



**MOBILE ASSISTED LANGUAGE LEARNING:
WHAT'S UP WITH WHATSAPP**

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Abstract: Mobile phones are viewed as significant aids to English language learning. Numerous studies have been conducted in different contexts on mobile assisted language learning (MALL) that indicate the benefits of mobile devices for English language learning. During the recent technological years, language learning has been attempted to transform its path from the conventional methods to instrumental applications. Mobile phone provides people to reach and exchange information through chats (WhatsApp). With the rapid increase in the use of mobile devices nowadays, especially smartphones, it is only natural for educators to turn to mobile technology to examine how it can be fully integrated in an educational context to support students' learning beyond the classroom. This study attempts to solve the lack of communicative learning opportunities by introducing mobile-assisted language learning with Whatsapp. In addition, it tries to investigate the perceptions of students towards the use of Whatsapp as a tool for develop their English writing skill. To achieve the result, a sample of 50 sophomores from the Department of English Education of STKIP PGRI Bandar Lampung, aged 18 to 20 years old. The results suggest that mobile-assisted language learning helps to create language immersion, which effectively motivates the learners further. Therefore, mobile-assisted language learning is promising in English learning for college students.

Keywords: Mobile application, Mobile learning, Mobile Assisted Language Learning, MALL, WhatsApp

INTRODUCTION

Learning a new language can be one of the essential interests that people are engaged in. Moreover, some of them need to learn an additional language for special purposes. Therefore, those who are responsible for teaching and learning languages try to explore more effective ways to facilitate it. Nowadays technology plays vital roles in teaching and learning languages. With the development of wireless network and mobile devices, it is possible to learn English anytime and

anyplace. Mobile phones are used as a handy tool for language learning.

That is, smartphones have become the most important device for Internet access. Mobile Internet applications have penetrated every aspect of users' lives with the improvement of mobile communication networks and the popularization of smartphones. Mobile education, which provides personalized learning scenarios, the experience of touching mobile devices' screens, voice output, and other functional advantages, has become the mainstream of online education.

Whatsapp is a popular instant messaging application, with more than 800 million users worldwide. It has given rise to a new form of social life, and has provided a new way of learning. It is a cross-platform and multifunctional social networking application. The various and powerful functions of Whatsapp can be applied to language learning. This paper aims to develop a new method of English learning with the assistance of Whatsapp instant messaging, improving language immersion and enhancing the learners' motivation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Technology can be an essential part of education and make it developed. Computers, the Internet, various software, and even mobile phones are inseparable part of today's classroom. Both teachers and learners will enjoy the role of modern technology. From the beginning of the 21st century, educators have tried to bring technology into the classroom. There have been seminars and conferences on CALL which have affected English language teaching and learning (Chapelle, 2003). At first, using technology in English Language Teaching (ELT) was rejected. However, its significant benefits were gradually revealed.

Mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) is a subset of mobile learning (Viberg & Grönlund, 2012) which enables the learning of a language to take place with the help of handheld devices such as smartphones, personal digital assistants (PDAs), iPads and so on. Laurillard (2007) and Sharples (2007) agreed that mobile devices offer five advantages for education: portability, accessibility, learning opportunities, connection, and personal experience. Therefore, access to education has become simpler with mobile devices, and learning opportunities have become bountiful.

Peters (2009) argued that mobile devices offer individualized and personal experiences and described mobile devices as "unique scaffolding that can be customized to the individual's path of

investigation." He claimed that mobile devices give students "anytime, anywhere learning". Kukulska-Hulme (2008) and Miangah (2012) noted that mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) provides students with rich, real-time, convenient, social contact, collaborative, and contextual learning. Various channels, such as Facebook groups, Twitter, WhatsApp, and WeChat, are available for learners, each with different characteristics.

