

THE IMPACT OF USING WHATSAPP IN PRACTICE ENGLISH ADVANCED SPEAKING AMONG OMANI GFP LEARNERS AT SOHAR UNIVERSITY

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Abstract _Teaching English speaking has become an essential part in the classrooms due to its long-term goal among Omani students. Recently after COVID-19 pandemic, the need to include the distance learning is useful for some reasons in which it enables the language teachers to exploit the time and reduce the issues related to students low performance, fear and lack of motivation. WhatsApp is a common tool that all learners have obtained on their smartphones. This mixed method study investigates the effectiveness of using WhatsApp to enhance learning speaking in the classrooms. The study method was examining pre and post tests using paired T Test and the interviews were conducted to the sample of 25 intermediate students at Sohar University. The results of t test revealed the best improvement was in favor of posttest in the field of speaking English (EFL) learning English as a foreign language due to the use of WhatsApp platform and at the same time it enhances the learners' motivation and reduce the sense of fear towards learning speaking. It also reduces the challenges that students face due to time consuming and pronunciation words.

Key words _ WhatsApp, motivation, fear, speaking skills

Introduction

The development of technology has created a big transformation in language learning and its practices in the globe. The application of Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) has been used as a big shift. Recently, the usage of MALL has raised and many users have used it more than before and it has become as a notable trend among English language teaching and learning and some studies have already approved this effective trend such as the studies of Liu & Chen, 2015; Shadiev et al., 2022), Gutiérrez-Colón et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2017; Yang, 2013). These studies indicated that MALL has become an integral part of English language learning and teaching and it is considered as one of the most effective tools of learning and teaching English language (Yu et al., 2022; Kukulska-Hulme, 2009; Gay et al., 2001).

WhatsApp (WA) is often a tool of communication among the users and at the same time it is employed as a learning tool in different study' fields. It was launched in 2009 as an instant messaging among billion users (Statista, 2022). Nowadays, a lot of studies in the literature have explored the effectiveness of WhatsApp usage the language learning such as the studies of (Güler,

2016), (Farahian & Parhamnia, 2022; García-Gómez, 2022), (Alshaibani & Qusti, 2021). The recent study of Manca (2020) indicated the use of social media platforms for instance, Instagram, Snapchat, and WhatsApp) as communicative and learning tools of speaking. It was approved that WA was and still become the most popular platforms of learning among the three tools. The recent study aimed at investigating the impact of WhatsApp in enhancing speaking skills in learning English language for intermediate learners in General Foundation Programs at Sohar University. Through the literature, the study approved this effectiveness of WhatsApp use among the learners.

Recently speaking English has a major impact influence on EL learners' post COVID 19 and it is considered as one of the most important language skills in the classrooms (James, 2013). It is usually basic to practice speaking and assess the learners on how they speak and perform in the speaking evaluation and assessment and after COVID pandemic many learners use to practice the speaking via WhatsApp however, they face some obstacles on how they practice and how to correct their errors. In the last few years, the technology is included in the English lessons everywhere in teaching the English language in the classrooms and now many researches have been conducted and explore the effectiveness of using mobile phones on learning (Burn, 2019).

Due to the lack of time, motivation and the increase of fear towards using WhatsApp are the most noticeable obstacles in the classrooms. These challenges hinder the improvement of practicing speaking in the classrooms and WhatsApp application reduce these challenges that teachers face in the classrooms. WhatsApp is widely spread since 2010 among students and recently it is developed and used in the teaching and learning especially after Corona Pandemic which widely has affected the ways of learning (Alqahtani, Bhaskar, Elumalai & Abumelha, 2018; Ali & Bin-Hady, 2019; Han & Keskin, 2016; Hamad, 2017). Learners were found to have generally positive attitudes and perception towards the use of WhatsApp. The WhatsApp Application has offered written, oral and video practices that students can see and practice daily though practicing the various wide range pronunciation and drilling repeating the words several times and speaking via voice messages WhatsApp has offered an asynchronous medium of communication and it is very available for everyone and still its cost is very cheap so that it allows its users to practice the speaking either in the classrooms or outside. This case study aimed at investigating the effectiveness of using WhatsApp application to practice advanced speaking skills among Omani intermediate students due to the few numbers of researches that investigate this phenomenon (Andújar-Vaca & Cruz-Martínez, 2017; Akkara, Anumula & Mallampalli, 2020).

