# STUDENTS' PERCEPTION ON THE USE OF WHATSAPP APPLICATION TO ENHANCE COMMUNICATIVE SKILLS

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**Abstract:** WhatsApp is a social media application which is used widely today. In the field of education, it could be used as a part of mobile learning to improve language proficiency. Higher learning institutions have been using WhatsApp as a medium of communication between students and their lecturers. In Politeknik Sultan Mizan Zainal Abidin (PSMZA), most students have difficulties communicating in the English Language in class due to lack of confidence. It has been a challenge for all lecturers to help passive students to become active students. Hence, using a familiar application like WhatsApp may help students to overcome some language anxieties. This study aimed to explore students' perception towards the use of WhatsApp application in enhancing their English language proficiency. To address these issues, a qualitative method of research was performed. In this study, the instrument used was a semi-structured interview. The interview was conducted on 6 participants (2 low achievers, 2 moderate achievers and 2 high achievers) based on post-test scores. The interview session was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Inductive content analysis was used to code and categorize emerging themes. The interview consisted of eight questions. All questions were open-ended and participants gave their own personal responses based on their experience. The findings revealed that the use of WhatsApp application aided learners in their communication skills. The results showed that the communicative skills among the students could be improved if they were given suitable methods and platform to encourage them to practice their skills.

**Keywords:** Communicative Skills; WhatsApp Application; Perception

## INTRODUCTION

Today, educational mobile technology is frequently used for English as the Second Language (ESL) learning. It is important to choose a technology that is familiar by the students to help them reduce the anxiety during English classes, particularly speaking classes. WhatsApp Application is the frequently used mobile technology for educational purposes as students are accustomed with the device. According to Yalcinalp and Gulbahar (2010), WhatsApp is widely used in higher education for the enhancement of discussions and sharing information among students and their lecturers. They also stated that WhatsApp in education helps to encourage learners to anticipate needs, make collaborative learning efficient and effective, and build relationship that encourages learner-to-learner for reliable and advanced learning.

**Research Objective**

The objective of this research is to explore students' perception towards the use of WhatsApp application in enhancing their English communicative skills.

**Problem Statement**

The interest of learning language is related to the students' motivation and attitude according to Mufandi (2015). Less confident students tend to be passive in class, refuse to respond to the teacher's questions and rarely ask questions. These students also give less contribution to the class discussion. Teachers reported that students are reluctant and afraid of speaking because lacking of confidence. A research about the students' barrier factors to communicate in a speaking class conducted by Mufandi showed that students were worry, scared, shy, unconfident and uncomfortable to communicate in English. When asked whether they like learning English, most of them answered no. This were shown by their negative attitude towards the activities in class as they were uninterested to participate and wanted to finish the class as soon as possible. Mufandi suggested that they needed to eliminate their barriers and find ways to build and maintain confidence and interest in speaking class.

The second issue is the anxiety among the students. Wilson and Brooks (2014) reported that most students ranked communicative activities as the most dreaded and unnerving activity in an anxiety-provoked situation. Oral presentation and group discussion are among the beneficial activities that can be acquired by the students through practices and feedbacks they got (Tanjizan et al.,2012), however, these activities remains the least awaited during the learning of the language. Tanjizan reported that, the high level of anxiety among students is due to their fear of speaking in public, making mistakes, being ridiculed by their peers and lack of English language proficiency. Due to these anxieties, students are reluctant to participate in the activities, resulting in them unable to improve their communicative skills and performance.

Apart from students motivation and anxiety problems, communicative activities are mostly time consuming especially if it involved large group of students. Due to time constraint, teachers and lecturers are more concerned to complete the syllabus rather than helping students to improve their communicative skills. According to Indra Devi, Amir & Krish (2014), in an engineering courses classroom focuses on covering critical technical material in curriculum rather than prioritizing communicative skills although they know the need of training the students for effective communication. Furthermore, the engineering students mainly focus on the content when delivering and they have very few knowledge about an effective presentation, assuming that they will be trained later in the elective courses. Subsequently, many leave the responsibility to the English department, which results in the imbalance of the input provided and the communication skills needed for a practicing engineer (Indra Devi, Amir & Krish, 2014; American Society for Engineering Education, 2012).

