WhatsApp in English Class: An Application of Blended Learning in Initiating Students' Interaction

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Abstract
This study investigated 1) The students' perception of group WhatsApp in the teaching and learning process, which is also well-known as blended learning, and; (2) The process of students' interaction in English via WhatsApp. Data were collected from 60 students of the English Education Department; 52 females and eight males; most are between 19 and 20 years old. The researcher deploys a survey, unstructured interview, and unstructured-descriptive observation. The data analysis revealed that most students responded positively to WhatsApp in blended learning, and only a few responded negatively. The level of students' participation in English interaction via WhatsApp is higher than they do face-to-face since they feel more confident in conveying their ideas via WhatsApp, especially to the lecturer.
***Keywords:** WhatsApp, face-to-face, students' perception*

1. Introduction

The rapid growth of technology demands English teachers at every level of education to modify the English language teaching method and strategy in line with students' desire to use new technology information devices. The current trend is to apply technology in the learning process—the tightened relationship between literacy and technology (Fortunasari, 2016). Social media is the most well-liked application. The smartphone is now very popular among students since it can contain many social media applications. Nowadays, public or students cannot free their fingers to check their social media even a day.

One of the social media applications, Facebook, has successfully engaged and encouraged students' participation in class. Enhancing their interest in the subject content became evidence that social media is friendly to be used in the teaching-learning process (Sim, Naidu, & Apparasamy, 2014). It is because of the ease of service contained on Facebook.

Another social media tool, WhatsApp, could help learners develop English skills, enrich their vocabulary, and learn from their mistakes (Hamad, 2017). Furthermore, WhatsApp usage helped motivate the learners to improve their writing skills. However, it is considered the most difficult of the four language skills, and learners respond better when technology, especially the internet, is involved in their language learning (Justina, 2016).

Those two researchers proved that conventional learning no longer becomes the only thing to rely on fully. Moreover, both showed the positive effect of WhatsApp use in the English teaching process.

As Facebook provides, students are accessible to post, share, and exchange multimedia materials such as audio, video, and texts online (Hamad, 2017). WhatsApp also granted similar features, even lighter in size and various features. For this reason, using WhatsApp in a blended learning class is highly considered.

Several scholars have researched the use of WhatsApp in English teaching. (Amry, 2014), conducted experimental research, the study participants were from faculty of female students of Taibah University as the experimental group (15 students) and specialized in the study of special education as the control group (15 students) in the Saudi Arabia context. The experimental group's e-learning process is built on WhatsApp mobile learning activities. The control group's e-learning process is devoid of WhatsApp mobile learning activities and is limited to face-to-face instruction in the classroom. The experiment's findings indicate significant variations in the experimental group's achievements and attitudes compared to the control group at the 0.05 alpha level. The result of Amry's research represented the effectiveness of WhatsApp compared with face to face learning

Meanwhile (Awada, 2016) held an experimental study on the effectiveness of WhatsApp in improving the critique writing skills of English as a Foreign language and increasing their motivation for learning. There were 52 participants from English proficient learners at the university level. The experimental conditions included integrating the WhatsApp application into the experimental group's class, whereas the control group received standard Sophomore Rhetoric teaching without WhatsApp. She claimed that regular instruction was less effective than WhatsApp mediation in improving the critique reading proficiency of the participants and increasing their motivation in learning.

Andújar-vaca & Maria (2017) led experimental research, 80 Spanish students took a B1 English course at the University of Almeria. Their ages ranging from 18 to 31 were found in both groups. The participants consisted of 32 males and 48 females. A "Whatsapp" group as the experiment group was created where 40 of these students participated in a daily interaction for six months while the control group did not receive any treatment as another group did. Andujar and Maria claimed that WhatsApp offered an environment where learners can ubiquitously negotiate meaning, reflect, and evaluate their performance through authentic interaction and feedback, constituting a powerful tool for developing second language proficiency. Authentic interaction possibly occurs automatically under the condition people are comfortable and accustomed to interacting. Therefore, the study connected people's convenience in using WhatsApp and their interaction in English via WhatsApp informal learning becomes interesting to investigate. Therefore, this research focuses on that problem. In this study, the authors intended to answer the research questions:

1. How do students perceive the use of WhatsApp in blended learning classrooms?
2. How does the use of WhatsApp initiate students' interaction in blended learning classrooms?