Literature review

Speaking Practice in the English Classrooms

Connectivism learning theory explains that technology is a very significant part of in the learning and this actual learning can occur outside the classrooms via digital mobile system (Guder, 2010). The recent studies on the influence of WhatsApp on speaking developments, have highlighted effectively due to some real reasons including the popularity, time control messaging, easy accessibility, quick and free information-sharing, free videos calling. Furthermore, photos, images and videos and free documents and files have created big groups with 256 learners, group chatting,

texting, audio and video messaging (Church, & Oliveira, 2013), (Yeboah, & Ewur, 2014) ;(O'Hara, et al., 2014). According to Samora and Farooq (2018), the challenges of practicing speaking in the classrooms have increased and this is because of some main and essential factors of fear of practicing and lack of motivation, class sizes and not enough time and Burn (2019) pointed that the factors cause some difficulties when learners practice the speaking inside or outside the classrooms.

Few studies in Oman are conducted to explore the effectiveness of using WhatsApp Application to enhance speaking levels of learners. however, there are some Omani studies conducted to explore the effect of WA on speaking. In Oman, using WhatsApp for educational aims is widely noticed and many Omani researches have conducted some studies that have shown WhatsApp application for educational aims such as AlShekaili (2016) explored the use of WhatsApp among Omani teachers for GFP programs at Sultan Qaboos University and his qualitative study from 135 teachers and found that the majority of teachers used WhatsApp application in teaching English language in the foundation program at SQU. Another local study was presented by by Al-Saleem, Al-Saqri, and Al-Badri (2019) have conducted a study among the faculty lecturers at SQU for distance learning and the majority of the faculty members approved that WhatsApp tool is used as online tool for teaching and learning for some activities such as class speaking and projects which are really useful for learning oral communicative speaking. Al Dughaishi (2020) investigated in his study the effectiveness of using WhatsApp to enhance the learners to use vocabulary in the English context. The findings approved that the learners learn more vocabulary that support them during their study of English context that help them to apply these English words in the speaking skills.

in some countries such as Sudi Arabia some studies have been conducted to show this effectiveness on practicing speaking among learners. The study of Alastuey (2011) discovered that among Sudi Arabian students, the EFL learners faced some difficulties in learning speaking due to some factors of crowded classrooms and lack of new teaching strategies of speaking and at the same time it appointed that the use of WhatsApp application has offered many advantages of learning speaking and one of these benefits is effective learning without any anxiety or fear by oral voice messages , this study agreed wits the study of Hsu (2016) , he appointed the same benefits for Taiwanese learners towards the use of WhatsApp platform in learning speaking professionally.

Bensalem (2018) showed that how using WhatsApp make the vocabulary development more effective in English classrooms. Similarly, the study of Şahan et al. (2016) explored the effectiveness of using (WA) in supporting English idioms and words outside the classrooms at a state university in Turkey. The study of Jafari and Chalak (2016), in Iran Secondary schools found out that the usage of (WA) is an effective tool of teaching and learning that foster learning vocabulary for speaking contexts. A similar study by Keogh (2017) in Colombia university discovered that WA application can scaffold lexical items and resources that can be involved in facilitating the speaking contexts. The study found out that WA has a great purpose in fostering collaborative learning and benefited from groups learning effectively. The study of Hamad (2017), in Saudi Arabia at higher educational centers, found out that WA application enhances the learning

enthusiasm and it is an effective tool of learning oral English despite some obstacles, for instance the lack of teaching materials that are created through WA applications and lack of learners' commitment and being on time. Alenazi (2018) has completed the same study in Saudi Arabia and found out that WA is effective learning platform for pre-service teachers and it is so supportive during the absence of them.

In a Namibian higher educational context, Mbukusa (2018) explored students' perceptions toward WA as a teaching and learning tool. Panah and Babar (2020) found that WA could "improve both communication and education and can be used in interactions. Nuraeni and Nurmalia (2020) studied the benefits of WA and how it could facilitate the language learning activities in the ESL classroom. In a more recent study, Khan et al. (2021) highlighted the effectiveness of (WA) as a learning tool in conventional classes. The findings of this study revealed both benefits and challenges of using WA in education, such as the lack of affordability among some students. All these studies showed that WA could be potentially included even in traditional face-to-face classes. Moreover, Chen and Katz (2009), Hoadley (2009) and Sung and Mayer (2012) studied the impact of mobile WhatsApp usage in learning. The studies discussed the effective and positive roles that mobile WA plays in educational English language.