As mentioned above, many students struggle to express themselves in the language because they have essentially little or to no contact with the language outside the classroom. Majority of the students find that it is difficult to express themselves and apply appropriate language and communication skills. In Politeknik Sultan Mizan Zainal Abidin, according to Semester One Communicative English Course Outcome Report Review

(CORR), students who achieved grade C and above in group discussion assessment is 59% (CORR June 2017). Meaning that, approximately 40% of the students only managed to get grade D and below. This showed that students' English proficiency is still need to be improved. They should be offered many opportunities to enhance their speaking abilities inside and outside of the classroom.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Benefits of using WhatsApp in ESL learning

According to Statisca 2017, WhatsApp is the largest online messenger application today. It is the most used social application globally. As of February 2017, it has recorded 1 billion monthly active users. This is a gigantic leap from its 200 million users previously in April 2013. This was supported by WhatsApp Official Webpage that stated WhatsApp Messenger is one of the most popular applications with 30.496.683 downloads in PlayStore.

Trevor (2013) stated that among all online tools, WhatsApp is considered as the easiest, most popular and effective tool that can be used by educators. With its easiness and urbane features, this application help students to interact with peers at any situation with or without the teacher' guide and it can encourage the students to contribute in group discussion to improve their skills. This was supported by a study carried out by Rambe and Chimpunza (2013), they observed that WhatsApp supports knowledge sharing between students-students and students-lecturers. Their study involved 40 students who were created on WhatsApp group and activities were done. It was observed that more interactions were present in the group-chat such as they formed questions, answers, sharing and learning material as well as gestures of thank you, well done and good job. The students agreed that they can express themselves freely in a comfortable environment and reducing the low participation constraints that normally happened during lectures.

### Perception

Perception can be defined as individuals' primary form of cognitive contact with the world around them (Efron, 1969). Therefore, understanding the students' perception towards the use of WhatsApp to improve communicative skills was significant to few past researches. The findings from a study carried out by Cheung et al. (2008) stated that it was a clear result that the experimental students' attitudes are positive and oriented towards the learning process integrating WhatsApp learning activities. Students past experience on using WhatsApp shapes their attitude toward this technology. Another study carried out by Preston and his colleagues (2010), nearly 70% of the students admitted that they were comfortable using a familiar learning tool and reported that they could learn just as well from the online lectures as face to face lectures.

### English Language Proficiency

According to University of Southern Queensland (2016), English Language Proficiency is defined as the ability of students to use the English language to make and communicate meaning in spoken and written contexts while completing their program of study. Marry Chin (2018) reported that Malaysia had been ranked 13th in

English language proficiency among non-native speakers in the world, according to the latest Education First (EF) English Proficiency Index 2016. Malaysia is the second best in Asia, after Singapore which is ranked number 5 out of 80 countries. However, studies have shown that there is a global concern about the increasing gap between the level of competency of the graduates and the level needed for employment (Sarudin et al. 2013). Liu (2013), through a study conducted in China, reported that the activities outside the classroom could improve proficiency in English as some students might be unwilling to talk in class or are intimidated by the formality of the classroom.

**Previous Study**

In June 2017 session, the researchers had carried out an action research entitled "Enhancing English Proficiency among DKM1S3 Students: Improving Communicative Skills Using WhatsApp Application" which was presented in Malaysia TVET on Research via Exposition 2017 (MATRIX) National Level conference. The action research aimed to improve communicative skills among students in carrying out group discussion. This research involved 40 students from DKM1S3 of Politeknik Sultan Mizan Zainal Abidin June 2017 session. The objective of the research was to increase students' performance in carrying out group discussion with the help of WhatsApp Application. The data collection was gathered through pre-test and post-test and questionnaire. Based on the data gathered in pre-test, it was found that 60% of the students only managed to score C and another 40% D for their interactive skills in group discussion. None scored A and B.

