Role of WhatsApp in Improving L2 Learner's Communicative Skills at Intermediate Level in the City of D. G. Khan

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Abstract/Izvleček
Learning English is difficult in all non-English speaking countries, including Pakistan, because learning another language after the mother tongue is difficult. This research aimed to improve L2 learners' communication skills through WhatsApp. This research was experimental; sixty average scoring students were selected through pre-tests for this experiment; then, using the fishbowl random sampling technique, two groups, control and experimental, were formed with 30 students each. It was found that the students who were taught with the help of WhatsApp had excellent communication skills in L2 as compared to those students who were taught by traditional methods without WhatsApp.

Vloga aplikacije WhatsApp pri izboljšanju tujejezikovnih komunikacijskih spretnosti dijakov na ravni B1 v mestu D. G. Khan
Osnovni namen pričujoče raziskave je analizirati razvijanje tujejezikovnih komunikacijskih spretnosti pakistanskih dijakov s pomočjo aplikacije WhatsApp. Za ta namen smo izvedli eksperimentalno raziskavo, v kateri je sodelovalo šestdeset dijakov s povprečnimi rezultati, ki so bili izbrani na podlagi predtesta. Sledilo je oblikovanje kontrolne in eksperimentalne skupine, vsaka je zajela 30 učencev, in sicer z uporabo t. i. akvarijske tehnike naključnega vzorčenja. Pri kontrolni skupini smo uporabili tradicionalni pristop poučevanja tujega jezika, medtem ko je eksperimentalna skupina pri pouku uporabljala aplikacijo WhatsApp. Na osnovi rezultatov eksperimenta lahko zaključimo, da so v primerjavi z dijaki kontrolne skupine dijaki, ki so pri pouku uporabljali aplikacijo WhatsApp, pokazali boljše komunikacijske spretnosti v tujem jeziku.

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Introduction

Language is a complex and specialized skill that develops in the child spontaneously, without conscious effort or formal instruction, is deployed without awareness of its underlying logic, is qualitatively the same in every individual, and is distinct from more general abilities to process information or behave intelligently (Zubkov, 2020; Pinker, 2003). Learners who have been exposed to various languages and cultures are seen has a stronger base for learning a further language than the student who hasn't had such experiences. As is common knowledge, teaching English at all of Indonesia's educational institutions has been given the status of second language instruction (Kandati and Tatipang, 2021). The challenge is determining how to appropriate and modify the source language culture to fit the target language culture. To accomplish the objectives of the teaching and learning process, it is necessary to find a solution to the problem using any available approach, strategy, or medium (Jabbarov, 2020; Pardede, 2020).

Reading, listening, writing, and speaking are the four fundamental language abilities that should be learned by anyone who is learning English (Xolmurodova, 2021). Among these, speaking is often considered the most important skill. Because it demands that learners think and talk simultaneously, speaking is universally acknowledged as the skill that presents the most significant challenge. Sometimes, learners have a lot of thoughts running through their head, but they struggle to articulate them since they are thinking in the target language. In addition, Hughes (2002) states that one of the primary challenges inherent in speaking research is that it intersects with many other domains and activities. This is cited as one of the major issues inherent in the study of speaking. The ability to talk well may be broken down into four components in its most basic form. According to Richards and Renandya's (2002) explanation, grammatical competence, discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence are all components of communicative competence.

A lecturer needs to distinguish between teaching speaking and utilizing speaking as a teaching tool. One must be distinct from the other. The topic of whether a teacher is involved in "teaching the spoken form of a language" or "teaching a language through speaking" is, therefore, an important one to consider (Hamad et al., 2019). The communicative method is always relevant when it comes to teaching speaking. The communicative approach, which is also known as communicative language teaching, can be understood as a set of principles concerning the goals of language

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teaching, how students learn a language, the types of classroom activities that most effectively facilitate learning, and the roles that teachers and students play in the classroom setting (Richards and Rodgers, 2002). Interaction is emphasized as both the method through which one learns a language and the end objective of the process under the communicative language teaching (CLT) methodology.

