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Usefulness of WhatsApp in the Process of English Language Learning among Undergraduate Students: A Perception Based Study

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Abstract

Technology has invaded the field of education and has become a major source of gaining and spreading knowledge. Among the various technological advancements currently facilitating teaching and learning in several educational disciplines, mobile technology is noteworthy. These days, almost all students keep a mobile phone and use its applications for different purposes. With the integration of technology in education, mobile devices are also being incorporated in numerous educational disciplines including language learning. This research was carried out to study students' perception of the impact of WhatsApp in learning English language. A questionnaire of 27 items was administered to find out the perception of 157 students about the impact of WhatsApp in English language learning. Students' access to internet was also explored to study the influence of the availability of internet on students' perception. The findings showed that students have a positive perception of the influence of WhatsApp in English language learning. They believe that using WhatsApp for language learning gives them confidence, improves their English language knowledge and enhances their four language skills. They also gave a positive response about the ubiquitous use of WhatsApp and their preference of using WhatsApp as compared to other teaching and learning pedagogies.

Keywords: Learning English language, mobile learning, technology, WhatsApp

Introduction

Education plays a significant role in achieving success in all fields of life. Over the last few decades, in the field of education a vital shift has taken place indicated by an increasing emphasis on learners and learning process rather than teacher and teaching methods. Technology has also manifested its remarkable influence in all spheres of life including education and facilitates teaching and learning. Solanki and Shyamleel (2012) and Pourhossein (2017) considered technology as a great help for the learner and they believed that it satisfies the visual and auditory senses

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of the learners. They are also of the view that learners can have access to a significant volume of information in technology assisted learning processes.

Similarly, the role of technology is considered influential in language learning and novice technological devices have made the language learning process different due to the fact that contrary to the conventional classroom learning, the process continues outside the classroom as well and involves excessive communication through these devices (Crescent & Lee, [2011](#)). These devices and social media applications such as WeChat, Twitter, WhatsApp, Line, Facebook etc. have increased the chances of learning past the classroom premises. Both teachers and students are provided with a platform to intermingle and to learn by themselves using various types of content, that is, audio, visual and textual content (Kumar, Lian, & Vasudevan, [2016](#))

WhatsApp is one of the most commonly used mobile applications and it efficiently facilitates the practice of sending and receiving messages including audio, visual and textual files. The application is easy to install in all sorts of smartphones (Ahmadi, [2017](#)).

At present, nearly all students own a smartphone or have access to one (Beger & Sinha, [2012](#)). Moreover, it is well known that undergraduates spend an extensive amount of time on social networking sites. They connect with fellow students and communicate with them their course contents, since the availability of Wi-Fi connections and cellular data has made it far cheaper to interact via social networking websites. This has limited the use of mobile calls and SMSs (Kumar, Lian, & Vasudevan, [2016](#)).

1.1. Objectives of the Study

The study intends to understand the perception of undergraduate students regarding the use of WhatsApp as a tool for learning English language. In this regard, the study has the following objectives:

- To identify the impact of WhatsApp in enhancing the knowledge of English language.
- To identify the students' level of confidence while using WhatsApp in and out of the classroom.
- To identify ubiquitous learning and teaching through WhatsApp.
- To identify the development of four language skills through WhatsApp.
- To identify the students' preference for using WhatsApp as compared to other teaching methodologies.

- To find the significance of the time (number of hours) access to Internet on the above mentioned five objectives.

1.2. Research Questions

The authors of this study are English language teachers who have been incorporating multimedia in their classrooms to engage students in several language learning activities. However, the excessive use of mobile phone applications among students evoked the researchers' interest to investigate the students' perception regarding the impact of WhatsApp in English language learning.

The research question is as follows,

- What is students' perception of the impact of WhatsApp in English language learning?

The above research question was studied on the basis of following categories,

- The impact of WhatsApp in enhancing the knowledge of English language.
- Respondents' level of confidence.
- Ubiquitous learning and teaching through WhatsApp.
- Development of four language skills through WhatsApp.
- Respondents' preference for using WhatsApp to other teaching methodologies.
- To find the significance of the time (number of hours) access to Internet on the above mentioned five objectives.

1.3. Significance of the Study

The current study can bring a positive change in the teaching methodology that may enhance the learning process. The effective use of WhatsApp can be incorporated in English language curriculum to facilitate language learning. The assimilation of the efficacious use of WhatsApp may help to increase the students' feeling of security and allow them to overcome their fear of using the English language.

