A Study of EFL Students' Attitudes, Motivation and Anxiety towards WhatsApp as a Language Learning

2 authors:

Jamal Kaid Mohammed Ali
University of Bisha
13 PUBLICATIONS   11 CITATIONS

Wagdi Rashad Bin-Hady
Hadhramout University
11 PUBLICATIONS   6 CITATIONS

Some of the authors of this publication are also working on these related projects:

Project   SDT studies in Middle East View project

Project   Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) View project

A Study of EFL Students' Attitudes, Motivation and Anxiety towards WhatsApp as a Language Learning Tool

Jamal Kaid Mohammed Ali
Department of English, College of Arts, University of Bisha
Bisha, Saudi Arabia

Wagdi Rashad Ali Bin-Hady
Department of English, Faculty of Education Socotra,
Hadhramout University, Yemen

Abstract
This study aimed to explore the impact of WhatsApp on enhancing Saudi EFL students' language skills and areas. It also investigated EFL students' attitudes, motivation, and anxiety towards learning English via WhatsApp. The sample comprised 55 male and female students studying English at the College of Arts, University of Bisha, Saudi Arabia. A closed-ended questionnaire was used to collect quantitative data from the sample. The results revealed that WhatsApp has a positive impact on learning English as a foreign language with a score of 3.9 as an overall mean. Students' attitudes towards using WhatsApp for learning English scored 3.4, while the impact of WhatsApp on motivating EFL students to study English scored 3.6 in total. It was also found that WhatsApp reduced students' anxiety with a score of 3.8 as the overall mean. Based on these results, the researchers suggest that WhatsApp should be activated at all stages of English language learning and teaching.
Keywords: anxiety, attitudes, English language learning, mobile language learning (MLL), motivation, WhatsApp

1. Introduction

Technology has permeated every part of our lives and as everything has become digitalised, we find ourselves increasingly inseparable from our mobile phones. Technology participates in advancements in the field of education by enabling access to knowledge worldwide. WhatsApp as an English language learning tool has been studied in various contexts (Çam & Can, 2019; Hashemifardnia, Namaziandost, & Esfahani, 2018; La Hanisi, Risdiany, Utami, & Sulisworo, 2018). To the best of the researchers' knowledge, this is the first study to investigate the impact of WhatsApp on English language skills and areas, students' attitudes, motivation and anxiety from Saudi EFL learners' perspective. Thus, the current research explores the impact of WhatsApp learning on four variables, namely, English language skills and areas, students' attitudes, motivation, and anxiety. The findings will bring about new insights for teachers, learners, and methodologists to consider learning English via WhatsApp. The current study aims to:

1. Investigate the impact of WhatsApp on EFL language learning;
2. Identify the attitudes of EFL learners towards using WhatsApp as a learning tool;
3. Find out the impact of WhatsApp on EFL learners' motivations; and
4. Examine the impact of WhatsApp in EFL learners' anxiety.

2. Literature Review

Recently, mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) has entered the fields of English language teaching (ELT) and English as a foreign language (EFL). Familiarity with mobile language learning (MLL) is the result of the widespread availability of mobile phones and smartphones which are owned by nearly all students. Saritepeci, Duran, and Ermi, (2019: 1) report that WhatsApp offers some advantages, for example, it can motivate students to use foreign languages, although it sometimes provides students "only superficial information" (p. 1). Hamad (2017) confirms that students are addicted to mobile applications like Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, and Instagram. So the teachers' task is to engage students by using such applications in English language teaching and learning. The current study thus takes one mobile application, WhatsApp, and investigates its effects on Saudi EFL students at University of Bisha.

      WhatsApp is a social network application through which people can chat with each other, send pictures, share documents and create groups. The existing literature in the field of MLL and WhatsApp as learning tools is grouped in this study into three sub-categories: (a) WhatsApp and English language learning (listening, speaking, reading, writing, vocabulary, grammar and spelling); (b) WhatsApp's effects on EFL attitudes, motivation, and anxiety; and (c) WhatsApp in the Saudi context.