WhatsApp Impact in Speaking Skills

The study of Mbukusa (2018) pointed out that learners perceptions towards WhatsApp and has shown the positive influence on (WA) usage as an communicative effective tool of teaching and learning. In the same line, the study of Nihayati and Indriani (2021) explored the effectiveness of students' views towards using (WA) applications online. Similarly, Alamer and Al Khateeb (2021) explored how it is very effective for teachers to use (WA) platform even outside the classrooms in fostering autonomous motivation , collaboration, engagement and confidence towards English oral activities.

Few studies have been conducted to investigate the effectiveness of the use of WhatsApp. The studies of Hamed (2019) have examined the effectiveness and showed that the majority of learners' attitudes towards learning speaking via WhatsApp has a very effective role and these studies agreed with some recent studies that have been conduct for the same aim (Ali & Bin Hady, 2019). Moreover, the study of Elumalai & Abumelha (2018) showed that the significant support of WhatsApp Application and its communicative ways towards improving the speaking level of proficiency.

Wulandari et al. (2021) conducted a study on learners' perception regarding WhatsApp as an effective tool to enhance speaking performance in English classrooms and discovered that the learners faced both advantages and disadvantages once learning speaking took place in the English classrooms. After COVID-19 pandemic, a great turning point occurred and a big shift in the learning online and digital educational platforms, Nihayati and Indriani (2021) investigated this big transformation towards using WhatsApp platforms as a fast online tool of learning. literature shows that WhatsApp use as a tool of learning and more researches have been conducted to investigate different aspects of language speaking learning. This mixed method study investigates

the effectiveness of using WhatsApp in enhancing the learners to practice the English-speaking English GFP at Sohar University in Oman.

According to the study of Alkhufiri (2019) explored that influence of using WA among Omani female teachers and explored that WA is an effective oral tool that benefited the learning and teaching since it saves time and efforts and at the same time it can support the learners in doing their homework easily foster the ending of the speaking or oral projects due to its rapid assistance. This study of Bouhnik & Deshen (2014) found out that WA platform is an essential tool in frosting learning of speaking outside the classrooms. Homework and projects materials can be explained easily in the WhatsApp application that teachers and students can use to enhance learning outside of the formal setting. Furthermore, the teachers were satisfied due to the effective use of WhatsApp as a channel of oral communication in enhancing oral skills virtually from even home and it saves time and efforts. Moreover, the teachers showed a great interest in involving the learners' parents in the communicative speaking orally and so that they observe the learners progress and performance as the parents can easily get updated in the issues related to their learners' duties easily in WA platforms.

Study Objectives

This current mixed method study aimed at investigating the impact of practice the English speaking skills via WhatsApp tool (WA) among Omani General Foundation Program (GFP) , Sohar University, intermediate students 2023/2024 first academic semester.

Study Questions

- Are there any statically significant differences at the significant level of 0.05 between the pre-test and post-test in using WhatsApp to improve advanced English speaking?
- Is there any effectiveness of using WhatsApp to practice the speaking EL (English language as a foreign language) among Omani GFP students at Sohar University?
- What are the Challenges related to using WhatsApp for improving English language speaking among Omani intermediate GFP students?

Study Method

This current case study used two ways of data collection: T test and focus group interviews. The study used pre-test and post-test that are applied for 25 female participants of intermediate students in GFP classrooms and as well as the focus group interview was used to reach the deep data of this issue in order to explore the effectiveness of using WhatsApp platform to enhance the advanced practice of speaking EL skills in Omani context. The sampling was selective and purposive. The group's age from 20 to 21 and all of them are from intermediate level.

Study Instruments

Pre-test and Post-test

This mixed method study has used two data collection to explore the deep reality of using WhatsApp when the learners practice the speaking in GFP classrooms. Pre and post-test were examined, 25 participants for pre-test and post-test via Microsoft Teams meeting. The both groups are exposure to the same lesson, the pre-test didn't practice speaking via WhatsApp but the post-test did. The speaking rubric was used from Sohar University W Drive (Computer Drive) to ensure

the validity of speaking evaluation for both tests (see appendix A). Finally, the comparison was done for both tests' performance.

