

The Effect of Using WhatsApp Messenger in Learning English Language among University Students

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Abstract

This study aimed to find the effect of using "WhatsApp messenger" in learning English language among university students during the academic year 2015/2016. The participants of the study consisted of 40 first year university students. They were divided into two groups. The control group consisted of 21 students taught in a traditional way while the experimental group consisted of 19 students taught through using a combination between WhatsApp and traditional learning. The results of this study showed that there were differences in the achievements of the students in the experimental group and the control group. This difference was in favor of the experimental group. The differences between the two groups indicated that integrating the WhatsApp application in teaching English language improved the abilities of the learners of the experimental group.

Keywords: WhatsApp messenger, learning English language, university students, technology, mobile learning

1. Introduction

Technology is considered an important and effective tool in language learning nowadays. It plays a major role in facilitating teaching and learning. Technology namely includes computers, mobile phones (smart phones) and the internet. Using and integrating some technological devices may motivate students as well as teachers to do their traditional jobs in different and attractive ways. Prensky (2001) suggests that students these days are all native speakers of digital language of computers and the internet. They adopt new instructional technologies in their learning and constructing knowledge.

Such technological devices may make the educational environment differ from the traditional way that concentrates completely on the classroom in giving information to learners to a new way of learning outside the classroom. Besides, they provide learners and instructors the

opportunity to learn and communicate with others at anytime and anywhere (Crescent & Lee 2011).

One of these applications is "WhatsApp messenger". It is a mobile application that employs users' existing internet data plan to help them network with others (WhatsApp2010). It is used for sending and receiving messages, video and audio messages. It has spread mostly among young people who are students and use it as an entertainment and funny tool. They largely depend on it to know a lot of news around the world. Besides, they may help them in their learning through exchanging information needed in learning English language since it is used by most of the students. It provides access to learning resources when teachers and students are separated by time and distance (Honeyman & Miller, 1993).

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The researcher notes that students face a lot of problems in learning English language. Most students think that learning in the classroom is boring and makes them feel stressed. For this reason, the researcher tries to find out a new way of teaching English that helps students to make the process of learning exciting and to help them to continue what they learn inside the classroom through using their smart phones. In this study, the researcher attempts to find out the effect of using "WhatsApp messenger" in learning English Language among university students.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the effect of using WhatsApp messenger in learning English Language among university students. More specifically, it aims to compare between the students' improvements who are subjected only to traditional instruction in the classroom (control group) and the others who use WhatsApp messenger in their learning (experimental group).

1.3 Question of the Study

This study attempts to answer the following question:

What is the impact of using "WhatsApp messenger" in learning English Language among first year university students?

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study investigates the effect of using "WhatsApp messenger" in learning English Language among university students. It is hoped that the results of the study will help educators and policy makers to understand the effect of new technological devices in the process of learning and teaching. Teachers may also be empowered by these results to look for ways of promoting their own professional development which may improve their teaching practices and their students' achievements in English.

2. Review of Related Literature

Attewell (2005) carried out a study about the effect of mobile technologies on learning. Her participants were from three countries. She developed an SMS-based course to motivate learners to study foreign language through mobiles. The findings showed that the learners achieved a great improvement in reading comprehension. Besides, they revealed that learners' motivation had increased towards learning and using the target language.

Cavusand Ibrahim's (2008) investigated the use of wireless technologies in education with particular reference to the potential of learning new technical English language words using Short Message Service (SMS) text messaging. The researchers developed a system called (MOLT). They tested 45 first-year students. Results indicated that students enjoyed using their mobile phones to learn new words. They also revealed that using the mobile learning tool system was an effective educational tool that contributed to the success of students.

Rambe and Bere (2013) investigated mobile instant messaging to make alternative contexts for learners' collaboration in informal spaces in response to the very limited lecture contact time and the little students' participation. The researchers selected 163 third year Information Technology students at Central University of Technology. They used interviews and a questionnaire to collect data using WhatsApp as a learning and teaching tool in different contexts to achieve academic benefits. Results revealed that WhatsApp positively influence students' ability to participate and connect with peers online at any time. WhatsApp online discussion interaction forums, are flexible comparing to traditional lectures. The roles of the teachers have been changed to facilitators and the learners' roles have changed to generators, collaborators and group leaders.

Alfaki and Alharthy (2014) studied the impact of using social networks to promote learners' English language. They collected data through pre- and posttests. Two groups of 80 participants were selected. Results showed that learning through social networks was more effective than traditional learning which looked to the classrooms a place of gaining information. Besides, they revealed that collaboration was a useful learning strategy in improving one's foreign language.