2. Literature Review

As an active member of a social community, it is pertinent to learn language effectively. In order to achieve proficiency in communication, a learner needs to work on all major skills of English language including listening, speaking, reading and writing (Grabe & Stoller, [2002](#)).

The study revealed that lesson time is not enough to practice and develop full communicative competence; however, technology can assist by incorporating meaningful and contextualized language during interaction (Ahmadi, [2018](#)).

Peregory and Boyle ([2012](#)) studied the use of technology for improving learners' reading and writing. The findings showed that technological tools improve learners' reading and writing skills since these tools are faster, effective and user friendly as compared to the traditional methods of learning. Moreover, the study also revealed that the internet provides a convenient platform for learners; they have an easy access to the learning lessons.

Rambre and Bere ([2013](#)) carried out a research on the use of mobile instant messaging to deliver content to learners in informal spaces. The results showed that WhatsApp positively affects students' capability to connect and participate with their fellow students online, no matter whatever the time it may be.

Attewell ([2005](#)) carried out a research on the participants from three different countries to study the effects of mobile technology on learning a foreign language. She created an SMS course to motivate students to learn foreign language. The results showed that participants improved their reading comprehension through this course and their motivation towards language learning increased.

According to a study carried out by Kumar, Lian and Vasudevan ([2016](#)). WhatsApp Messenger is a free of cost messaging application that is used for sending and receiving instant messages between individuals and among groups. It can be used on different types of computers or with different software packages and works chiefly on android tablets and smartphones. The study depicted that WhatsApp is extensively used by undergraduate students in academic settings. Formerly, WhatsApp permitted ten members in a group, now this number has been increased. It renders teachers the facility to create WhatsApp groups for their respective classes. This study also explored the students' feelings regarding using WhatsApp as a language learning tool (Kumar, Lian, & Vasudevan, [2016](#))

'Words Up with WhatsApp' is the title of a research by Man ([2014](#)), who studied the use of instant messaging in consciousness raising academic vocabulary. The results depicted participants' acknowledgement for the use of instant messaging by helping them to know more about academic words.

Alsaleem ([2014](#)) carried out a research on the use of WhatsApp in English language journals to improve learners' writing vocabulary, word choice and speaking ability. The study concluded that the use of WhatsApp enhanced students' language skills.

Another study on the effect of WhatsApp on critique writing proficiency and perceptions towards learning indicated that as compared to the common instruction, the use of WhatsApp enhances critique writing proficiency.

AbdAlFattah (2015) studied WhatsApp application as a technique used to enhance students' writing skills. The findings portrayed that students who were taught English language through WhatsApp developed their writing skills more efficiently as compared to the ones who studied it through their prescribed book.

Maria (2016) studied the use of WhatsApp to enhance reading and writing skills at the undergraduate college level. The study revealed that the availability of internet on cell phones almost at all times is a motivating tool for learning L2. Moreover, this study depicted that the learners tend to improve their writing skills by using WhatsApp. It also revealed that regarding language learning, learners respond in a better manner when technology and internet are assimilated in their learning.

Similarly, Ibtehal Mahmoud Aburezwqand and Fawzi Fayeze Ishtaiwa (2013) studied the impact of WhatsApp on interaction in an Arabic language teaching course. The study depicted that WhatsApp provides a platform and offers its users a source for communicating and expressing their ideas and exchanging the information ubiquitously. Yet, some of the crucial challenges involving WhatsApp in learning remain the cost of internet, work load, interruption and students' lack of active participation in learning.

Alhawati (2015) carried out a research to study the effect of WhatsApp in learning English language at the community college of Tabuk. The findings of this study depicted a significant impact of WhatsApp on the participants. Moreover, this study showed that WhatsApp plays a pertinent role in the educational field including language learning.

3. Methodology

The current study was conducted to investigate students' perception regarding the use of WhatsApp to enhance their English language learning and skills. The data was collected through a survey questionnaire. This survey questionnaire was developed by consulting several previous studies and related questions were adapted and modified for the purpose of this study. In order to find out the accuracy of the constructed questionnaire, five language instructors working as assistant professors were consulted to check the appropriateness of the questionnaire.

The questionnaire consisted of twenty-seven items. Respondents were required to express their opinion by selecting the answers on the scale of 1-5 (5=Strongly Agree, 4=Agree, 3=Neutral, 2=Disagree and 1=Strongly Disagree).