Therefore, several actions were implemented in order to help the students improved their communicative skills. The action plans conducted include implementation of various communicative activities in class such as role-play, debate, games and practicing the skills through WhatsApp Application. There were 2 WhatsApp methods being carried out in this action research. The first one was 'Dependent WhatsApp Conversations' where lecturer guided the students to write a mini-dialogue using the communicative skills they had learned that day. As they finished preparing the dialogues, they practiced and recorded it using voice notes within their WhatsApp group in class. The second method was 'Independent WhatsApp Conversations' where students were required to submit 2 videos per week regarding group discussion via WhatsApp Application. The other classmates were required to give feedbacks and responses in the group. Lecturer acted as facilitator and monitored the students' participation in the discussion.

Based on the actions conducted, the post-test result has shown positive improvement in their communicative skills where 2.5% and 6% of the students managed to score A and B respectively. It was supported by their positive feedback on the questionnaire given. The results of the action implemented showed that the communicative skills among the students could be improved if they are given suitable methods and platform to encourage them to practice their skills.

In conjunction of this action research, an interview were carried out to 6 selected students based on their post-test result to identify their perceptions on learning communicative skills using WhatsApp applications.

**METHODOLOGY**

The process of data collection is done by using qualitative method in where semi-structured interview was conducted. The interview was conducted to gain deeper explanations on students' perception towards learning communicative skills using WhatsApp application. The interviews were carried out in the library for 10 minutes for each individual. The interview session was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The interview consisted of 8 questions. All the questions were open-ended and participants gave their own personal responses based on their experience with the method. Furthermore, the researcher used bilingual during the interview in order to get more information from the participants.

The interview session was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Inductive content analysis was used to code and categorize emerging themes. Paper and Pencil Interviewing (PAPI) method was used during the interview process. According to Paul J.L (2008), PAPI is the most frequently used method for data collecting since 1980s. This method was used especially when the data were from quite a small sample with a non-complex questionnaire, within a short time frame. During the interview process, the interviewer holds a printed-out questionnaire, reads the question to the respondent and fills the answers into the questionnaire.

Two experienced English lecturers from PSMZA were asked to validate the interview questions and data from interview transcription. Their feedbacks and recommendation were considered in the data collection process.

**Target Group**

The target group of this research is from semester one, DKM1S3 students of June 2017 session in PSMZA. Six students were selected based on their post-test scores that were carried out in the previous research. The students were selected based on the highest score, the average score and the lowest scores in their post test results.

**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The eight interview questions are as follows:

Q1. Do you like self-learning using Whatsapp?

Q2. Do you think your interest in learning English has increased by using Whatsapp?

Q3. Do you think that recording videos is beneficial to your learning of communicative skills?

Q4. What do you think the advantages of using Whatsapp to your speaking?

Q5. What challenges do you face when using Whatsapp?

Q6. How do you overcome those challenges?

Q7. What are the skills you have improved after going through this learning method?

Q8. Do you still want to continue using Whatsapp for the lesson in the future?

Codes were used to represent the participants and their level. For example 1H represented student one, higher achiever as outlined in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Coding System**

| STUDENTS | LEVELS | CODES | SCORE (%) |
|---|---|---|---|

| Students One | High Achiever | 1 H | 85% |
|---|---|---|---|
| Students Two | High Achiever | 2 H | 65% |
| Students Three | Moderate Achiever | 1 M | 50% |
| Students Four | Moderate Achiever | 2 M | 45% |
| Students Five | Low Achiever | 1 L | 35% |
| Students Six | Low Achiever | 2 L | 30% |

Ten themes emerged about the students' perception towards enhancing communicative skills using Whatsapp Aplication. The following themes were as follow.

1. Interest and Motivation
2. Self-learning
3. Lecturers and peers collaborations
4. Time factor/ Time allotted
5. Learning at own pace
6. Effective learning
7. Communicative skills
8. Easy to access
9. Money and resources
10. Anxiety issue

**Interest and Motivation**

The first theme identified is interest and motivation. All respondents stated they enjoyed and liked this learning approach. Four respondents agreed that by using WhatsApp, they become more interested in English and felt more motivated to speak in the language.