2.1 WhatsApp's effect on English language learning

The effects of WhatsApp on students' enhancement of English language learning have been explored by several studies (Ahmed, 2019; Andujar, 2016; Alsaleem, 2013; Asif, 2018; Nasr & Mustafa, 2018). In the Yemeni context, Ahmed (2019) studied the effect of WhatsApp on developing reading and writing skills of 20 EFL students at Aden University. The findings revealed that WhatsApp motivates students and provides them with opportunities to develop their reading and writing skills. Further to this, with regard to the effect of WhatsApp on language learning, an experimental study was conducted in the Iranian context to check the impact of WhatsApp on students' vocabulary acquisition. Eighty EFL students were grouped

into control and experimental groups. The control group was taught vocabulary face-to-face in a traditional classroom setting while the experimental group was taught vocabulary via a WhatsApp group. Mahdi (2018) found some evidence in the development of students' vocabulary as a result of their use of WhatsApp. Another study investigated the impact of WhatsApp on Jordanian students with special reference to gender. It revealed that females performed better at writing than males (Bataineh, Al-Hamad, & Al-Jamal, 2018). To summarise, all the studies presented above reported positive impacts of WhatsApp on students' English language learning.

2.2 WhatsApp's effect on students' attitudes, motivation and anxiety

Positive attitudes "played a vital role in adopting new technologies" (Mohsen & Shafeek, 2016, p.108). A study conducted at an Anatolian high school aimed to establish students' attitudes towards using WhatsApp outside their English course. The study found that using WhatsApp outside the English course had a significant effect on students' self-efficacy beliefs in reading and listening. Moreover, the interview revealed that students experienced emotions of happiness, pride, and joy from using the WhatsApp application in the experiment (Çam & Can, 2019). The correlation between WhatsApp and students' motivation in language learning/teaching has also been reviewed in many studies (Alamer, 2016; Bensalem, 2018; Han & Keskin, 2016; Khan, 2016). Motivation can be defined as 'the set of thoughts and feelings that create a person's interest to do something' (Alnakeeb, 2012:19). Nunan (2015) notes that there is a strong association between motivation and being a good language learner. A study in Pakistan which investigated reading motivation when using WhatsApp found that although it motivated the students' reading skills, neither teachers nor parents encouraged the use by students of this application (Khan, 2016).

     Anxiety is the psychological state of not being well. Johnson (2004) claims that anxiety 'cause(s) learners' block' (p. 50). Elyas and Rehman (2018) found that anxiety causes negative performance. The effects of WhatsApp on reducing foreign language students' speaking anxiety was also focused on by studies conducted by Han and Keskin (2016) and Shamsi, Altaha, and Gilanlioglu (2019). Both studies found that using WhatsApp activities reduced students' anxiety and such reduction in their anxiety improved students' language acquisition. Alrabai (2014a, 2014b) found a significant correlation between reducing students' anxiety and good performance.

2.3 WhatsApp in the Saudi context

Some studies conducted in the Saudi context have focused either on the efficacy of WhatsApp on English language learning/teaching or the effect of WhatsApp on students' motivation (Ahmed & Hassan, 2019; Çam & Can, 2019; Hamad, 2017; Nasr & Mustafa, 2018). A study examined the effects of Skype, YouTube, and WhatsApp on developing the speaking skills of Saudi EFL students. The findings revealed that such applications have a positive effect on improving students' oral communication skills (Nasr & Mustafa, 2018). Furthermore, Hamad (2017) conducted a study on first-year students at King Khalid University which revealed that WhatsApp enhanced students' language skills and developed their vocabulary. Another study aimed at exploring Saudi university students' perceptions about whether WhatsApp can be viewed as a learning platform. The study found that Saudi EFL students supported the view that WhatsApp is a useful learning platform (Alqahtani, Bhaskar, Elumalai, & Abumelha, 2018).