The population of this study comprised undergraduate students and the participants were selected through random sampling. A total of 157 participants were selected for this study. The participants used WhatsApp for their English language course. The instructor created a WhatsApp group for each English language class that participated in this study to post and share the relevant material and to communicate with students outside the classroom. It was ensured that the students willingly participated in this study.

Participants' access to internet (number of hours per day) was also noted. This was done to draw a comparison between their response towards the impact of using WhatsApp in English language learning and their access to the internet.

4. Analysis

The main purpose behind using the 27-item questionnaire was to investigate students' perception regarding the impact of WhatsApp in English language learning. The questionnaire was designed to collect data regarding students' perception about the aspects of ubiquitous learning and teaching through WhatsApp, influence of WhatsApp on their level of confidence, their preference for using WhatsApp over other teaching pedagogies, development of four language skills through WhatsApp, and the effect of WhatsApp in enhancing their knowledge of English language. The data collected was analysed using SPSS version 20. The percentages of all the above mentioned categories were displayed through bar graphs including the significance of the time (number of hours) access to Internet on five objectives.

Figure 1 depicts the response of the participants regarding the impact of WhatsApp in enhancing their knowledge of English language. The results clearly depict that participants showed a positive attitude towards the influence of WhatsApp in developing their English language knowledge. 58% students strongly agreed that WhatsApp has helped them to enrich their vocabulary while responding to item 1. 56.7% participants agreed for item 8, where it was discussed that WhatsApp is helpful to learn from their fellow students. 54.1% participants strongly agreed with the idea that WhatsApp has helped them to think in English and has also helped them to remember what they have learned in their English course while responding to items 9 and 24, respectively. Whereas, 45.2% participants remained indecisive for item 5, which says that using voice note feature in WhatsApp to speak

English is easy. For items 8 and 9, only 1.9% participants strongly disagreed that WhatsApp has helped them to learn from their fellow students and have made them think in English.

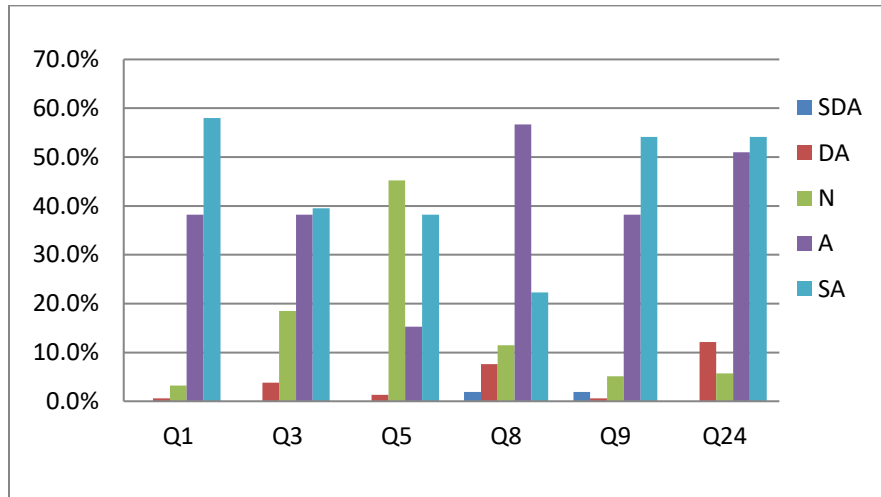


Figure 1. Bar graph showing students' perception of the impact of WhatsApp in enhancing the knowledge of English language

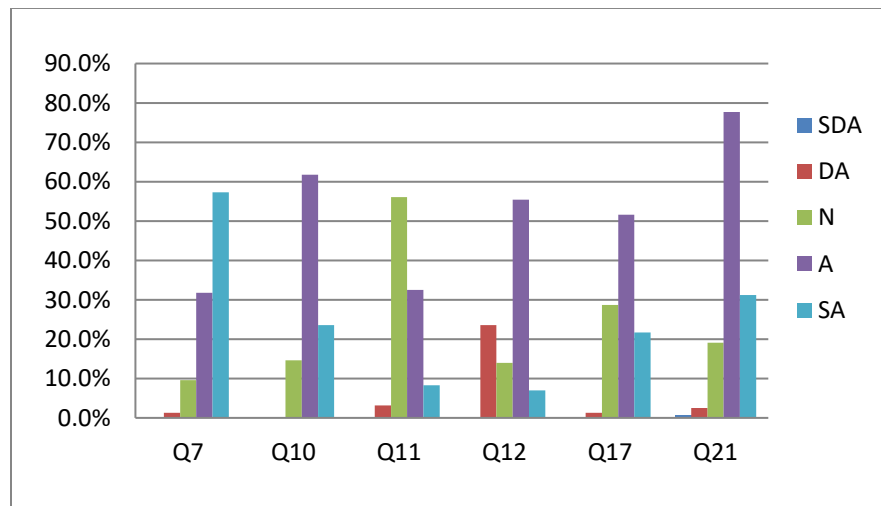


Figure 2. Bar graph showing students' perception of the impact of WhatsApp on their level of confidence regarding English language learning