*"Yes. My interest has increased … because I found ways to increase my communication skills" (Q2, 1H)*

*"Yes. I feel enthusiastic whenever I attend English class" (Q2, 2H)*

*"Mmmm… I am very shy and scared to speak English, but by recording myself speaking, I can do it. When teacher and my friends comment, I feel motivated" (Q2, 1M)*

*"It is fun and easy… I think" (Q4, 2L)*

When asked whether English has piqued their interest, three respondents agreed they enjoyed the learning activity and thought it was enjoyable. 2L and 1L thought that coming to class was enjoyable and less stress, while 2M stated that it was fun to be able to practice the language on his own.

*"To be honest, I really enjoy coming to class" (Q2, 2L)*

*"I think English class is fun and I don't feel very stress learning it" (Q2, 1L)*

*"Next time I can practice on my own and send the videos to you to correct me…because I think it's fun to learn like this" (Q2, 2M)*

Turgay Han and Fırat Keskin (2016) in their study reported that the WhatsApp experience offered the learners chances to listen to their own voice-recordings and be evaluated by an audience. This activity would make the learners feel good about themselves. They even can positively self-aware in self-evaluation by questioning their mistakes.

**Self-Learning**

The second theme is Self-learning. All respondents have agreed by using WhatsApp they could implement self-learning and not to rely on lecturer to practice English. They felt it was a less stress and independent learning activity. They were comfortable to complete the task given.

When asked whether they liked self-learning, 1H agreed that he preferred self-learning than being in group because sometimes there is no positive collaboration among the group mates. 1L enjoyed working on his own free time while 1M stated that the activities taught him to be independent without relying on his teammates.

*"Yes, sometimes when in group, somebody in the group doesn't contribute much" (Q1, 1H)*

*"Yes, I like self-learning. I can do work on my own time and free time" (Q1, 1L)*

*"I do research more when have to work alone…..compared to if work with friends, I tend to rely on them" (Q1, 1M)*

2M and 2H stated that the benefit of self-learning was that they can practice many times before recording and manipulate the timeline of learning. Unlike the traditional classroom or in-person training, they do not need to always see the lecturers to learn new things.

*"Next time I can practice on my own and send the videos to you to correct me... because I think it's fun to learn like this" (Q2, 2M)*

*"We can learn on our own. We don't need to go see lecturers all the time. We just send videos or voice notes and get feedback" (Q4, 2H)*

*"I can practice many times and re-record before send the videos or voice notes. It's like practice many times" (Q4, 2M)*

Samsiah & Azidah (2013) in their study reported that, once students are actively involved with the task, they are more likely to develop learning strategies that will aid their learning development, hence, contribute to their motivation. A mobile device is among the best digital media as it can be carried around all the time and gives its users great amount of control over how and when to access their mobile devices.

**Lecturer and Peers Collaborations**

The third theme is lecturers and peers collaborations. Despite all the intriguing learning proses, most of the respondents claimed that they preferred to work in group as they could excel better when collaborate with their friends. 1M and 2H responded that although they like using Whatsapp as a tool of learning, but learning in class

was better as they could get first hand assist from the lecturer. 2L, 1H, 2M and 1L claimed they need friends to exchange ideas when completing tasks.

*"I think I like use Whatsapp, but I like to learn in class better because it is difficult to learn by myself without friends"(Q1, 1M)*

*"Sometimes I feel it is beneficial. Sometimes I feel that I can do better if I do it with my friends in class in front of teacher. Then teacher can correct us there and then" (Q3, 2H)*

*"We send our work in group Whatsapp. So sometimes friends help give comments" (Q4, 2L)*

*"We search information together with friends" (Q6, 1H)*

*"If I'm blank, like don't know what to talk about, I will watch how others answering the topic first, to get some ideas what to talk about" (Q6, 2M)*

*"Yes.. but I like with groups instead of individuals" (Q8, 1L)*

One of the respondents stated he preferred group interaction so that he could exchange ideas and opinions.

*"We need to do work alone, like searching the ideas for topic, record, do the script, all alone. It is individual task so other friends all busy doing their own recording. Cannot ask for their help. Better if in group work" (Q5, 2M)*

This theme is supported by Al-Harbi & Alshumaimeri (2016) in their study. According to them, self-learning is beneficial to some extent because students need to ask for clarification on some parts of the lesson. Students might need to have clear knowledge so they could do it face to face with the teachers and friends.