Finally, a study focused on the use of the WhatsApp application by students to develop their motivation in informal learning. The study found that students used WhatsApp as a sustainable learning tool outside classrooms even after they had completed a course (Alqasham, 2018). The four studies presented above showed that students have positive attitudes towards using WhatsApp as a learning tool and the application had good efficacy on the four language skills and areas. However, the above results were collected from various studies conducted at different times throughout the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The current study takes the variables from one sample at the same time.

3. Methodology
This section presents the methodology of the current research used by the researchers to answer the following questions:
1. What is the impact of WhatsApp on English language learning?
2. What are the attitudes of EFL students towards WhatsApp as a learning tool?
3. What is the impact of WhatsApp on students' motivation?
4. What is the impact of WhatsApp on students' anxiety?

3.1 Instrument
The researchers developed a closed-ended questionnaire to collect data from the sample. Questionnaires are defined as 'forms used in a survey design that participants in a study complete and return to the researcher' (Creswell, 2012, p. 626). The questionnaire consisted of 16 items with a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'. The questionnaire items were subcategorised into four groups, that is, English skills, attitudes, motivation, and anxiety. Both the instrument validity and reliability were checked. The validity was reviewed by three experts from applied linguistics, then modified according to suggestions made by them and finally piloted on ten students to check its clarity before administering to the students. Cronbach's alpha scored 0.87 which shows that the questionnaire was reliable. In order to avoid misinterpretation of the questionnaire items, the researchers translated the questionnaire into Arabic. The questionnaire was distributed via Google Formats by English teachers in the summer term of 2018. After granting permission, the Chairman of the English Department sent the link to the teachers' telegram group to share the questionnaire link with English major students.

3.2 Participants
The study sample consisted of 15 males and 40 females Saudi EFL students studying English at University of Bisha. All the participants have smartphones and use WhatsApp for daily communication as well as for learning purposes. All the respondents were final year students. Their English is proficient and they were members of many WhatsApp course groups. They also have sufficient experience using Blackboard as almost all English teachers in the Department of English teach via Blackboard, either as blended learning or supportive learning. This indicates that they are familiar with e-learning and their views are, to some extent, reliable.

4. Data Analysis
4.1 Description of the variables
The descriptive statistics for the main study variables are summarised in Table 1. A scale is considered acceptable if Cronbach's alpha is 0.70 or higher. The overall Cronbach's alpha

measured 0.87 for the current study. Note that the Likert scales applied to this study ranged from 1=Strongly Disagree to 5= Strongly Agree, so a value above 3 represents a positive attitude while, conversely, a value below 3 represents a negative attitude.

Table 1. *Descriptive Statistics for the Study Variables (N=55)*

Variable	Item n	Range	Mean	SD
Overall	16	2.17–4.83	3.90	0.57
English Language Learning	6	2.17–2.83	3.90	0.58
Attitude	3	1.33–3.67	3.49	0.78
Motivation	3	2.00–5.00	3.65	0.76
Anxiety	4	2.00–5.00	3.82	0.69

4.2 Differences between male and female respondents on the study variables

As can be seen in the series of t-tests reported in Table 2, there were no significant differences between males and females overall or on any of the four scales with regard to their opinions of WhatsApp. This was consistent across the overall scale as well as for each of the four subscales. Note that the ratings for both males and females on the overall scale as well as all the four subscales were favourable (greater than 3).

Table 2. *Differences between Male and Female on the Main Study Variables (t-test, N=55)*

Variable	Home	n	Mean	Variance	T	P
Overall	Female	40	3.93	0.77	0.36	0.72
	Male	15	3.83	0.92		
English Skills	Female	40	3.91	0.31	0.23	0.82
	Male	15	3.87	0.39		
Attitude	Female	40	3.51	0.53	0.27	0.79
	Male	15	3.44	0.85		
Motivation	Female	40	3.62	0.56	-0.39	0.70
	Male	15	3.71	0.54		
Anxiety	Female	40	3.88	0.33	0.93	0.36
	Male	15	3.68	0.86		

4.3 Findings

The mean scores and standard deviations were used to answer the research questions presented in this paper. The first research question, 'What is the impact of WhatsApp on English language learning?' aimed to elicit the impact of WhatsApp on the four skills of English language

(listening, speaking, reading and writing) and the language areas (vocabulary and grammar). To answer this question, six items in the questionnaire were set. Every item focused on one skill or area. Table 3 shows that there was a positive impact on the majority of students regarding the influence of WhatsApp on the development of their language skills and areas with an overall mean score of 3.8, with 0.95 as a standard deviation.