Amry (2014) conducted a study to explore the impact of using WhatsApp mobile learning activities on the achievement and attitudes of online students using mobile devices at the university. The researcher selected 30 students to be in two groups (experimental and control). The e-learning process of the experimental group was depended on WhatsApp mobile learning activities whereas the e-learning process of the control group was only face-to-face learning in the classroom. A learning unit of the same course educational media was experimented with the experimental and control group. The t-test was used to compare the differences between the experimental and control groups. Results showed that there are differences, at 0.05 alpha level, in the achievements and attitudes of the experimental group compared with the control group in favor of experimental group.

AbdAlfattah (2015) conducted a study to determine the effectiveness of using a WhatsApp Messenger as one of mobile learning technique to develop students' writing skills. The

participants were 30 second year college students, English department from a private university in Saudi Arabia. They were divided into two groups (experimental and control). The experimental group used WhatsApp technology to develop their writing skills; whereas the control group was taught their writing skills through prescribed book. Results revealed that WhatsApp technique had positive effects on the experimental group comparing with control group.

Alhawiti (2015) did a study to look at the effect of the WhatsApp method of learning English for Specific Purposes (ESP) students' achievement at the community college of Tabuk. The sample consisted of 36 students from the Administration Science Department at Tabuk Community College (TCC). They were divided into two groups. The control group was taught by conventional methods, while the experimental group was taught through what's App method. Findings showed that the experimental group showed higher progress in ESP post-test comparing with control group.

Cakir, I. (2015) explored the current use of mobile phones in a foreign language teaching from prospective teachers' opinions and attitudes. The researcher presented the views of prospective English teachers on utilizing the mobile phone as an instructional tool for foreign language learning purposes in the educational and instructional setting of foreign language teaching classrooms. A questionnaire was given to 193 participants in an English Language Teaching (ELT) department. Results showed that most of the participants liked to use their mobiles as instructional tools to help them in learning English. The results also gave some insights as to how foreign language teachers could employ suitable approaches to make the process of learning and teaching English meaningful and communicative. They suggested that the participants would like to make use of mobile phones for educational purposes when they become teachers of English.

3. Design and Methodology

In this section, the researcher discusses the procedures used to conduct this study. He describes the study variables, population, sample, instrument, procedures and statistical analysis that are used.

3.1 Variables of the Study

This study consisted of the following variables:

(1) The independent variable: the method of teaching which has two levels: learning English through a combination method (WhatsApp and traditional learning) and traditional learning only.

(2) The dependent variable: the students' achievement.

3.2 Population of the Study

The population of the study consisted of all the first year students enrolling in Badr Community College at Taibah University during the first semester of the academic year 2015\2016. They were 68 students.

3.3 The Participants of the Study

The participants of the study consisted of 40 first year university students. They were divided into two groups. The control group consisted of 21 students taught in a traditional way while the experimental group consisted of 19 students taught through using a combination between WhatsApp and traditional learning. The participants were taught unit seven found in the English book called "*Q: Skills for Success Reading and Writing INTRO*". It talked about good and bad weather, weather and geography and carriers connected with people who enjoyed bad weather. The researcher arranged the questions of the pre and post-test according to the items of the unit and provided them to the participants.

3.4 Research Instruments

The researcher developed a test based on the seventh unit in the book "*Q: Skills for Success Reading and Writing INTRO*". The test was prepared by the researcher. He validated it and made it reliable. All groups were taught by the instructor of the course. The participants in all groups took a pre-test to determine their actual level before starting the experiment, and the same test was given as a post-test at the end of the experiment to evaluate the learners' achievement. The time interval between the pre-test and the post-test was (10) weeks to minimize the effect of the pre-test on the results of the experiment.

3.5 Reliability of the Instrument

The researcher followed test/retest technique in order to ensure the test reliability. He gave it to a pilot sample of (15) students outside the study sample in the same college from which the participants were chosen with a two-week period between the pre-test and the post-test. The reliability of the test was concluded using correlation coefficient and found to be 0.81 which was acceptable for the purposes of the research.

3.6 Validity of the Instrument

The researcher validated the instrument by consulting ten English language professors. He followed their recommendations, remarks and suggestions to produce the final version of the test.

3.7 Procedures of the Study

A course of eight 50-minute periods was planned to teach twelve different sections picked from the seventh unit found in the English book called "*Q: Skills for Success Reading and Writing INTRO*" that talked about good and bad weather, weather and geography and carriers connected with people who enjoyed bad weather. The researcher was the instructor to ensure authenticity and avoid unserious performance of any other English instructor. The course lasted a month, two periods a week.

At the beginning, the researcher talked about the internet and its use in learning English and how can learners benefit from the internet applications. After that, he talked about the importance of integrating internet applications in educational environment as a whole and in teaching and learning English in particular. There were two groups, a group taught through a

combination between the traditional and WhatsApp learning and a group that completely depended on the traditional learning inside the classroom. Then, he conducted a pre-test to explore their English level and collected data needed for further analysis. Sheets were corrected and marks were registered.