WhatsApp has become the "communication portal" for social networking that has quickly changed the way people communicate (Susilo, 2014). It is one of the evolutions which have been frequently used on particular mobile phones and computers (Yeboah & Ewur, 2014). As an exclusive, cross-platform instant messaging subscription service which is available on the new generation of smart phones such as Iphone, Android, Blackberry and Nokia mobile phones, WhatsApp allows its users to send free text messages to each that is, users are not charged for a text sent through WhatsApp (Hindu, 2011). This is because WhatsApp sends messages through an internet data connection. It should be mentioned that many other, different message types, from simple text to pictures to audio files and videos as well as one's location using integrated mapping features are supported by WhatsApp (Alsalem, 2014). With social networks rapidly gaining prominence in this scenario, WhatsApp is emerging as a tool that can be used for different educational purposes. WhatsApp is already being used to teach vocabulary or to disseminate general information and links for language learning.

Learning through Mobile Application

Mobile learning also was called M-learning that is a new generation of distance learning focusing on the use mobile devices. It is a learning technology that employs different approaches of learning across social interactions (Vygotsky, 1978) with individual electronic devices (Crompton, 2013).

Typically, mobile and web resources situate learning situations in reliable contexts, emphasize the interchange of opinions between participants and depend on the living encounter of the learner (Hartly & Bendixen, 2001).

Mobile learning (M-learning) is a self-paced learning supported on mobile phones, tablets, or pads. Given the rapid development of network infrastructure and the considerable increase of mobile network speed, the usage rate of the 3G/4G network has largely increased. Furthermore, Wi-Fi Internet usage has accelerated with the deployment of wireless networks at home, at work, and in public places. M-learning allows learners to learn for as long as a mobile signal is available. Compared with traditional face-to-face education or PC-end education, M-learning provides an individualized learning experience and generates cross-platform interactions through touch screens and voice output to increase the fun of learning.

Our students today are all 'native speakers' of the digital language of computers, Internet, video games, mobile phones and the other tools of the digital era (Prensky, 2001). College students habitually follow up to date instructional technologies in learning and devising knowledge. The transfer of common information through utilization of mobile technologies is more and more regular at universities and higher educational centers. Smart phones are not instructors by themselves; rather, they are instructional tools which have internet access, voice and text messaging, and voice recording. For the sake of learning a new language successfully, relatively the whole package of these characteristics can enable language learners to practice their communicative skills, benefiting from the privilege of genuine content, and task accomplishment. In the realm of research, these worthwhile benefits are very rare, or in other words it is an optimal situation that can hardly be found (Traxler, 2007). This is simply because cell phone users with internet connection can access a lot of documents at their convenience virtually

anytime and anywhere within network coverage. They can therefore read online newspaper articles and short stories or novels now uploaded for the benefit of those whose cannot afford buying and reading newspapers and story books or novels from time to time.

Effect of WhatsApp as an Application on Learning

Nowadays, mobile phones have become a crucial part of our daily life. Every individual has a personal cell phone of their own. Mobile phones have been expanding rapidly since 1995 (Chowdhury, 2012). They are employed not only for sending text messages and making calls, but also for the other varieties of applications such as watch a movie, play music and access internet. Many operating systems such as Windows, Mobile, IOS and Android are developed to give more functionality in mobiles. Android applications are currently being developed (Susilo, 2014). The most popular messenger applications among the college students are consisted WhatsApp (WA), Skype and GO SMS Pro (Jadhaw, Bhutkar, & Mehta, 2013). Technologies such as WhatsApp messages have achieved increasing prevalence in societies. These kinds of messaging technologies are greatly applied among undergraduate learners nowadays (Lenhart, 2007).

Digital dialogues between members of students and trainers have become common during the past decade through different channels: SMS, Email, Facebook groups, Twitter and freshly WhatsApp. Every one of these tools has various attributes that affect suitability for learning goals (Calvo, Arbiol & Iglesias, 2014). One of the most exciting issues about WhatsApp messaging and other general technologies (text messaging, video games, etc.) is that they are prospective acquisition tools (Dearstyne, 2011; Brown-Owens, Eason, & Lader, 2003). Unlike the other forms of communication and any other technologies that occasionally do not work and students do not use after school hours, WhatsApp enables easy and quick transference of

links to study materials. Sending homework materials through WhatsApp make sure that all students receive the message, whether it is a video specified for class or copy of an answer to an exercise sent outside the classroom hours (Bouhnik & Deshen, 2014).