Table 3. *WhatsApp Impact on Language Learning*

English Language Learning	Mean	Standard Deviation
1. WhatsApp helps me improve my listening skills	3.63	1.03
2. WhatsApp helps me improve my speaking skills	3.78	1.02
3. WhatsApp helps me improve my reading skills	4.02	0.9
4. WhatsApp helps me improve my writing skills	3.92	0.91
5. WhatsApp helps me acquire the right vocabulary	4.25	0.8
6. WhatsApp helps me improve my English grammar	3.76	1.05
Total	3.893333	0.951667

The second research question presented in this paper is, 'What are the attitudes of EFL students towards WhatsApp as a learning tool?' The questionnaire items that answer this research question are presented along with mean scores and standard deviations. Table 4 lists three items aimed at answering this research question. Students reported a medium positive attitude towards using WhatsApp as a learning tool with a total mean score of 3.4 and standard deviation of 1.06.

Table 4. *Students' Attitudes towards WhatsApp as a Learning Tool*

Attitude	Means	Standard Deviation
7. WhatsApp is a good addition to learning English language	3.86	0.89
8. I prefer WhatsApp learning to classroom learning	2.78	1.43
9. Learning via WhatsApp is easy	3.82	0.86
Total	3.486667	1.06

The third research question in this study is, 'What is the impact of WhatsApp on students' motivation?' To answer this research question, three items were included in the questionnaire. Table 5 shows that WhatsApp has a high impact on students' motivation with an overall mean score of 3.6 and standard deviation of 0.95.

Table 5. *WhatsApp Impact on Students' Motivations*

Motivation	Means	Standard Deviation
10. WhatsApp motivates me to learn English effectively	3.7	1.04
11. I like learning via WhatsApp	3.51	1.03
12. I actively participate in WhatsApp group discussions	3.75	0.8
Total	3.65333	0.956667

The last research question presented in this study is 'What is the impact of WhatsApp on students' anxiety?' To answer this research question, four items in the questionnaire were included. Table 6 shows that WhatsApp reduces the anxiety suffered by students as a result of learning the language. The mean score of the overall items on anxiety is 3.8 and a standard deviation of 1, which is considered a high positive impact.

Table 6. *WhatsApp Impact on Reducing Students' Anxiety*

Anxiety	Mean	Standard Deviation
13. WhatsApp helps me to communicate with my teacher comfortably	4.11	0.79
14. I feel confident when I chat with my teacher via WhatsApp	4.18	0.86
15. I don't feel nervous while using WhatsApp as a learning tool	3.8	1
16. I don't fear making mistakes during communication via a learning group	3.2	1.37
Total	3.8225	1.005

5. Discussion

This section presents the discussion of the findings. The first variable is the impact of WhatsApp on language skills and areas. The study found that WhatsApp has a positive impact on the four language skills and areas with a mean score of 3.9. This finding is in line with Alghamdy (2019), who found that the experimental group who were taught via WhatsApp scored higher in the four language skills than the controlled group exposed to traditional teaching. Similarly, Ahmed (2019) found that WhatsApp played an important role in motivating students in their reading and writing skills. Furthermore, regarding the language areas, the findings of the ongoing study are supported by Hashemifardnia et al. (2018), who found that the experimental group taught via WhatsApp scored higher than the control group who had been taught traditionally. The second variable presented is the impact of WhatsApp on students' attitudes. The study revealed that using WhatsApp as a learning tool had a positive attitude with a mean score of 3.49. This finding is confirmed by Hanisi et al. (2018) who found that students integrating WhatsApp in their formal learning had positive attitudes because of its easy use and enjoyment for the students. Furthermore, the impact of WhatsApp on motivating students to use the language and develop their skills is the third variable of this study. The findings revealed that WhatsApp has a positive impact on motivating students to use the language with a mean score of 3.6 which is considered a high rate. Khan (2016) reported that even though its use was not encouraged by others, WhatsApp motivates students in reading skills. Reducing students' anxiety is the fourth variable in this study. The findings showed that WhatsApp had a positive impact on reducing students' anxiety. Han and Keskin (2016) found that using WhatsApp reduced students' anxiety and improved their acquisition of the language. Similarly, Shamsi et al. (2019) found that students' use of mobiles reduced their anxiety and encouraged them to talk with others.