The bar graph shows the impact of WhatsApp on students' level of confidence regarding English language learning. Six items from the administered questionnaire were included in this category. Overall, the results of the items included depict the participants' affirmative response.

According to the received responses, 57.3% participants strongly agreed that WhatsApp has created a platform for them to use English. 61.8% participants agreed for item 10 stating that the activities given by the instructor via WhatsApp improve their confidence to use English. 55.4% students agreed for item 12 stating that WhatsApp has developed their attentiveness towards learning the English language. That the use of Whatsapp has enhanced their ability of using English language was discussed in item 17 and 51.6% participants agreed on it. The response of the participants for item 21 was 77.7%, where they agreed that WhatsApp has helped them to overcome their fear of using English. However, 56.1% participants were indecisive for the item 11 stating that the use of WhatsApp has allowed them to take greater control over language learning.

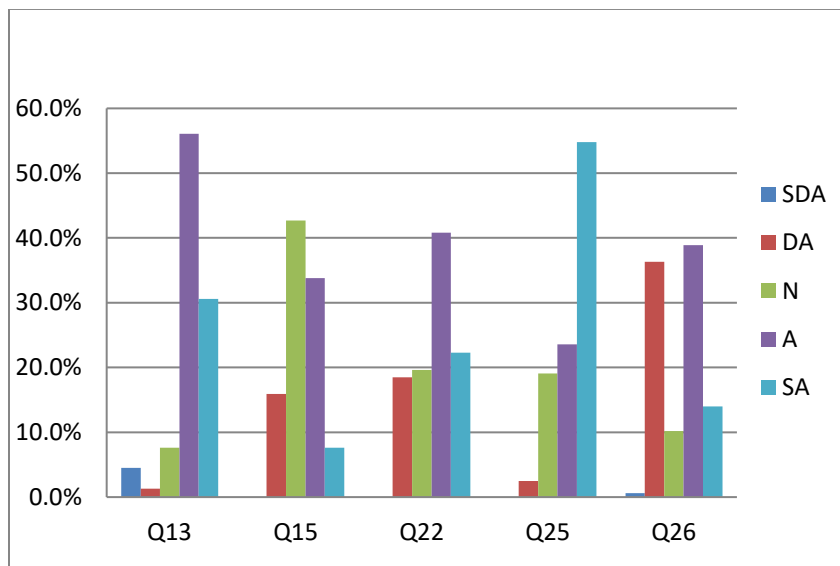


Figure 3. Bar graph showing students' perception of the impact of WhatsApp in ubiquitous English language learning and teaching

Ubiquitous learning can be associated with WhatsApp in a way that both facilitate the user anywhere anytime. Ubiquitous learning refers to exist or being everywhere. WhatsApp is a friendly application that can be used in a group and all members included can communicate and interact with each other, simultaneously.

For this particular aspect, 5 items were used to collect the data. Getting instant feedback from the instructor was a question asked in item 13 and 56.1% participants agreed on it. 40.8% participants agreed for item 22 stating that WhatsApp is a convenient source to get information from the instructor. 54.8% participants agreed that WhatsApp has increased their interaction with lectures and classmates to learn English while responding to item 25. However, only 38.9% agreed for item 26 that investigated the use of WhatsApp in promoting auto learning of English. For item 15, the participants of the current study remained indecisive, where they were inquired whether WhatsApp allows them to get instant information for learning English.