According to Yeboah & Evur (2014) technology is growing at a very rapid percentage, and Whatsapp is one of the evolutions in technology that is ordinarily operated on particular mobile phones. As the smartphones became in demand, many messaging services were initiated but Whatsapp has become very widespread among them. Connection through mobile phones and particularly with Whatsapp messenger has become simpler, faster and cheaper. Whatsapp is employed in higher education. It is used for the improvement of exchange of views and participating data among lecturers and their pupils. Overall, according to Bere and Chipunza (2013) WhatsApp has turned into a shared platform which promotes accessibility, motivates cooperation and strengthens motivation to take a lively component in academic assignments.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

To pile up the required data, a sample of 50 sophomores from the Department of English Education of STKIP PGRI Bandar Lampung, aged 18 to 20 years old. A preliminary survey using questionnaire showed that the biggest challenge students faced in writing is using correct grammar (40%). Based on this result, direct corrective feedback focusing on grammar was chosen to be implemented in the study.

Table 1: Challenges in Writing

Challenges in Writing	Frequency	Percentage
Using correct grammar	20	40
Finding suitable words to express ideas	7	14
Giving relevant	3	6

elaboration		
Organising ideas	6	12
Vocabulary		
Use of transition words	13	26
	1	2

The Tool

Whatsapp is an instant messaging application commonly used by smartphone users to send messages, images, videos, sound files and so on to each other. This application was chosen as a platform for the participants of this study because all of them possess a smartphone which contains this application. They were also familiar with its basic applications. Approximately 54% of the students used Whatsapp more than 1 hour daily, and 20% of the students used Whatsapp for more than two hours every day. The survey illustrates that college students use Whatsapp often. Whatsapp was thus a readily available language-learning tool for the participants of the present study.

Table 2. Usage habit of smartphone owners

Questions	Answers (percentage of the item)			
1. How often do you use Whatsapp every day?	Very often.	Sometimes	Seldom	Never
2. How often do you use your smartphone to learn English?	Very often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never
3. How long do you access the Internet every day?	More than 3 hours	More than 2 hours	More than 1 hours	Less than 1 hours
4. How long do you use Whatsapp every day?	More than 3 hours	More than 2 hours	More than 1 hours	Less than 1 hours

The Intervention

The study was designed based on two of Gu et al.'s (2011) design principles for mobile learning tasks namely activity and usability. Firstly, the activity assigned should be micro and simple so that learners are able to perform it independently without problems. Secondly,

usability refers to whether learners find the application user-friendly in order to maintain learner interest. Students were given a writing prompt once a week for 7 weeks consecutively and they were encouraged to participate in the activity using English. The prompts required students to write only short sentences. The purpose of doing so is to make it simpler for the correction of grammatical mistakes. The topics were carefully chosen so that they revolved around the students' everyday lives as this is thought to be more interesting and relevant for the participants. At the end of every week, the teacher would post a writing prompt in the chat group which usually occurs in the form of a statement or a question. Clear instructions would be given along with a sample answer so that students would have a clearer idea on how to respond in the group.

Examples of the prompts for each week are given below:

- 1) Introduce yourself
- 2) Share with your friends what you usually do to improve your English.
- 3) What do you do to improve your writing skills?
- 4) Share a picture of something you like and write a caption.
- 5) What did you do during your weekend?
- 6) List down three things you are grateful for
- 7) Summarise how you feel right now using one word and state the reason why

Data Collection

The instrument used to collect information for this study was a closed-ended questionnaire to gather demographic information of the participants. At the end of seven weeks, an open-ended questionnaire was distributed to explore students' perception towards Whatsapp as a writing tool using two simple questions namely: 1) What are the advantages of using Whatsapp as a writing tool? and 2) Did you face any problems when using Whatsapp to practise writing? The responses by the students were categorised according to themes. The

findings from the study are discussed in the following section.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section shows how corrective feedback is done in the Whatsapp chat group followed by students' perceptions on Whatsapp as a writing tool. Participants will be addressed as S1, S2, S3 to represent student 1, student 2, student 3 and so on in the findings.