6. Conclusion

This study investigated the WhatsApp application as a mobile language learning tool. Such applications can invade our lives in various dimensions. Students' addiction to such applications can be skilfully directed towards enhancing their competence in English language. The current study found that WhatsApp had a positive impact on learning English skills and areas (listening, speaking, reading, writing, vocabulary, spelling, and grammar). This indicates that EFL students positively perceive WhatsApp as a good language learning tool. This study also showed that

WhatsApp motivated students to use the language and reduced their anxiety. The study recommends the integration of WhatsApp and mobile learning in all stages of education generally and in the field of English language learning/teaching in particular. The researchers recommend that English language teachers should activate mobile learning in English language teaching because of the high positive attitudes shown by the students.

About the Authors:

Jamal Kaid Mohammed Ali is currently an Assistant Professor of Applied Linguistics at University of Bisha, Saudi Arabia. He received PhD degree in Applied Linguistics in 2012 from Aligarh Muslim University, India. His research interests include Texting, Psycholinguistics, Sociolinguistics, and Discourse Analysis. He is an e-learning and Quality Matters Reviewer. He got certificates from Quality Matters (QM) on Applying the Quality Matter Rubric, Peer Reviewer Course and Master Reviewer Certification. https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3079-5580

Wagdi Rashad Ali Bin-Hady is currently an Assistant Professor of Applied Linguistics at Hadhramout University, Faculty of Education Socotra and the Head of the English Department, Yemen. He received his PhD degree in English in 2016 from Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University, India. His research interests include communicative competence, novice teachers, cooperative learning, ICT-based informal learning, language learning strategies, task-based and process-genre approaches. He is also interested in quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods research design. He is also a reviewer in some respected international journals**.** https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4116-113X

References

Ahmed, S. T. S. (2019). Chat and learn: Effectiveness of using WhatsApp as a pedagogical tool to enhance EFL learners reading and writing skills. *International Journal of English Language and Literature Studies, 8*(2), 61-68.

Ahmed, S., & Hassan, A. (2019). The impact of WhatsApp on learners' achievement: A case study of English language majors at King Khalid University. *International Journal of English Language Education*, 6(2), 69–81. http://doi.org/10.5296/ijele.v6i2.13743

Alamer, A. (2016). The role of EFL learners' motivation in mobile language learning. *Asia Pacific Institute of Advanced Research (APIAR)*, 2(1).

Alghamdy, R. Z. (2019). The impact of mobile language learning (WhatsApp) on EFL context: Outcomes and perceptions. *International Journal of English Linguistics*, 9(2), 128–135. http://doi.org/10.5539/ijel.v9n2p128

Alnakeeb, A. M. A. (2012). *A study of Yemeni English teachers' classroom practices and approaches with special reference to secondary schools in Laboos*. Unpublished PhD thesis. University of Pune.

Alqahtani, M., Bhaskar, V., Elumalai, K. V., & Abumelha, M. A. (2018). WhatsApp: An online platform for university-level English language education. *Arab World English Journal (AWEJ) Volume*, 9(4), 108–121. http://doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol9no4.7

Alqasham, F. H. (2018). Exploring Saudi EFL learners' agency towards the use of WhatsApp for English learning at Qassim University. *International Journal of Linguistics*, 10(6), 10–43. http://doi.org/10.5296/ijl.v10i6.13857

Alrabai, F. (2014a). *Reducing Language Anxiety & Promoting Learner Motivation: A Practical Guide for Teachers of English as a Foreign Language*. Lulu Publishing Services.