Technology is crucial to the current teaching and learning process in schools. Most students report feeling more motivated to learn English when they make use of technology. According to Brown (2000), motivation is arguably the catch-all term used most frequently to explain the success or failure of nearly any problematic undertaking. As a result, it is not difficult to fall into the trap of believing that success in any endeavour is only attributable to the fact that a person is driven.

The pace at which new technologies are developed is quickening. Most people know that the desktop computer is no longer considered cutting-edge technology. The modification of many programs available in the App Store has provided a new source of inspiration for all learners, making it easier for them to acquire information related to science and knowledge. In addition, the study of the English language is subject to the effect of the advancement of technology (Hamad et al., 2019).

The ubiquitous availability of digital technology and its impact on people's daily lives make it imperative that educators consider using various technological tools in instructional settings. Whether speaking of individual low- or high-tech tools for learning and teaching or the collective grouping of various resources, technology can favourably affect students' learning and instruction (Hamad et al., 2019). Technology is in a prime position to play a significant role in developing a novel approach that may be more efficient than previous approaches. The current strategy places more emphasis on the pupils than the instructor. How students present themselves confidently and engagingly can positively impact their learning experience, making them feel more engaged and connected to the classroom environment. However, the physical attractiveness of students doesn't directly influence their ability to learn English (Aprianto, 2020).

WhatsApp Messenger is an instant messaging program, available only on mobile devices, that is cross-platform and uses encryption. It uses the Internet to communicate regular cellular mobile numbers to other users to receive audio messages, text messages, documents, photos, video, and user position information. It has become one of the most popular social networking programs. It is used for conversation with other people.

Younger people are currently leading the trend of using this communication tool. This program is more straightforward than others, requiring several methods or procedures to get started (Hamad et al., 2019).

This research aimed to investigate the role of the WhatsApp Mobile Tool in developing students' communication skills and student enthusiasm for learning English as a second language (Mandasari and Aminatun, 2020).

Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL), one of the most important application areas in mobile learning, has improved as a result of the rapid rise in mobile devices (Aprianto, 2020; Mandasari and Aminatun, 2020; Kukulska-Hulme, 2012). In a recent study examining how mobile technology may be used to learn a second language, researchers found that mobile phones are the most popular device (67%) among all portable gadgets (Persson and Nouri, 2018). Learners of second languages (L2) can exploit the potential presented by the widespread ownership of smartphones and participate in casual conversations outside the classroom (Kukulska-Hulme and Shield, 2007). At the tertiary level, the growing body of research on the use of smartphone applications in classroom instruction has been overwhelmingly favourable (Abugohar et al., 2019). A brief overview of the relevant literature will be given to place the current study into its proper perspective within the larger body of research on MALL (Aprianto, 2020).

Related Literature

The affordances that WhatsApp provides have been unambiguously emphasized as the primary reasons for its appeal, according to studies on the app. Among these are capabilities for real-time messaging, simple accessibility, rapid information exchange, free audio and video chatting, a sense of belonging and sociability, and speedy information dissemination (Mandasari and Aminatun, 2020; Church and Oliveira, 2013). In addition, features such as group chatting, broadcasting, texting, audio, and video messaging, capturing and sharing photos and videos, sharing documents, making video and voice calls, creating groups with up to 256 members, and group chatting all offer a rich potential for transforming language learning into the most engaging learning experience possible (Ahmed, 2019).

WhatsApp is a promising platform for collaborative learning, informal learning, and interaction in the target language (Ahmed, 2019). This is because most MALL applications were developed with individual learning as their primary focus, and only a few applications offer CL opportunities. Studies on popular instant messaging

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services such as WeChat have demonstrated a good outcome in enhancing people's ability to communicate in their second language in China (Mandasari and Aminatun, 2020; Shi et al., 2017). The current research investigates the WhatsApp platform's effect on L2 speaking and the participants' perspectives on the criteria for evaluating speaking ability. It also considers the diversions and uncontrolled bits of information that Ahad et al. (2014) mention by communicating the study's goals to every participant.