**Time Factor / Time Allotted**

The fourth theme is time factor. Three respondents stated video recording activity was taking much time. 1M and 1H stated that he preferred in class activity because they already burdened with so many tasks and assignments from different courses.

*"mmm to be honest I prefer practice in class than video recording because I have other work to do outside class" (Q3, 1M)*

*"emm… time. Sometimes we don't have the time to record and do homework about the topic given because too many other classes and assignments" (Q5, 1H)*

The third respondent claimed he has to plan the content of the video before started recording. It took his time.

*"Time consuming...because when we want to record, we need to know what to talk about…. have to do research first. Takes a lot of time" (Q5, 1H)*

Neilson W. (2005) came out with a theoretical model that examines the relation between homework and achievement. The model suggested that proficiency of a learner is strongly linked with the effectiveness of homework. Different students require different amounts of time to complete the same homework assignment, and these differences are correlated with their performance in the class. Some homework is beneficial, in that it

helps everyone who does it. However, too much homework makes the weak students felt pressure to complete them in the given time frame, making them look even worse in comparison with the high proficient students.

**Learning at Own Pace**

The fifth theme is learning pace. One respondent claimed recording video could be beneficial in improving communicative skills. Learning can be improved when the learners were given opportunities to learn according to their flexible time.

*"Yes.. because I can record anywhere or whenever I can. I just record and practice on my free time" (Q3, 2M)*

Cavus and Al-Momani, (2011) stated that technology today makes learning flexible. Mobile learning opens up more opportunities for learning to take place regardless of place and time. The learners have the freedom to be in different location than the teachers, to study at their own pace and time provided that they have the knowledge of hardware and network infrastructure.

**Effective Learning**

The sixth theme is effective learning. All respondents agreed video recording can improve their communicative skills. 1L, 2L, and 1H stated that video-recording helped them to improve their communicative skills as they had to practice and organize their words beforehand as compared to being spontaneous in class and would not be as successful. 1M believed it was a good self-practice when they regularly made mistakes. Students who are allowed to have more control on their learning experience are believed can be encouraged to improve themselves.

*"Yes, that's the only way to make us speak every day. By recording ourselves on the video" (Q3, 1L)*

*"Yes, it is an effective way of learning. We can share opinion effectively. Example, if in class, we have trouble finding ideas or to speak spontaneously, but when record, we have time to think and organize our words" (Q3, 1H)*

*"Yes, videos and voice notes help to improve my communicative skills" (Q3, 2L)*

*"My biggest challenge is to record a good video because I made many mistakes memorizing the points. So, how I overcome it is I can stop, pause and do it again until perfect before I send the video" (Q6, 1M)*

*"Yes. My communicative skills improved a bit because a lot of practice" (Q8, 1H)*

Schult,et al, (2013) supported this theme by indicating that learners who record their own works using students-produced videos in the language classroom is more beneficial than using traditional way of completing a task or a project. They stated that students produce their own video material promoted active learning.

**Communicative Skills**

The seventh theme is communicative skills. All respondents agreed that by doing video recording using WhatsApp they could improve their communicative skills. The skills improved as mentioned by all the respondents were, communicative skills(2L), initiate group discussion(1L), made clarification and justify

opinion(1H), carry out group discussion(2L), interrupt politely(1M), justify and elaborate points(2M) and correct way of responding(2H)

*"Yes, videos and voice notes help to improve my communicative skills" (Q3, 2L)*

*"Well... I can lead the group discussion now. I can ask my friends for their opinion now" (Q7,1L)*

*"I know how to clarify my opinion if people don't understand them. I can ask them to justify their points. I can carry out discussion" (Q7,1H)*

*"I know how to do group discussion" (Q7, 2L)*

*"I learn to interrupt politely. Like, 'excuse me' , 'I agree but I have to interrupt' and something like that" (Q7,1M)*

*"I know to elaborate my points if group member ask. I can justify my opinions" (Q7, 2M)*

*"I learn to respond if people ask questions. I learn to use the correct way or word of responding" (Q7, 2H)*

Mona (2017) in her research study found that during using WhatsApp as a teaching tool, there was clear development in the performance of the students. Students have shown very good communication skills especially when they helped each other whenever the teacher was out of net access. Mona reported that the students also created many beneficial discussions that impressed her as instructor.