1.1 Literature Review
1.1.1 Blended Learning

Muhtia, A. & S (2018) asserted that blended learning is the combination of online learning with face-to-face learning. Online learning refers to a learning activity done via the internet or intranet. Online communication was already started in the 1960s when US researchers first developed a procedure that allowed the sending and receiving messages via computer (Carter, R., & Nunan, 2001). Online communication was first applied to educational affairs in the 1980s, the same time as computer development. Online communication in language teaching was divided into two obvious periods, in the mid-1980s, the computer as mediation for communication was introduced, and in the mid-1990s, World Wide Web time.

As an extension of WWW, the World Wide Web is an international online database that allows sharing of linked multimedia documents. Formerly, before smartphones became very popular used as at this time, the PC (Personal Computer) was the only device used to access the World Wide Web. Today, smartphones are more popular than computers since they have more ease and are practically used in their power, cost, screen size, portability, storage, connectivity, operating system, data entry, and user input. (Soekartawi, 2006) Semler defined that blended learning brings together the finest features of online education, scheduled face-to-face activities, and real-world practice. Online education, classroom training, and on-the-job experience all have significant limitations. The blended learning technique leverages each participant's strengths to compensate for the other's limitations. The real contribution of blended learning to education can be seen from Semler's definition, which summed up that knowledge is not limited to brick-and-mortar classrooms (Naghdipour, 2017).

1.1.2 Interaction in the classroom

It is believed that interaction among the students is vital (Dixson, 2010) stated that collaborative activities, group discussions, and other types of student-student contact are a recurring issue in the literature. However, his statement was interestingly objected to by (Moore, Warner, & Jones, 2016) in the context of distance education. They found that from over 200 students the respondents, most of them did not want student-to-student interaction.

The mutual exchange of thoughts, feelings, or ideas between two or more people, resulting in an equal effect on each other, is called interaction (Brown, 2007). Humans require interacting with each other to convey what they think, feel, and expect. At every level of education, interaction is an imperative word for language teachers. In language class, the teacher should have the ability to facilitate the student to be 'interactive' with other students to negotiate the meaning or even just state to exchange the idea. Wilga Rivers emphasized (Brown, 2007) that students can build their language storage through engagement when they listen to or read actual linguistic content or the work of their peers

in discussions, skits, collaborative problem-solving exercises, or dialogue diaries. Students may apply every aspect of the language they possess — whatever they have studied or casually acquired – in real-world conversations. They learn to use the flexibility of language in this manner even at a rudimentary level

Adam (2018) believed that memorizing vocabulary and grammar is not sufficient in learning a language but by making sense of what we hear and read and putting our ideas into what we say and write. The English teachers must realize that meaningful communication is central to reaching that situation. They should introduce authentic and meaningful interaction and reinforce it every meeting in the classroom.

According to (Brown, 2007), most of the 12 principles that he listed and discussed in his book "Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy" supported a theory of interaction in the language classroom; the interaction should have the following selected relationships:

1.1.2.1. Automaticity

People interact with each other automatically without being controlled by the rule of grammar and other linguistic forms. Meaning and messages are the priority.

1.1.2.2. Intrinsic Motivation

The interaction comes from the speaker as s/he engaged with each other in speech acts of fulfilment and self-actualization moreover, if s/he feels appreciated in terms of her competence to use language.

1.1.2.3. Strategic Investment

Interaction requires strategic language competence to make certain decisions on how to say, write, or interpret language and make repairs when communication pathways are blocked. The spontaneity of interactive discourse requires judicious use of numerous strategies for production and comprehension.

1.1.2.4. Willingness to Communicate

The interaction must be based on a readiness to fail in conducting the communication. Always anyone can be complicated in interpreting others' meanings. Yet that condition will not stop him from keeping continuing the interaction.

1.1.2.5. The Language-Culture Connection

The interactions need a cross-cultural understanding of each other to build mutual understanding communication.

1.1.2.6. Interlanguage

The interaction complexity requires an appropriate response from another speaker or speaking partner. Their feedback is very valuable for one's linguistic development and behaviour.