Learning to speak a second language via interaction with other people is essential. It might be challenging for students to develop the self-assurance necessary to talk effectively and confidently in the target language if they do not have adequate opportunities to engage in it. There is a strong correlation between interacting with others and gaining knowledge (Gass and Mackey, 2007). Finding individuals who can communicate with learners in the target language for learning and practice is the best environment for obtaining L2 speaking abilities. This is because it allows learners to practice speaking the target language (Mandasari and Aminatun, 2020; Kukulska-Hulme, 2016). One of the most significant issues that English professors must face is the creation of an atmosphere outside of the classroom that is conducive to interaction in a second language.

When instructors in the role of facilitators can use WhatsApp as a platform to create constructive student involvement, WhatsApp provides a great deal of help in creating a favourable environment for L2 learning (Mohamed, 2019; Pike, 2011). It makes it easier to create an optimal atmosphere for collaborative learning in groups with a sense of identity, a shared goal, and confidence in one another.

Formal learning using WhatsApp makes learning more student-centred, leading to increased learner autonomy through collaborative learning with classmates (Jasrial, 2019). In addition, it assists in effectively engaging students by giving them much-needed exposure to and engagement in the target language outside of the classroom setting (Mohamed, 2019; Lam, 2015). The findings of previous research studies, which found that learning a second language through casual conversation was beneficial, provide support for this point of view (Keogh, 2017). Earlier research on WhatsApp concentrated on acquiring language skills inside of a classroom setting; however, the present study focuses on the influence of WhatsApp on L2 speaking abilities outside the classroom through formal learning (Jasrial, 2019).

Statement of the Problem

Much of the existing research on students learning English as a foreign or second language in Pakistan has identified communication challenges. Most of the difficulties with communication that these investigations have uncovered are linked to two distinct types of problems: linguistic and non-linguistic. The issues with linguistics may be broken down into four categories: phonology, syntax, coherence and cohesiveness, and vocabulary. The challenges that are not related to language have to do with the limited time allotted to students in the class to work on their communicative skills and the methods teachers use to instruct students on improving their communicative skills. These problems lead to several additional issues related to anxiety, personality traits, self-esteem, a poor environment for communication outside the classroom, and inhibition in which students feel afraid of making mistakes. These problems also lead to several additional issues.

Given the earlier research findings that highlighted EFL students' challenges, language learning specialists must instruct students on overcoming the obstacles they confront while attempting to communicate in English. There have not been many studies in Pakistan that thoroughly assesses the challenges associated with communicative skill. Few studies explore the influence of Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT) on increasing communicative ability.

Given the lack of prior research on the topic of English communicative difficulties experienced by students in higher secondary education, the purpose of the present study is first to identify the communicative problems encountered by Pakistani students and then evaluate the impact of WhatsApp on EFL learners' communicative skill in English classrooms using an experimental study of the perspectives of students in an intermediate class.

Objectives of the Study

Objectives of the study included exploring the role of WhatsApp in improving L2 learners' communicative skills to analyse the impact of teaching with the help of WhatsApp on EFL learners' communicative skills in English classrooms at the intermediate level. In addition, we sought to compare teachers' and students' perspectives about teaching through WhatsApp and its impact on EFL learners' communicative skills in English classrooms and to provide recommendations about methods for all stakeholders at the intermediate level.

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Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses of the research were tested through experiment; two groups were made: one was the control group, which received no treatment, and the second was the experimental group, which used WhatsApp.

Ho.1: WhatsApp has no role in improving L2 learners' communicative skills at the intermediate level.

Ho.2: There is no impact from the use of WhatsApp in teaching on EFL learners' communicative skills in English classrooms at the intermediate level.