MALL Model Using Whatsapp

A questionnaire on learners' attitudes toward the mobile-assisted language learning was given to the Whatsapp Group participants at the end of the research. The questionnaire had four structural items and an open question. A total of 50 questionnaires were distributed to the participants in the Whatsapp group. The questionnaire is shown in Table 3. The results are shown in fig 1.

Table 3. Questionnaire on learners' attitudes toward mobile-assisted learning

Questions	Choices			
Do you think that learning English with Whatsapp is convenient?	A. Very Convenient	B. Convenient	C. Not convenient	D. Do not know
Do you think mobile-assisted learning is beneficial for college students?	A. Very beneficial	B. Beneficial	C. Vain	D. Do not know
Do students actively interact in chat groups?	A. Very active	B. Active	C. Inactive	D. Do not know
Is the whatsapp group useful for language learning?	A. Very useful	B. Useful	C. Not useful	D. Do not know
What is your				

evaluation and suggestion of mobile-assisted learning?	
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When asked about the convenience of using Whatsapp in English learning, 58% of the students responded that Whatsapp is very convenient for its multi-functionality, accessibility, and interactivity. Approximately 35% of the students responded that it is convenient. Only 5% of students thought that it was inconvenient, and 2% students did not know whether Whatsapp was convenient.

With regard to the question, "Do you think the mobile-assisted learning is beneficial for college students?", 43% of the students believed that the mobile assisted learning is very beneficial, 46% considered it as beneficial, 8% thought that mobile-assisted learning was useless, and 4% were undecided.

Regarding how actively the students interacted in the chat groups with Whatsapp, 33% of the students confirmed that they were very active in the chat groups, 46% stated that they were active, 16% admitted that they were inactive in the chat groups, and 5% answered that they did not know.

Most students actively performed in chat groups. Several students sent more than 200 messages a day when chatting with their teammates. They were willing to chat with teammates in English. A few students performed negatively in the chat groups because they were afraid of making mistakes and felt uncomfortable chatting in English. When asked about the usefulness of the Whatsapp group, 37% of the students confirmed that the Whatsapp group was very useful, 47% thought it was useful, 6% of the students denied its usefulness, and 10% students answered that they did not know how useful the group was for them. Most students believed that the Whatsapp group was useful for obtaining learning materials and that was an effective method to learn English.

The last item in the questionnaire was an open question. The students were asked to evaluate and suggest improvements for mobile-assisted learning. A number of the answers are listed as follows:

- It makes me more motivated to learn English.
- I feel comfortable chatting with others in English now.
- I have learned a lot in the semester-long program.
- Content pushed by official account is useful and interesting.
- Sometimes smartphones are distracting and would interfere with my other activities.
- I wish foreigners are invited to the chat groups.

Language immersion was achieved to a certain degree using the MALL model in the program. Participants generally regarded this learning model in a positive manner. Most of them were very interested in the mobile-assisted learning model and provided good responses in English vocabulary, sentence making, speaking, and writing. Most students considered Whatsapp as an effective tool that motivates them to learn English.

Perceptions of Students towards Whatsapp as a Writing Tool

Advantages of Whatsapp as a Writing Tool

According to the open-ended responses from the students as well as the excerpts from the Whatsapp chatgroup, several advantages of using Whatsapp as a writing tool were identified and placed under four themes such as: (1) language support, (2) platform for exchanging opinions, (3) peer feedback and (4) increased confidence in using English for writing.