Table 1: The results of pre and post-test paired sample test

Paired Samples Test

	Paired Differences					t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Pair 1 pretest – posttest	-13.24000	1.26754	.25351	-13.76322-	-12.71678-	52.227	24	.000

The above table shows that $\text{sig} < 0.05$ and as a result there is a difference between the pre-test and posttest and the post-test showed the best speaking improvement when the participants use WhatsApp as a learning tool of English speaking.

Tale 2: The pretest and posttest paired samples statistics

Paired Samples Statistics

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1 pretest	82.0800	25	1.60520	.32104
posttest	95.3200	25	.90000	.18000

The above table shows the mean of both pre-test and post-test and shows that the post- test is better than the pretest in terms of speaking performance. The pretest mean scored 82 while the posttest 95 which shows that the best improvement of speaking performance is in favor of the post-test.

The Interview

The focus and one to one interview were conducted to explore the effectiveness and five themes were coded: speaking performance, motivation, fear and confidence and challenges.

Data Discussion and Findings

This study used mixed method approach to investigate deep research details on the effectiveness of using WhatsApp among Omani intermediate students in the General Foundation Program.

The findings of T test showed the effective speaking on both pre and posttest however the posttest scored the best performance and its performance was higher that the pretest in improving the English-speaking level and performance. The case study finally indicated to the effectiveness of using WhatsApp among Omani Intermediate GFP students as it gave much flexibility and increase the motivation and reduce the fear once the learners practiced the speaking activities and exercises.

On the other hand, the interviews indicated to that WhatsApp is considered as an effective learning tool of speaking as the learners felt much free to do their speaking tasks without any obstacles as the use of this interactive tool is really easy and available for every learners' smartphones. The learners also increased their level of confidence, anxiety and increase the sense of desire, motivation and enthusiasm.

The Impact on Speaking Performance

The participants revealed that their speaking performance improved via WhatsApp application, voice messages, drilling and pronunciation of vocabulary which were involved in discussion, oral conversation and presentation. Also, they appointed out that the use of voice messages supports them to learn more speaking errors such as pronouncing the words and even sentences. The participants believed that the application improved their fluency and pronunciation and had a major role in enhancing the level of speaking proficiency which agreed with the experimental group that has been done in this case study.

The Impact on Motivation

The majority of participants showed that using WhatsApp increased their level of motivation towards learning this skill and this as well increases the level of inspiration and willingness to learn and practice the speaking skills. On the other side, the level of enthusiasm increased via increasing the opportunities for the learners to listen to their own voice several times and practice the speaking exercise online. This also create the sense of competency and the readiness to participation in speaking activities. the studies of Soomro and Farooq (2018) and Seghayer (2014) pointed out that WhatsApp is a very supportive communicative tools that gives the learners the flexibility in which it allows the adaptive leaning by giving the learners enough time to practice English speaking and rise the willingness, motivation and confidence level in the English classrooms and all these previous studies have agreed with the results of interviewing the candidates. The study of Alamer and Al Khateeb (2021) investigated how teachers' use of WhatsApp to enhance autonomous motivation and this led to individualized and autonomy learning.

The Impact of Fear

The participants in the interview either focus groups or one to one group showed that the level of fear was less when they used WhatsApp Platform comparing to the traditional way of speaking in the classrooms. The interview's results showed that the practice of speaking through WhatsApp is really effective as the participants revealed that they don't feel shy when they are using voice messages to practice the speaking while they feel shy once they use the real face to face or group speaking in the classroom. They also added that they feel free when they use WhatsApp and had less sense of anxiety when they use WhatsApp voice message or even video conferencing via WhatsApp platform. Also, the participants revealed that they use WhatsApp as a tool of practical and user-friendly in the teaching and learning of speaking.

