

LEVERAGING WHATSAPP GROUP AS A LEARNING DEVICE TO ENHANCE STUDENTS' SPEAKING SKILLS

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ABSTRACT

The improvement of speaking skills is highly important to be intensified to continually develop students' speaking skills. Speaking skills need special attention because a good speaking skill cannot be obtained automatically without appropriate learning activities and intensive practice. Language skills, especially speaking skills, can affect students' communication skills, therefore the efforts to improve students' speaking skills become a priority in English language learning. This study was conducted on university students with the aim of developing their speaking skills through the WhatsApp group application. The study showed that the students' speaking skills improved considerably high after the integration of WhatsApp group into English language learning. Therefore, the study implies that the WhatsApp group can be utilized by the language teachers to improve their students speaking skills.

Keywords: Leveraging, Whatsapp Group, Learning, Enhance, Speaking

INTRODUCTION

Speaking is one of the language skills in everyday life. Someone more often chooses to speak to communicate, because communication is more effective if done by talking. Speaking is an essential communication process to express, state, and convey ideas, thoughts, ideas, or feeling to others by using spoken language that can be understood by others by articulating sounds or words to express information meaningfully (Widiastuti et al., 2019). Speaking skill is also a language skill which is very important to communicate with the communities. Speaking is a language activity carried out by humans in language life to communicate and express themselves (Buton & Astuti, 2000).

It can be said that speaking is a form of human behaviour that utilizes physical, psychological, neurological, semantic, and linguistic factors. Furthermore, speaking is a tool to communicate ideas that are compiled and developed according to the needs of the listener (Mantra et al., 2018). Speaking is an instrument that reveals to the listener almost directly whether the speaker understands or not, both the material of the conversation and the listeners; whether he is

adaptable or not, when he communicates his ideas; and whether he is alert and enthusiastic or not. Therefore, speaking skills are the main basis of language because speaking skills (1) are the mode of expression that is often used, (2) are the first form of ability that children usually learn, (3) are the most common type of language skills that are commonly used. It can be said that students have to develop various knowledge in language to be able to speak appropriately. Therefore, students' speaking skills should improve continually (Mantra et al., 2018).

In Indonesian school, the teaching of English sometimes was still conducted using the Indonesian language and the students had very limited exposure to language use orally. Therefore, to leverage the students speaking skills, teachers were expected to suppress the use of the Indonesian language at school. The habit of using Indonesian in everyday life for students is one of the obstacles in learning to speak English properly. Because of the known habit and knowledge factor from the beginning of the students is difficult to improve. Consequently, to continually improve students' speaking skills, various

efforts should be carried out including parental support. Moreover, teachers are required to implement appropriate learning activities to make sure that students are active in learning speaking (Amelia, 2019). One of the learning activities that can be implemented is by integrating communication technology in learning. WhatsApp group is considered to be an effective way of learning since students were familiar with using the WhatsApp application during their everyday communication (Elhadi, 2018).

In line with the use of communication technology in learning, recently the use of communication technology was more exposed to the community since the spread of Covid-19 and the implementation of online learning (Gamage et al., 2020). The implementation of a distance or online English learning system allows teachers and students to continue to communicate and carry out the English learning process without having to meet face-to-face using internet media (Ariebowo, 2021). This system is considered the most reasonable and most likely to be implemented in the current emergency with all its advantages and limitations. To maximize the use of online media in learning English online, a teacher must be able to develop his creativity so that material delivery can run effectively and learning objectives can be achieved optimally.

One of the online learning media that can be used by teachers to improve their four English skills and its components is a WhatsApp group. This application is very popular and the easiest to use because it can send photos, audio, documents, videos not only individually but can also be done in groups (Surani & Chaerudin, 2020). Moreover, now it is certain that almost all students already have the WhatsApp application on their cell phones. Learning English online using this application is also more practical and cheaper in terms of cost because the system used is asynchronous so

it is not too expensive for internet data. So that the WhatsApp application with the features in it is very worthy of being one of the choices of English learning media for students (Wargadinata et al., 2020).

With the service features available in the WhatsApp group, it allows teachers and students to communicate in English learning activities, for example by easily sending dialogues or conversations through the voice note and video features (La Hanisi et al., 2018). In addition, students can also enrich their vocabulary and master English grammar through emojis and also share photos on WhatsApp Groups. WhatsApp groups create a condition where students can interact with each other more actively, can discuss better, and can help each other among themselves, both during the preparation, learning, evaluation, and feedback processes. This can happen because students tend to feel more confident, more courageous, and don't feel intimidated when they have to express their opinions through WhatsApp (Zarei & Fathi, 2020).

