several other studies (Ferreira-Meyers & Martins, 2020).

**Sub-theme 2:** Perceived Benefits of using WhatsApp for Language Learning

**Extract 4-2:**

It helps because it is difficult for teacher to reply individual one by one. So teachers leave a message combined for all like instructions in this group. So, this is the benefit of group to connecting teachers and students. [Anwar 28-01-2023]

According to this statement of the participant, the teachers are always accessible to the learners, and this feature is also quite helpful for the teacher, who would otherwise have to individually send messages to students but here sending one message in the WhatsApp group saves time as well as resource.

One benefit of using WhatsApp group for language learning class is that it is easily accessible and it cuts the time of the teacher. First, the students can practise any language learning skill through WhatsApp. Secondly, they get immediate feedback from the teacher. It helps them practise behind the screen of camera. Often the teacher needs to inform the class about something, she/he can drop a message in the group it saves time for all. Often, it is noted that learners of language do not take negative feedback positively, when given in front of every one, WhatsApp gives them a personalised platform to communicate and feedback can also be given personally, as mentioned in another study (Jasrial, 2019).

**Convenience and Accessibility**

Most of the participants were of the view that use of WhatsApp is very helpful for them, one reason is that it is very easy to use. No advance technology is used for it. Moreover, it also is available all the time. The worksheets and the exercises provided to them by the teacher could be

solved immediately without any delay and they do not need any specific or class based timing to communicate and take help from their peers or teachers. There was no time and space constraint for them.

## **MOTIVATION AND ENGAGEMENT**

### **Extract 4-3:**

Yeah. I send documents on WhatsApp. It is helpful. It help us, our knowledge and, uh, it is beneficial for the students [Nisar Ahmad 18-01-2023]

When asked about the use of data sending facility through whatsapp, one of the participant said that he sends documents and receives them instantly. It saves them costs of printing and purchasing hard form of the documents too. It also kept the students engaged and occupied. They did not need paper submissions; they could easily transfer their documents through WhatsApp. It was noted by the participants that they could use audio or video clips easily on WhatsApp, which helped them connected with the class whenever they needed. Hence, this instant data sending app is very beneficial for the students.

### **Collaborative Learning**

Most participants were of the view that use of WhatsApp and creating groups for WhatsApp helped them in exchanging ideas, notes and also led them to do combined studies and practices of different skills through WhatsApp. It was indeed highlighted that it made them more collaborative and they remained engaged throughout their session.

### **Sub-theme 3: Usage Patterns of WhatsApp for Language Learning**

WhatsApp is slowly and gradually becoming an integral part of classes, especially in language learning classes where students communicate, exchange educational material with each other and practise skills using WhatsApp. How much time a learner gives and how is WhatsApp used depends on particular students based on their preferences and goals. The tasks or activities conducted on WhatsApp may also vary depending on the goals. Some may use to discuss and improve speaking skills through voice notes, or attempt reading comprehensions or grammar skills.

### **Theme 4: Perceived Effectiveness of using WhatsApp for different Language Skills (e.g., Speaking, Listening, Reading, Writing)**

It is also noted through the interviews that students' viewpoint about the effectiveness of WhatsApp in improving different skills of language learning i.e. reading, writing, speaking and listening differs depending on their requirement and needs. Some believe, it is useful for listening and speaking, whereas others believe that traditional settings are better for reading and writing skills. However, it is noted that most of the participants, agreed on the notion that WhatsApp is a useful educational tool for language learning strategies.

### **Sub-theme 4: Speak Up! Improving English Language Fluency through Listening and Speaking**

#### **Extract 4- 4:**

**Interviewer:** WhatsApp messages help you practice and improve your English language speaking. If yes, how?



**Anwar:** Yeah. It improves whenever, I, especially in the groups when we send a voice note, so then we receive that feedback. Sometimes we commit a mistake that the teacher corrects this is your pronunciation mistake, so it helps a lot. [Anwar 28-01-2023]

Voice notes as highlighted by the participant are of quite use. Especially, when their teacher gives them back prompt feedback on the wrong use of vocabulary and pronunciation. Most of the participants emphasized that their speaking and listening skills were improved after using whatsapp, particularly when they would send voice notes, their teachers correct them quickly after listening to their voice notes (Jasrial, 2019). They are also of the view that listening to voice notes helps in improving their listening skills. It also helps them collaborate with each other in English which enhances their skills.

**Extract 4- 5:**

I get audio material of English language and it is beneficial for learning English. Uh, sometimes when the documents are related to learning I read it. we learn more from reading especially vocabulary enhancement and sentence structure. [Ayima 28-01-2023]

One of the response also highlighted that these voice notes come handy and they are saved in the memory of the phone where they can be reused repeatedly. Especially, students who are not very confident in participating, feel very comfortable doing exercises on their phones. These WhatsApp groups also help in reading comprehension, vocabulary enhancement and structure of sentences are also corrected due to its use.

**Sub-theme 5:** Read and Write: Enhancing English Language Proficiency through Reading and Writing

Although most of the participants considered listening and speaking as the most positively affected skills due to the use of WhatsApp but they were also of the view that the same impact on reading and writing skill is limited but it does affect positively. The documents shared with them on WhatsApp are always available and easy to read.