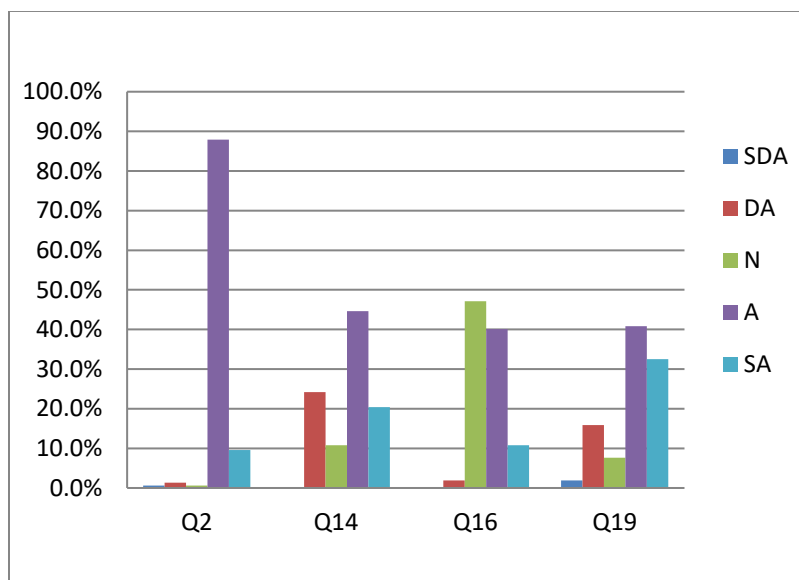


Figure 4. Bar graph showing students' perception of the impact of WhatsApp in learning four language skills

Figure 4.4 shows the responses of the participants regarding the impact of WhatsApp in learning the four language skills. Listening, speaking, reading and writing are the four major skills that are essential for language learning. Four items from the administered questionnaire were selected to investigate the participants' perception about the use of WhatsApp for learning these skills.

87.9% participants agreed for item 2 that WhatsApp has improved their listening skills. On the other hand, 44.6% and 40.8% participants agreed for items 14 and 19 respectively stating that WhatsApp has helped them to improve their

speaking and reading skills. Whereas, the impact of WhatsApp on writing skills was discussed in item 16 and 47.1% participants were indecisive about it.

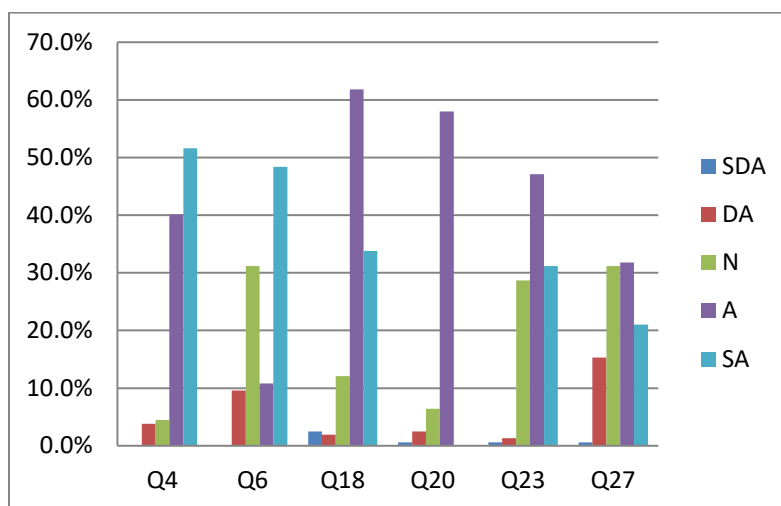


Figure 5. Bar graph showing students' perception of their preference of using WhatsApp

Finally, the administered questionnaire investigated the students' preference of using WhatsApp. 6 items from the questionnaire were selected for this particular purpose. 51.6% participants strongly agreed for item 4 stating that it is easy to download WhatsApp on their mobile phone. For item 6, where participants were asked to show their views about the use of WhatsApp as an easy application, 48.4% participants strongly agreed that through this application transferring and sharing PDF, MS Word, PowerPoint, Excel and media files becomes easier and facilitates English language learning. 61.8% participants agreed for item 18 stating that learning English through WhatsApp is fun. 58% participants agreed that all lecturers should use WhatsApp to support English language learning. Item 23 surveyed whether the participants consider the use of WhatsApp to learn English language beneficial and 47.1% participants gave their response in affirmative. For item 27, which surveyed the comparison of watching movies and the use of WhatsApp to learn English, 31.2% participants gave their response as neutral. For the same question, 31.8% participants preferred using WhatsApp on watching movies to learn English.

The following table shows Pearson coefficient of correlation of time (number of hours accessing the internet) with students' perception of the impact of WhatsApp as a tool in enhancing the knowledge of English language.

Table 1

Pearson Coefficient of Correlation of Time (Number of Hours Accessing the Internet) With Students' Perception of the Impact of Whatsapp as a Tool in Enhancing the Knowledge of English Language

		TIME	Category_1
TIME	Pearson Correlation	1	-.120
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.133
	N	157	157
Category_1	Pearson Correlation	-.120	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.133	
	N	157	157

The following table shows Pearson coefficient of correlation of time (number of hours accessing the internet) with students' perception of the impact of WhatsApp on their level of confidence regarding English language learning.