The researcher practiced teaching the selected sections through exchanging information and explanations inside classroom and further drills through WhatsApp messenger for the experimental group. For control group, he used traditional way in teaching which was completely depended on information, explanations, drills and discussions inside the classroom. At the end, a post-test was given to both groups to measure their improvements. Sheets were corrected and marks were scored. To assure objectivity, the researcher gave the pre-test and post-test sheets to four English instructors to correct them again. Same marks were found.

3.8 Equivalent Test

In order to determine the equivalency of the two groups on pre-test, the means and the standard deviation were computed, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviation of Students' Scores on the Pre-test

Method	Control group (Traditional method)	Experimental group (Combination method)
Mean	9.6190	9.4737
N	21	19
Pre-test		
Std. Deviation	3.49966	4.31236
Minimum	4.00	2.00
Maximum	16.00	16.00

Table 1 shows the means and standard deviations for both groups on the pre-test. The purpose of this action is to identify the level of each group. As table above shows, the means of the students' scores for both groups are very close. It is **(9.6190)** for control group and **(9.4737)** for experimental group. This result indicates that the levels of the students in both groups are approximately the same.

4. Data Analysis

To answer the question of this study, the researcher found the means and standard deviations through using SPSS program. He calculated students' scores on the pre and post tests for both groups (the experimental and control).

4.1 Findings of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of using "WhatsApp messenger" on learning English Language among university students. The researcher applied the pre /post tests for the two groups. Therefore, the data were analyzed through SPSS program to compute the means and standard deviations, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Means and Standard Deviations of Students' Scores on the Pre/posttests

Method		Pre-test	Post-test
Control group (Traditional method)	Mean	9.6190	10.0952
	N	21	21
	Std. Deviation	3.49966	2.79114
	Minimum	4.00	4.00
	Maximum	16.00	14.00
Experimental group (Combination method)	Mean	9.4737	13.4737
	N	19	19
	Std. Deviation	4.31236	4.10106
	Minimum	2.00	6.00
	Maximum	16.00	20.00

Table 2 shows the means and standard deviations of both groups on the pre\post-tests. It indicates that the achievement of the experimental group is better than the achievement of control group on the post-test. More specifically, the means of students' scores on the pre\post tests for the experimental group are 9.4737 (for pre-test)and 13.4737 (for post-test). Whereas the means of students' scores on the pre\post tests for the control group are 9.4737 (for pre-test) and 13.4737 (for post-test). It is clear from this result that the experimental group has an advantage comparing with the control group.

5. Discussion

The results of this study showed that there was a difference in the achievements of the students in the experimental group who studied unit seven through a combination method (WhatsApp and traditional) and the control group who studied the same unit through the traditional method (face to face). This difference was in favor of the experimental group. As shown in table 1, there were no differences between the experimental group and the control group on the pre- test. The scores were (9.4737) for the experimental group and (9.6190) for the control group. This result indicated that the students had the same level and background about the target unit before testing them. This also showed that both groups had approximately similar scores in the pre-test. So, the progress in the achievements of the students in the experimental group could be referred to the new method that employed in the teaching process. The mean of the experimental groups in the post-test was (13.4737), while it was (10.0952) for the control group, this indicated that the progress in the post -test for the experimental group is referred to the treatment. More specifically, integrating the WhatsApp application in teaching unit seven improved the abilities of the learners of the experimental group. This result confirmed that using WhatsApp messenger affected the learning process positively. The results of Alfaki, I. and Alharthy, K. (2014), Amry (2014), Cavus and Ibrahim's (2008), AbdAlfattah (2015), Alhawiti (2015), Cakir, I. (2015), Attewell (2005) confirmed the results to which the present study ends up.

One possible explanation for the positive effect of using WhatsApp in teaching English is that this way of learning may help learners as well as instructors to learn according to their own

pace. A lot of learners and some instructors may think that using and integrating technological tools might be a crime inside and outside the classroom and have negative effects on the learning process. When students have a chance to use this application and see explanations from their teacher and comments and questions from their classmates, they may participate in the discussion held by their teacher freely. This motivated them to gain a lot of information about the topic from different resources to prove that they are good students and have good information about the target topic of the discussion. As a result, their information about the topic could be deeper and better than information gain from face to face learning.

Another possible explanation is that some students may choose many ways to participate depending on their abilities, personalities and information. For example, they may use written, audio and/or video messages. This may help them in enhance discussion and make them eager to communicate with others according to the suitable way of participation. It is also makes students feel motivated, relaxed and funny when they learn. More specifically, students may find their mistakes as useful as teacher's explanations. These mistakes may lead them think deeply and freely to correct them.

6. Conclusion

The present study investigated the effect of using "WhatsApp messenger" in learning English Language among university students. The findings indicated that the experimental group that used a combination method (WhatsApp and traditional) was better than the control group which was learned through the traditional method (face to face). It can be concluded that English lessons can be learned more effectively through integrating technological applications such as WhatsApp messenger in learning English than the traditional methods.

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