Ho.3: There are no perceptions of teachers and students about WhatsApp teaching EFL learners' communicative skills in English classrooms at the intermediate level.

Significance of the Study

This research would benefit all parties concerned, particularly those whose work focuses on formulating educational plans and policies relating English instruction to the communicative skills of other languages. It would help students and instructors at the school level better comprehend acquiring English as a foreign language (EFL) through WhatsApp. This inquiry may also serve as a starting point for other researchers working on comparable problems. The findings of this study have important implications for English instruction. The study suggests that the new teaching method may be an effective approach to improving students' English communication skills, which could also enhance their ability to communicate in other languages. The study's findings could be used to inform the development of new teaching materials and professional development programs for English teachers. The findings of this study are also significant for students and parents. The study suggests that students who have access to the new teaching method may be more likely to succeed in mathematics. Parents can use the findings of the study to advocate for their children to have access to the new teaching method.

Delimitations of the Study

This study was delimited to the following groups:
1. Higher secondary school boys at Tehsil Kot Chutta.
2. Only 2nd-year students.

Research Methodology

The researcher used the following research methodology in this study.

Study Design

The research was experimental and was conducted in the Government Higher Secondary Boys School Kot Chutta among 2nd-year students. The researcher first took a pre-test of all the students, checking their communicative skills; we observed how the children communicated orally in English and through WhatsApp. Two groups of 30 students each were formed, omitting students with the highest and lowest marks. Only average achieving students were selected for the experiment. Students were randomly assigned to groups, one being an experimental group, and the other a control. The researcher exposed the experimental group to WhatsApp and taught the other group by traditional methods. This treatment lasted for three months. Both groups were then given a post-test, including questions about communicative skills. Then, the test score was calculated as the mean value and standard deviation. The significance level was checked by applying an independent sample t-test to the mean values of these two groups.

Table 1

Experimental Design

Population	Pre-tested	Sample	Control Group (Group 1)	Experimental Group (Group 2)	Treatment
130 Students	130 Students	60 Average Scoring Students	30 Students	30 Students	3 Months
Post-tested	-	-	30 Students	30 Students	Compared

Validation of the Research Tool

The research tool was tested and validated through two methods;

Expert opinion: The developed tool was presented before the institute's experts, language experts, and principals. Some extra statements were added according to the WhatsApp context, some were updated, and some were omitted.

Pilot testing: The tool was pilot tested on 20 students, excluding the sample. In this way, the reliability proved to be excellent, at .89.

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Reliability of the Tool

Students' scale possesses good reliability, i.e., Cronbach's alpha was 0.89; it was tested through data collection in a pilot study, and results were obtained through SPSS.

Results

Table 2

Factor Analysis (Descriptive)

Group Statistics					
Skills	groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Communicative Skills	Without WhatsApp	30	1.58	.506	.092
	WhatsApp	30	4.35	.578	.106
Reading Skills	Without WhatsApp	30	1.45	.337	.062
	WhatsApp	30	4.47	.516	.094
Writing Skills	Without WhatsApp	30	1.53	.346	.063
	WhatsApp	30	4.55	.589	.107

Table 2 states both groups' results; it was found that the mean value of the factor "communication skills" (4.35) was better in the experimental group, while the mean value (1.58) was poor in the control group. The mean value of the factor "reading skills" (4.47) was found to be better in the experimental group, while the mean value (1.45) was poor in the control group. The mean value of the factor "writing skills" (4.55) was found to be better in the experimental group when compared to the mean value (1.53) in the control group.