**Extract 4-6:**

**Teacher :** do you think documents shared in the group are working on your reading skills? If Yes, How?

**Ayima:** Somehow, yes because we learn more from reading especially vocabulary enhancement and sentence structure. [Ayima 28-01-2023]

The interviewees also highlighted that when they receive documents through WhatsApp like PPT or PDF files, they are bound to read them, specially, when they are just using their WhatsApp casually, this casual link with reading documents keeps on increasing their reading skill. The sentence structure becomes clear, looking at vocabulary repeatedly, reinforces their usage of particular words, hence improving their spelling and vocabulary. This also has a positive impact on the writing skills as well because they start writing what they read.

**Sub-theme 6:** English Learning Hub: A Treasure Trove of Audio-visual and Textual Learning Materials

**Extract 4-7:**

**Interviewer:** WhatsApp voice note messages help you practice and improve your English language speaking or otherwise?

**Ayima:** Yeah, they do. They do a lot in English language learning. and i like sending voice notes. [Ayima 28-01-2023]

The students responded that speaking and listening skills are quite polished by using WhatsApp. The voice notes or audio clips for listening exercises help them improve their skills. The pronunciation, intonation and vocabulary is enhanced by it. While the reading documents help them in improving their reading skills. Reading skills also help in improving the writing skills. Sentence construction and written expressions are also improved by it. Participants were more confident in using all the skills through the WhatsApp group. When the teacher corrects punctuation, grammatical mistakes and sentences.

**Extract 4-9:**

In groups we get archive of all the past class activities and learning records. [Ayima 28-01-2023]

The participants were also of the view that all the materials are cost free and they remain connected by having all the material in hand. They posed that their different groups of particular classes help them stay connected with all the material shared in the class, even if they are from the earliest class, they remain intact and safe in the group. The groups are quite interactive and this engaging component of these groups help in maintaining one of the innate features of language learning i.e. interaction and participation.

**Theme 7: Teacher's Role in WhatsApp-Based Language Learning**

**Extract 4-10:**

We enjoy a lot, because, you know, we receive, that feedback directly on time and then we share our thoughts. So means, uh, whenever we talk about topic, uh, we, we discussed briefly on these groups. Uh, we enjoy, uh, I think, uh, WhatsApp groups are the best ways to interact, uh, with class. [Anwar 28-01-2023]

Almost all the participants were appreciative of teacher's presence due to the app. Although there is a general consensus that the role of teacher might get subjugated by the presence of technological tools but the participants posed a different viewpoint. They narrated that with the increasing use of WhatsApp for language learning, the role of teachers has also enhanced. Students have a teacher present around them all the time. The techniques and strategies to bring out maximum productivity among students can only be done by a teacher. Teacher lead the learners on such paths from where they can learn greatly. Teachers not only keep the learners engaged in right activities but also monitor and give appropriate feedback at the right time.

**Sub-theme 8: Perceived Advantages of having a Teacher in the WhatsApp Group**

**Extract 4-11:**

Voice note's function assist teachers in providing brief corrective comments regarding how well their students are learning English. It is quick and also helps in doing better next time. [Soroch 06-01-2023]

According to this participant the involvement of teacher in correcting the learners is possible due to the app. Teacher could be helpful in many ways in the group. She provides immediate feedback to her/his students, which is very necessary in language learning (Alfiansyah et al., 2022). The activities, exercises or worksheets designed and then used by students can only be done when a teacher trained for the purpose does it. While the presence of teacher in the group, helps in taking guidance in performing activities as well as facilitates in the results too.

It is also pertinent to notice that the participants highlighted the benefit of teacher feedback. They believed that it is quite impactful in the learning process because it helps them in learning about their strengths and weaknesses. The feedbacks are also often personalised according to the need and requirement of a particular student.

## **CONCLUSION**

Hence, it is concluded by looking at the responses of interviews that the online platforms, particularly WhatsApp, provides many advantages in the language learning process. The researcher, after developing themes, highlighted the research questions to be resolved. While highlighting the first theme, it was analysed what the viewpoint of the learners is regarding the usage of WhatsApp in classrooms and how it helps in engaging, motivating, and providing accessibility. It was inferred that quite a positive role of Whatsapp is observed in this regard. While the second theme focusing on role of Whatsapp in improving the four communication skills was also considered to have a positive impact on learning through different advanced features of WhatsApp while communicating. The theme discussing the role of teacher in WhatsApp based language learning environment also recorded quite a positive impact in this regard, keeping in view the easy access to the teacher.

However, it is also noted by the researcher that there are quite a few challenges too by such inclusions in the language learning process which should be addressed to promise a better experience of learning. The research finds out the perceptions of the learners as an alternative source in English language learning. It highlights that in this process of learning WhatsApp can play a vital role in motivating providing, convenience, interactive collaboration and learning among learners and teacher.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Whatsapp exercises in game shapes can be added to language learning classes.
- Comparative study based on different mobile apps can be taken to further assist in language learning classes.
- Survey based researches must be taken up by policy makers of Higher education for integrative learning environment

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