1.1.2.7. Communicative Competence

All communicative competence elements (grammatical, discourse, sociolinguistic, pragmatic, and strategic) are involved in human interaction. All aspects must work together for successful communication to take place.

Whether the teachers can initiate the interaction among the students in the classroom depends on how the teacher provides the stimuli to engage students to begin the conversation and actively speak to each other. In terms of English teaching and learning,

an opinion said that a teacher should use English and never use the native language in teaching. This opinion is being influenced by the Direct Method, which has the principle that teachers only speak in the target language; as well-known that method was also the counterattack of the Classical Method or Grammar Translation Method (Rodgers, Theodore, Jo, & John, 1986) & (Larsen-freeman, 2000). On the other side, using a lot of native language in teaching English also became a problem that enables the students to speak communicatively in English. At this point, the smartphone involved in enhancing the interaction in the class reached its goal successfully (Liu, Chang, Sun, Wible, & Kuo, 2010).

2. Method

2.1 Context and Participant

Study participants are from the English education department of IAIN Sultan Amai Gorontalo, consisting of 52 females and eight males; most are between 19 and 20 years old. The medium of instruction in the English education department is English; hence students must speak English in the classroom. However, several of them are still struggling to have a conversation in English due to the students' admission that they had no good basic English in High School.

The blended class using the WhatsApp application was conducted for one academic semester. The teachers instructed the leader of each class to create a WhatsApp group. In those groups, teachers posted the teaching materials, gave instructions on what students must do at that time and for the next meeting in the classroom, provided students with tasks, and asked for students' opinions. The students were free to ask what they did not comprehend yet, and the teacher gave immediate feedback.

2.2 Data Collection and Analysis

At the end of the course, the researchers began collecting data, consisting of three instruments: survey, unstructured interview, and unstructured-descriptive observation. The researcher identified students' English interactions via WhatsApp. A survey consisting of 10 closed items was administered to students to investigate their perception of the use of WhatsApp in English class and the process of interaction via WhatsApp. In addition, the researchers conducted unstructured interview in a friendly and casual manner to ensure that the students express their opinions freely. The interviews were recorded and transcribed.

3. Results

3.1. Finding

The Students Response on WhatsApp

Table 1. Observation Sheet of Students' Interaction via WhatsApp in Blended Learning

Item	SD (1)%	D (2)%	U (3)%	A (4)%	SA (5)%	M
1. I think it is easier to interact in English with my friends via WhatsApp			2	8	3	
2. I think it is easier to interact in English with my lecturer via WhatsApp	1	2	2	6	2	

3. I feel nervous about interacting in English with my friends via WhatsApp	2	7	2	1	1
4. I feel free to interact in English with my friends via WhatsApp			1	7	5
5. Interaction in English via WhatsApp makes my English better		1	3	5	4
6. I think it is easier to interact in English with my friends directly face-to-face		1	1	6	4
7. I think it is easier to interact in English with my lecturer directly face-to-face			5	3	4
8. I feel nervous about interacting in English with my friends directly face-to-face		5	1	7	1
9. I feel free to interact in English with my friends directly face-to-face	3	1	1	5	3
10. Interaction in English directly face-to-face makes my English better	1		1	5	6

WhatsApp in English class resulted in different sights among the students. The majority of them (85%) responded positively and preferred to study via WhatsApp. This response showed that actually students enjoy learning by WhatsApp in blended learning. This surprise result showed that the learners were aware that conventional face-to-face class is so teacher-centred. I assume that in speaking class, the students feel more comfortable to express their ideas in English without a lecturer in front of him/her.

The second response in this study was those who gave negative response (15%). They pointed that not all instructions and tasks could be executed via WhatsApp.