Studies in language skills have been widely carried out by researchers who examine the role of digital technology in improving the quality of learning (e.g. Karim, (2018); Barbera, (2009); Wang, (2018). From these several studies, however, there have been only a few studies conducted to examine the practice of speaking in learning speaking skills by utilizing electronic media, namely the WhatsApp application which has voice note or voice message facilities. As it has been known that the use of voice messages as a medium of practice for learning speaking skills certainly has advantages and disadvantages, therefore this study was considered to be beneficial to be conducted to reveal useful information related to the use of WhatsApp group in leveraging students' speaking skills.

This study was supported by previous studies which showed that the use of WhatsApp groups as an online English

learning medium can create a more relaxed and conducive learning condition that can encourage students to be more motivated in learning the material provided (Surani & Chaerudin, 2020). Students also tend to be more courageous in their opinion because the opinions expressed are written so that they have more opportunities to think and arrange words before being conveyed in group chats. As one of the results of research states that WhatsApp Group as an English learning medium provides space for students to practice language, especially in improving speaking skills, encourages students to remain involved in the learning atmosphere even outside the classroom, and motivates them to teach each other (Handayani et al., 2019).

Considering the phenomenon as described above and by acknowledging the importance of speaking skills for the students, therefore, this study was intensively conducted to develop students' speaking skills through implementing digital communication technology in the form of WhatsApp group application. The study was expected to broaden teachers' horizons in the use of technology in teaching English.

METHODS

To accomplish this research study, the researcher used Classroom Action Research (CAR) design. This design was chosen due to the fact that CAR was used concerning the improvement of speaking skills by the WhatsApp group application. The data were collected by utilizing two kinds of research instruments, they were speaking tests both for pre-test and post-tests and questionnaires to find out students' changing behavior during the learning process when WhatsApp groups were conducted in speaking classes. Initial reflection or pre-test (IR) was intended to evaluate the pre-existing speaking skills of the students, while post-test or reflection (R) was intended to reveal the expected increase in the students' speaking skills.

In this present study, the teaching-learning processes were divided into two cycles in which each cycle consisted of four interconnected sessions. Each session consisted of four systematic activities, namely: Planning (P), action (A), Observation (O), and Reflection (R). It was compulsory to note that IR (Initial Reflection) was a term usually used in classroom action research which referred to pre-test in speaking.

Basically, this study was held to find out the effectiveness of the WhatsApp group in teaching speaking to the students in English classes. The improvement of students' speaking skills was figured out by comparing the mean score gained by the students with their corresponding mean scores of the reflections or post-test of both the first cycle and second cycle. Therefore, the most required data to answer the research question related to the improvement of speaking skills through the WhatsApp group application. Moreover, a questionnaire was conducted at the end of the first learning cycle and the results were used to design revised lesson plans for the next learning sessions.

Therefore, there were three kinds of raw scores obtained for the present class action study, they were, (1) scores showing the subjects' pre-existing speaking skills, (2) scores showing the subjects' progress achievement in speaking skills, (3) scores showing the subjects' changing learning behaviors after the implementation of WhatsApp group in speaking classes..

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

This study aims to describe the improvement of speaking skills by utilizing the WhatsApp group in English classes. The application of the WhatsApp group enabled students to practice their speaking skills more intensively both during online learning classes and outside the classroom setting. One alternative online English learning media that can be used to overcome the

problems in online learning is by utilizing the WhatsApp application in the daily learning process. This application is not only easy, cheap, and practical, it also has quite complete features that can be used optimally for learning purposes.

One of them is the group chat feature that can be created for free, easily, and quickly with a maximum number of members in a group of 250 people. The WhatsApp application is a potential learning medium and is able to increase student motivation in learning. This study dealt with improving students' speaking skills through the WhatsApp group application, the summary of the data can be presented in the following table.

The following is the data related to students' speaking:

Cycle	Score	Number of Students	Percentage
Pre-Cycle	< 7.0	32	80%
	≥ 7.0	8	20%
Cycle I	<7.0	15	37.50%
	≥7.0	25	62.50%
Cycle II	<7.0	5	12.5%
	≥7.0	35	87.50%

This classroom action research showed an increasing score in speaking skills achieved by the students after the implementation of the WhatsApp group. The increasing achievement can be seen from the percentage of students the minimum passing grade in which there were 20% of the students achieved the minimum passing grade in pre-cycle, there were 62.50% of the students achieved the minimum passing grade in cycle I, and there 87.50% of the students achieved the minimum passing grade in cycle II.