Table 2

Pearson Coefficient of Correlation of Time (Number of Hours Accessing the Internet) With Students' Perception of the Impact of Whatsapp on their Level of Confidence Regarding English Language Learning

		TIME	Category_2
TIME	Pearson Correlation	1	.110
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.172
	N	157	157
Category_2	Pearson Correlation	.110	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.172	
	N	157	157

The following table shows the Pearson coefficient of correlation of time (number of hours accessing the internet) with students' perception of WhatsApp in ubiquitous English language learning and teaching.

Table 3

Pearson Coefficient of Correlation of Time (Number of Hours Accessing the Internet) With Students' Perception of Whatsapp in Ubiquitous English Language Learning and Teaching

		TIME	Category_3
TIME	Pearson Correlation	1	.262**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.001
	N	157	157

		TIME	Category_3
Category_3	Pearson Correlation	.262**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	
	N	157	157

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

The following table shows Pearson coefficient of correlation of time (number of hours accessing the internet) with students' perception of the impact of WhatsApp in learning four language skills.

Table 4

Pearson Coefficient of Correlation of Time (Number of Hours Accessing the Internet) With Students' Perception of The Impact of Whatsapp in Learning Four Language Skills

		TIME	Category_4
TIME	Pearson Correlation	1	.068
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.400
	N	157	157
Category_4	Pearson Correlation	.068	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.400	
	N	157	157

The following table shows Pearson coefficient of correlation of time (number of hours accessing the internet) with students' perception of their preference for using WhatsApp.

Table 5

Pearson Coefficient of The Correlation of Time (Number of Hours Accessing the Internet) With Students' Perception of Their Preference for using Whatsapp

		TIME	Category_5
TIME	Pearson Correlation	1	-.179*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.025
	N	157	157
Category_5	Pearson Correlation	-.179*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.025	
	N	157	157

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

5. Discussion

The findings of the current study showed a positive attitude of students towards the use of WhatsApp for learning English. The graph of positivity towards the use of WhatsApp for the purpose of language learning highly advocates that this way of learning helps the learner to develop English language skills. Alhawati (2015) also studied the impact of WhatsApp in learning English language at the community college of Tabuk. The findings of his study showed a significant impact of WhatsApp on the participants. This study also portrayed that WhatsApp is playing a pertinent role in the educational field including language learning.

The use of WhatsApp within the classroom not only enhances the knowledge of the language but also remains a major source of improving the confidence of students as they get immediate feedback from their instructors while sharing knowledge with their classmates.

Students' perception clearly illustrated that the improvement of the four language skills is complimented by using WhatsApp, as it was presented by Attewell (2005) that the learners achieved considerable improvement in reading comprehension after using mobile technology. AbdAlFattah (2015) also proved that mobile learning techniques are helpful in developing students' writing skills. Similarly, the current study also supports the intervention of WhatsApp to enhance the four English language skills.

The findings of the current study suggest that this method is ubiquitous and supports the language learning process, as Rambre and Bere (2013) found in their study that mobile instant messaging and WhatsApp were favourable in communicating with students in informal spaces and to achieve academic benefits. According to the views of the participants of this study, WhatsApp connectivity gave them a platform to use English language and get instant help to improve it. Holistically, participants agreed on the friendly and convenient use of WhatsApp.

According to the traditional manner of teaching and learning, technological tools create a negative impact on students and their language learning process. However, the current study and several other studies such as Peregory and Boyle (2012), Kumar, Lian and Vasudevan (2016), Alsaleem (2014) and Maria (2016) have revealed that the use of WhatsApp can elevate students' language ability.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

As for now, it can be said affirmatively that undergrads have a positive notion of using WhatsApp in English language learning as it is convenient to use, easy to access and learning can be carried out in an interesting and fun manner through its

usage. Furthermore, WhatsApp helps students to gain knowledge and motivates them to interact with their fellows and instructors to resolve their queries. Students' attitude in this study clearly showed their preference for WhatsApp being a supportive, useful and an accessible application.

For future studies, it is recommended here to conduct a true experimental research with the intervention of a specially designed syllabus integrating WhatsApp. Moreover, the current study can be expanded by examining the performance of a larger number of participants. A larger sample size would also bring strength in the reliability of the findings.

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