The Challenges

The English teachers have faced notable challenges related to teaching English in the classrooms because of unwillingness of learners and unavailability of time, and using WA can give the learners

a flexible, adaptive and comfortable chances to practice speaking (Chun et al., 2016). Due to the great and noticeable social use of WhatsApp, the participants showed their interest on using WhatsApp when they practiced speaking and they reported that they didn't face any challenges when they practiced speaking via WhatsApp and they showed their great satisfaction on using WhatsApp and their high desire towards it. Actually, after collecting all the participants answers they all agreed that they didn't face any obstacles when they practiced the speaking of English on WhatsApp. However, the obstacles appeared in creating isolation for some learners and laziness as the mobile WA creates some social platforms that hinder effective learning due to its wide-open sources of chatting and groups. These social groups may waste the learners' time and lead to lack of learning. Another notable challenges that is received from participants is, the massive amount of messages and files that the learners receive daily from chatting or social groups and this causes annoying confusion among the learners since some messages are unnecessary because of its daily social chatting.

Conclusion

The finding of this mixed method study showed that the WhatsApp is an effective learning tool in practicing English speaking due to its increase on the learners' speaking performance, motivation and reduce their fear towards practice the speaking in front of the audience. The study recommended further research that deal with the same study topic and few Omani studies have been conducted so far. The GFP teachers revealed their interest on using WhatsApp and the its voice messages to practice the speaking either in group or one to one. They stated that the use of social applications such as WhatsApp have to be expanded to all other learning fields of learning EFL (English Language as a foreign language) but the future investigations are recommended to explore this research filed.

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Appendix A

INTERMEDIATE LEVEL SPEAKING RUBRICS

Mark	Pronunciation	Range: Lexical & Structural	Accuracy	Interaction	Communicative Effectiveness
4	Communicates clearly and naturally with good intonation and sounds. Very easy to understand	Communicates naturally and appropriately, without any hesitation, using a full range of vocabulary that is relevant to the topic.	Maintains an excellent degree of grammatical accuracy consistently. Uses a full range of structures appropriately.	Can initiate, maintain & close conversation with little hesitation on familiar & complex topics. Speech is spontaneous and displays a very good understanding of others' views.	Communicates with clear, well-structured speech. Ideas are presented clearly and effectively. Elaborate use of cohesive devices as and when required.
3	Communicates almost always with correct intonation and sounds. The phonological errors do not seriously affect communication.	Communicates naturally with a good range of vocabulary that is relevant to the topic. May sometimes lack awareness of appropriacy. Has occasional errors though often self-corrects.	Maintains a very good degree of grammatical accuracy. Partly memorized. While some errors are noticeable, the flow of communication is not seriously affected.	Can initiate, maintain & close conversations on familiar topics but with some hesitation and pauses that do not largely hinder communication. Mostly understands others' views.	Communicates mostly with clear, well-structured speech. Ideas are mostly presented clearly. Mostly well- chosen use of cohesive devices as and when required.
2	Communicates sometimes with correct intonation and sounds. The phonological errors do not seriously affect communication.	Communicates naturally with a reasonable range of vocabulary that is relevant to the topic. May sometimes lack awareness of appropriacy. Has occasional errors though sometimes self-corrects.	Maintains a good degree of grammatical accuracy. Partly memorized. While some errors are noticeable, the flow of communication is not seriously affected.	Can sometimes initiate, maintain & close conversations on familiar topics but with some hesitation and pauses that do not largely hinder communication. Mostly understands others' views.	Communicates generally with clear, well-structured speech. Ideas are generally presented clearly. Generally well- chosen use of cohesive devices as and when required.
1	Limited use of intonation and inaccurate sounds. Phonological errors often impair communication.	Communicates using limited range of vocabulary relevant to the topic. Mostly unaware of appropriacy of vocabulary related to the topic. Lexical errors often prevent communication.	Maintains very basic degree of grammatical accuracy. Uses a lot of memorized phrases. Frequent errors often impair communication.	Often unable to initiate, maintain or close the interaction. Can interact and present ideas in a limited way on simple topics. Displays a lack of understanding of others' views.	Communicates but not effectively. Some ideas are presented clearly. Uses very basic linkers. Cohesion is often affected and the task is poorly dealt with.

Appendix B

The interview questions

- A. What is the impact of using WhatsApp in enhancing your speaking performance?
- B. What is the impact of using WhatsApp in your learning speaking motivation?
- C. What is the impact of using WhatsApp in reducing fear when you practice speaking via WhatsApp application?
- D. What are the challenges that the you face when you use WhatsApp in practicing English speaking?