Table 3

Factor Analysis (Inferential)

Skills		**Independent Samples Test**						
		t-test for Equality of Means						
		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
							Lower	Upper
Communicative Skills	Equal variances assumed	-19.725	58	.000	-2.767	.140	-3.047	-2.486
	Equal variances not assumed	-19.725	56.986	.000	-2.767	.140	-3.048	-2.486
Reading Skills	Equal variances assumed	-26.808	58	.000	-3.017	.113	-3.242	-2.791
	Equal variances not assumed	-26.808	49.969	.000	-3.017	.113	-3.243	-2.791
Writing Skills	Equal variances assumed	-24.202	58	.000	-3.017	.125	-3.266	-2.767
	Equal variances not assumed	-24.202	46.879	.000	-3.017	.125	-3.267	-2.766

Table 3 describes both groups' results; it was found that the factor "communication skills" t-test was significant at (.000). The factor "reading skills" t-test was significant at (.000). The factor "writing skills" t-test was significant at (.000).

Discussion

Ho.1 WhatsApp played a significant role in improving L2 learners' communication skills at the intermediate level in D. G, Khan. The null hypothesis was rejected.

Ho.2 WhatsApp had a considerable impact, and the null hypothesis was rejected.

Ho.3 There were highly positive perceptions among teachers and students about WhatsApp teaching EFL learners' communicative skills in English classrooms at the intermediate level. The null hypothesis was rejected.

It was found that WhatsApp has a serious impact on improving L2 learners' communicative skills. Noorani and Salehi (2019), in a study titled "*The Impact of Using WhatsApp on Iranian Intermediate EFL Learners' Acquisition of Compound Nouns: Gender in Focus,*" concluded that WhatsApp played a vital role in learning compound words

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of L2, and that students had a positive attitude towards using WhatsApp to increase their academics marks and enhance communicative skills. Another study by Oye and Cisneros (2021) titled "*Effect of voice messages and short videos through WhatsApp application to enhance the communicative skills of EFL B1 learners between the age of 18 to 25 in an Ecuadorian University*" yielded similar results that students learn a lot through WhatsApp. Students increase their communicative skills with the help of voice messages and short videos. In research titled "*Whatsapp* [sic] *and an Academic Wordlist (Awl) Have A Synergistic Impact on L2 Vocabulary Learner,*" Gurmani et al. (2022) found that L2 learners profited from WhatsApp because WhatsApp provided help to access correct pronunciation. Students enhance their writing skills, reading skills, and communicative skills with the help of WhatsApp. WhatsApp and other social media Apps provide many opportunities to enhance student's communication skills and improve their English language. Ying et al. (2021), in research titled "*The Challenges of Learning English Skills and the Integration of Social Media and Video Conferencing Tools to Help ESL Learners Coping with the Challenges During COVID-19 Pandemic: A Literature Review,*" established that WhatsApp provided students with conference call capacities. Group sharing is effortless for teachers to communicate at once and share notes in a group, and everyone can download a copy of documents shared by teachers in WhatsApp groups. It also provides teachers with audio and video for better communication, and L2 learners enhance their communication skills through WhatsApp.

Conclusions

WhatsApp has a massive role in improving L2 learners' communicative skills at the intermediate level. Teachers deliver the lesson and tasks in WhatsApp groups at any time; it is the fastest mode of communication. When students have difficulty, they can ask in the WhatsApp group; the WhatsApp group is a moving classroom, facilitating time savings and reducing tension. Children can communicate in English in WhatsApp groups, which improves their English writing and reading skills. Children also talk via audio, which improves their speaking and listening skills. Teaching can be significantly improved by using WhatsApp, which is also a modern way of teaching.

It is suggested that teaching methods should be adapted to take advantage of modern technology; WhatsApp is a modern mobile application that provides fast transfer of Word and PDF files in addition to audio and video. Therefore, it is essential to make

WhatsApp groups mandatory for learning English communication skills at an intermediate level. It is recommended that teachers and content writers develop and share reading materials in soft form. The cell phone is a modern technology that can hold a whole book library in soft form. Print books are heavy and need light to be read, but a phone has its own light and no weight, so students can comfortably open books and notes on the phone and read comfortably. Therefore, WhatsApp technology should be promoted for the improvement of education.

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