Language support

Participants of the study found that Whatsapp was useful for language support, as they were able to identify their

grammatical errors and learn. In addition, the Whatsapp chat group was also beneficial for other aspects of their language learning such as vocabulary and spelling.

"helps me (to) improve my grammar and English languages (language)" (S3)

"I can see the spelling. I can(will) know how to use the word in (a) sentence" (S7)

"learn more vocabulary and improve my grammar"(S30)

Platform for exchanging opinions

Learners also found it easier to discuss with other members in the group whenever they needed to discuss about a particular topic through Whatsapp. They could discuss anytime, anywhere as long as they had internet connection.

"Get more opinion from other member"(S8)

"We can (ex)change our opinion in English subject with other people" (S13)

"we can brainstorm any topic there without shying (feeling shy) to speak"(S26)

Peer feedback and support

In the beginning of the research, it was observed that participants were quite reserved in terms of joining in the chats in the Whatsapp group. They only responded when they had to, for example, when the instructor posed a question in the chat group. However, as the research progressed and the participants got to know each other better, not only through Whatsapp but also through face-to-face interactions during class, the interaction within the group gradually increased. The participants felt more at ease to chat with one another freely, even without prompts from the instructor.

Initially the participants also relied more on the lecturer to correct their grammatical mistakes, but subsequently, the participants were observed correcting one another, especially when it came to basic errors such as spelling mistakes, as illustrated by the example below:

S7: "You spell the word wrong"

S9: "Where? Tell me.."

S7: "It's Ms actually not Mr haha"

However, there were cases where students were not sure how to answer their friend's questions about grammar, as shown by the excerpts below:

S5: "Guys, I had try or I had tried?"

S8: "Idk (I don't know) "

S5: "Past tense?"

S9: "I have tried"

S5: "Okay tq (thank you)"

When situations like this occur, the instructor has to intervene and provide grammar advice in the group. Otherwise, it is a good thing to observe and allow learners to help each other as this also promotes self-reflection and less student dependence on the teacher. Some of the participants were so used to communicating in their mother tongue, for example, Bahasa language, that they would sometimes use it in the chat group. It was encouraging to see the participants occasionally reminding each other to use English in the chat group, in a light-hearted manner. Peer support really helped in creating a supportive environment for learning English writing and grammar.

S1: "English please..."

S2: "Opps!! Sorry, I don't know how to say it in English"

Increased Confidence in Writing

The participants also reported increased confidence in writing in English in the Whatsapp chat groups after corrective feedback was given in the Whatsapp group over a period of seven weeks.

"Be more confident to write using proper grammar" (S11)

"It can build my confident (confidence) to write in English" (S24).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study sought to improve students' English writing skill by using Whatsapp instant messaging.

The data analysis and questionnaire results revealed the following.

(1) A virtual language immersion was created using Whatsapp instant messaging. Learners were exposed to a virtual English environment where they were encouraged to communicate in English as thoroughly as possible. This kind of immersion helped students to practice English and gradually improved their English proficiency. (2) Students were very interested in mobile-assisted English learning. Most of the students in the Whatsapp Group performed actively in the new learning model. They effectively interacted with peers and tutors using text and voice messages. (3) With enhanced learning efficiency, learners were nurtured with a strong sense of confidence. Their confidence in writing and speaking English improved.

The mobile-assisted language learning model was proven to effectively enhance learners' interest and improve their English proficiency. According to the open-ended responses from the students as well as the excerpts from the Whatsapp chatgroup, several advantages of using Whatsapp as a writing tool were identified and placed under four themes such as: (1) language support, (2) platform for exchanging opinions, (3) peer feedback and (4) increased confidence in using English for writing.

For future research, larger samples can be used to investigate the effectiveness of corrective feedback via Whatsapp using a pre-test and a post-test focusing on specific features of grammar. A longer duration of study may also be needed to ensure reliability. Educators could also experiment with different skill-focused activities using other features on Whatsapp.

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