The data analysis led to the establishment of the finding of the present class action study which investigated the effectiveness of the mind mapping strategy method in improving speaking skills. In pre-cycle, there were 32 students or 80% of the

students still had poor ability in speaking. They were still could not speak English appropriately and correctly to describe certain topics given to them to describe to their friends in the classroom. However, There were 32 students, or 20% of the students passed the minimum passing grade or achieving a score of ≥ 7.0 . This indicated that only 8 students or 20% of the students had a good ability in speaking skills, 32 students or 80% of the students still needed serious treatment in how to speak English more appropriately and correctly.

In cycle I, there were 15 students or 37.50% of the students still had poor ability in speaking skills. They were still could not speak in good grammar and appropriate content. However, there were 25 students or 62.50% of the students who passed the minimum passing grade or achieving a score of ≥ 7.0 . This indicated that 25 students or 62.50% of the students had a good ability in speaking skills, meanwhile, 15 students, or 37.50% of the students still needed further treatment in how to improve their speaking skills. This cycle indicated that there was an increase of 42% of the students passed the minimum passing grade or achieving the score of ≥ 7.0 after the students taught using WhatsApp group if it was calculated its increase from the students' achievement in pre-cycle.

In cycle II, there were 5 students or 12.5% of the students still had poor ability in speaking skills. They could not speak approbatively to describe the given topics because of their poor ability in vocabulary and grammar. However, there were 35 students, or 87.50% of the students passed the minimum passing grade or achieving a score of ≥ 7.0 . This indicated that 35 students or 87.50% of the students had a good ability in speaking skills, meanwhile, 15 students or 12.5% of the students still needed further treatment in how to speak better English. This cycle indicated that there was an increase of 25% of the students passed the minimum passing grade or achieving the score of ≥ 7.0 after the

students taught using WhatsApp group if it was calculated its increase from the students' achievement in cycle I and there was an increase of 67% of the students passed the minimum passing grade or achieving the score of ≥ 7.0 after the students taught using WhatsApp group if it was calculated its increase from the students' achievement in pre-cycle. This showed that the WhatsApp group is an effective learning device to improve students' speaking skills.

Additionally, based on the analysis of the questionnaire data, it could be found that the responses of the subjects toward the implementation of the WhatsApp group were significantly positive during the learning process in speaking classes. It could be seen from the amount of the subjects after the implementation of the WhatsApp group that there were 38.44% of the responses that showed strongly agree; 57.51% of the responses, agree; 4.05% of the responses, undecided; and none of the responses that showed disagree and strongly disagree. From the questionnaire results, it could be stated that most of the subjects agreed that the WhatsApp group was an effective teaching media to improve their ability in speaking skills.

As an alternative to online learning, of course, WhatsApp groups have several advantages and disadvantages which, if used properly, will be able to provide maximum results for the continuity of the learning process, including for the English learning process. Teachers and students can interact and communicate through WhatsApp Groups during English learning by optimizing the features available in the application. The advantages of WhatsApp Group in general are (1) the features of this application can encourage students to be bolder in expressing their opinions because the time for thinking is more flexible and longer; (2) the WhatsApp Group feature is very practical and can be used on smartphones so that its contents can be accessed anytime and anywhere; (3) the

dissemination of information is very easy; (4) affordable internet fees.

The various features of WhatsApp Group are considered to be very helpful for teachers and students in the language learning process and improve learning outcomes to the maximum. Teachers can dig deeper into the use of services from the WhatsApp Group to provide online learning strategies or techniques that are more interesting, active, fun, and meaningful to master speaking skills. By paying attention to some of the advantages of this WhatsApp application, educational practitioners are also creative in designing a learning process by utilizing the various facilities offered by this technology, one of which is learning English through the WhatsApp group. WhatsApp group can be used as a collaborative learning medium between teachers and students online or offline, and as a technology-based learning application, it can also improve students' abilities in English especially in speaking

CONCLUSION

Effective learning should be always conducted in the classroom to continually improve students' competence. Moreover, learning should be enjoyable for the students to make students willing to learn continuously. Learning English has many challenges that demand innovation and creativity from teachers in designing learning activities to achieve the expected goals. With the development of technology in the fields of education and teaching, teachers and students can collaborate to take advantage of various available technology services to optimize learning processes and outcomes even in disaster emergencies.

The WhatsApp Group application as an alternative learning technology is considered to be very helpful for teachers and students in the process of improving students' abilities in mastering speaking skills. The variety of features on the WhatsApp Group service enables students

and teachers to communicate more effectively, consequently, teachers can continually improve students' speaking skills even outside a classroom setting. The study implies that teachers should consider maximizing the use of WhatsApp in their teaching because it is an easy way to teach the students and considerably cheap to operate as a learning device.

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