There were two perceptions toward the use of WhatsApp in blended learning they are:

Table 2. Positive and Negative Responses

Positive Response	Negative Response
ST 1"*in my opinion, I like to study via WA because we can apply technology which I think is cool. In addition, we have a WA group. For me, learning in the classroom is usually teacher-centered so that most students are shy to state what they wish to state. Via WA the teacher can send the audio easily and students also are easy to reply, give a comment, send the pictures, caption, or send the audio recordings"*	ST 4 "*Learning via WA is not good, because it made students postpone their task, so I prefer to study in the classroom (face-to-face) because I can directly understand what is expained by the lecturer*"
ST 2 "*Learning via WA makes us easy to interact with the lecturer without feeling shy. Most of students only keep silent when learning face-to-face*"	
ST 3 "*it is more free to convey what are	

in our mind via WhatsApp to the lecturer rather than face to face, that is because face to face with the lecturer makes us nervous"

3.1.1. Positive response

Student 1 statement is supported by the research resulted fund by (Liu et al., 2010) stated that the use of online learning developed students' learning autonomy which does not rely on teacher's domination in teaching. Besides, the association of technology in teaching-learning process should be student-centered, and numerous studies indicate that positive impacts such as increased motivation, immediacy, and interaction within the landscape of language teaching and learning (Malissa, 2018).

Most of the students admitted that learning via WhatsApp enhance their self-confidence to learn. Indeed, foreign learner anxiety (FLA) sources is from the teacher-related factor (Trang, T., Moni, K., 2013). Generally, students are shy to have direct conversation with the teacher or lecturer.

3.1.2. Negative Response

Giving instruction and task to the students via online could be frustrated (Wang & Ip, 2010). Hence, teacher must be able to control the students' activities in online learning to keep them motivated in learning (Carter, R., & Nunan, 2001). It was also found that the lecturer underwent a difficultness in handling or controlling the group since there were too many comments in the group that he must reply. Therefore, for successful learning process, not all meeting are executed via WhatsApp, but to emphasize what the lecturer meant, several meetings must be conducted face-to-face as Semler's definition that quoted by (Soekartawi, 2006) that in blended learning the weakness of both face-to-face and online learning is covered each other.

3.2. Discussion

Students' interaction can be seen from their level of participation in learning process. The participation form are students' feed back toward the material or lecturer's explanation.

Every subject has its own WhatsApp group that initiated by the lecturer. The lecturer posted the teaching material, give the assignments, and instructed the students to submit those assignments via WhatsApp. There were 60 active students in WhatsApp in 5 different classes they were: literal listening, micro teaching, speaking for formal interaction, paragraph writing and general English. In the learning process via WhatsApp, the lecturer posted the material in different forms related to the class.

In conventional face-to-face class, there were only one to three students who are dominated in arguing their opinion or asking the question, whereas discussion via WhatsApp were more participation by the students. Students state that having discussion via WhatsApp is more easy since they can formulate what they want to say by looking for the meaning and corrected the ungrammatical form of what they would argue. One of

students' admission, "*I think, use WhatsApp in listening class, is helpful and efficient. We can get more practices through WhatsApp (voice recorder and video) easily*". The features of WhatsApp give the ease for the students to learn. The data is relevant with Amry (2014) that WhatsApp successfully have a positive impact on students' language attitude and Awada (2016) stated that instruction via WhatsApp is more efficient than face-to-face.

Another factor that stimulates students' participation in learning via WhatsApp is it is effective in reducing the anxiety to convey their opinion in English. Another student admitted, "*In my opinion, the use of WhatsApp in listening class is very good. Because via WhatsApp we can freely comment or give input without any shame or nervousness*". This statement was in line with Andujar-Vaca and Cruz-Martinez (2017) stated that learning through WhatsApp offered facilitate the learners to negotiate meaning, reflect and evaluate through authentic interaction and feedback.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, students' perception on the use of WhatsApp in blended learning is divided into two, they are positive and negative response. those who responded positively admitted that WhatsApp help them to apply their technology skill, avoid from teacher-centered, and enrich the learning via visual-audio. Meanwhile, those who responded negatively argued that learning via WhatsApp did not gave us comprehensive understanding of lecturer's explanation.

Of the written above, the finding do not alter the statement that the strength of blended learning since this model combines two learning models, they are face-to-face and online. This model is the solution for institution that cannot fully-apply e-learning model (Waskito, 2018). However, it is interested to find out the combination of its blended. For instance, the question like is 50-50 more effective that 40-60 in blended class?

In term of students' interaction via WhatsApp, it was found that more students participate in giving the feedback toward the material or lecturer's explanation rather than in conventional face-to-face learning. This is because students feel easy to learn via WhatsApp in term of WhatsApp's features and interaction in English among the students is more active due to their nervousness is reduced.

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