### Easy to Access Anytime

The eighth theme is easy to access. Two respondents agreed the use of WhatsApp in learning English is easy because this application is user friendly and they were familiar with it. It did not require any training to access the application.

*"Advantages... I think it is easy... because we all know how to use Whatsapp. Like we don't have to go for training first. Just use it like how we usually use, send videos and voice notes" (Q4, 1H)*

*"Easy access anytime. We are used to the device" (Q4, 1M)*

Mohammed Alhabbash (2012) stated in his study that he decided to use WhatsApp as a teaching tool because it was the most common app used between the students, did not need to have a computer, attainable and did not cost much. He reported that this tool is interesting and more exciting for students, even the data analysis showed a clear result which assists the effects of online discussion on improving students' speaking

### Money/Resources

The ninth theme is money and resources. All respondents claimed the use of WhatsApp required internet connection. Thus, it became obstacle for them when they had to buy internet data. It also took a lot of space in their phone memory. One of them has to delete the videos and comments given, in order to save data. It shows that by providing sufficient resources to students can help them to participate in lesson activity.

*"Use a lot of data hehehe…Quite slow to send or download others videos. Sometime forgot to download because too slow" (Q5, 2L)*

*"Internet slow and data finish faster. A little bit costly or expensive to top up" (Q5, 1L)*

*"Take a lot of phone space. We have to download others' video to comment. And also data" (Q5, 1M)*

*"Yes, I like… but using Whatsapp is not really the problem. The problem is when I have to upload and download videos and take a lot of space and data" (Q8, 1M)*

When asked how they overcome the problem, 1L responded that he waited for the midnights free Wi-Fi while 2H said that he would download the video then delete them as soon as given comments to save the data and phone space.

*"Sometimes we wait for free wifi at midnight 'The Burung Hantu wifi'. Can save data" (Q6, 1L)*

*"I will download the video and delete them after watching and comment" (Q6,2H)*

Jack Burston (2011) in his study mentioned that phone-based Internet connections would cause obstacles as many learners may be unable, or at least unwilling, to pay. In fact, mobile phones which offer Internet connectivity are among the most costly. It shows that, if educators were thinking of using internet based tools for learning process, money and resources need to be considered.

**Anxiety Issue**

The final theme is anxiety problem. Even after all the benefits and improvement the students get from learning through WhatsApp, there are still a couple of students who have the anxiety issues among themselves. 2M and 2H stated they felt shy and awkward to speak in front of people or when their videos been watched by friends.

*"Yes, because I think I speak more in this activity compare if in class. I am shy to speak in front of people. But people see my video also I feel shy" (Q8, 2M)*

*"I like watching others' video compared to seeing mine…because it feels awkward" (Q8, 2H)*

This was supported by Turgay Han and Fırat Keskin (2016) who claimed that some students do not prefer to be the focus of attention while extrovert ones happily involve in the activity or task due to the fact that they would enjoy the hands-on tasks or projects. They also stated that exposing students more to the language could build their positive feelings towards speaking.

**CONCLUSION**

A four weeks experience in teaching English by applying Whatsapp had given a lot of knowledge on how to assist students to improve communicative English optimally. Generally, based on the in-depth interview with the students, it was noticed that the use of this application does not only increase the interest and motivation for students to learn, but it also provides them larger opportunities to practice their communicative skills without being limited with the time and classroom meetings. More importantly, as Whatsapp is one of the mobile technologies closely related to the students' interest, it can make students excited to carry out the activities and subconsciously reduce their anxiety problem. Apart from that, this tool also helps to build their self-confidence, passion in learning and explore their own learning ability. Hence, since the WhatsApp can boost enthusiasm and English skills, educators are proposed to integrate it in teaching other English skills as well. In future, many other mobile apps will be developed to be used in the language teaching and learning. Thus students need to be

prepared in these new teaching approaches as well as engaging themselves in the independent learning using technological support.

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