Alrabai, F. (2014b). The influence of teachers' anxiety-reducing strategies on learners' foreign language anxiety. *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching*, *0*(0), 1–28. http://doi.org/10.1080/17501229.2014.890203

Andujar, A. (2016). Benefits of mobile instant messaging to develop ESL writing. *System*, *62*, 63–76. http://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2016.07.004

Alsaleem, B. I. A. (2013). The effect of "WhatsApp" electronic dialogue journaling on improving writing vocabulary word choice and voice of EFL undergraduate Saudi students. *Arab World English Journal*, *4*(3), 213-225.

Asif, M. (2018). Mobile assisted language learning (MALL): Use of Whatsapp as an effective tool to support ESL/EFL writing skill. *Remarking an Analisation*, *3*(9), 112–114.

Bataineh, R. F., Al-Hamad, R. F., & Al-Jamal, D. A. (2018). Gender and EFL writing: Does WhatsApp make a difference? *Teaching English with Technology*, *18*(2), 21–33.

Bensalem, E. (2018). The impact of WhatsApp on EFL students' vocabulary learning. *Arab World English Journal*, *9*(1), 23–38.

Çam, B., & Can, Y. (2019). The Effect of "WhatsApp" usage on the attitudes of students toward English self-efficacy and English courses in foreign language education outside the school. *International Electronic Journal of Elementary Education*, *11*(3), 247–256. http://doi.org/10.26822/iejee.2019349249

Creswell, J. W. (2012). *Educational Research: Planning, Conducting, and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research* (4th ed.). Boston: Pearson Education.

Elyas, T. and Rehman, A. A. (2018). Test Anxiety. In The TESOL Encyclopedia of English Language Teaching (eds J. I. Liontas, T. International Association and M. DelliCarpini). DOI:10.1002/9781118784235.eelt0320

Hamad, M. M. (2017). Using WhatsApp to enhance students' learning of English language "Experience to Share." *Higher Education Studies*, *7*(4), 74–87. http://doi.org/10.5539/hes.v7n4p74

Han, T., & Keskin, F. (2016). Using a mobile application (WhatsApp) to reduce EFL speaking anxiety. *Gist Education and Learning Research Journal*, *12*, 29–50.

Hashemifardnia, A., Namaziandost, E., & Esfahani, F. R. (2018). The effect of using WhatsApp on Iranian EFL learners' vocabulary learning. *Journal of Applied Linguistics and Language Research*, *5*(3), 256–267.

Johnson, M. (2004). *A Philosophy of Second Language Acquisition*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Khan, T. J. (2016). Motivation for reading English as a second language (ESL) through the use of WhatsApp among graduate students of government college Township, Lahore (Pakistan). *International Journal of Pure and Applied Researches*, *1*(May), 220–231.

La Hanisi, A., Risdiany, R., Dwi Utami, Y., & Sulisworo, D. (2018). The use of WhatsApp in collaborative learning to improve English teaching and learning process. *International Journal of Research Studies in Educational Technology*, *7*(1), 29–35. http://doi.org/10.5861/ijrset.2018.3004

Mahdi, H. S. (2018). Effectiveness of mobile devices on vocabulary learning: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Educational Computing Research*, *56*(1), 134-154.

Mohsen, M. A., & Shafeeq, C. P. (2014). EFL Teachers' Perceptions on Blackboard Applications. *English Language Teaching*, *7*(11), 108-118.

Nasr, E., & Mustafa, E. (2018). The impact of YouTube, Skype and WhatsApp in improving EFL learners' speaking skill. *International Journal of Contemporary Applied Researches,*

5(5), 18–31.

Nunan, D. (2015). Teaching English to Speakers of other Languages. New York: Routledge.

Saritepeci, M., Duran, A., & Ermi, F. (2019). A new trend in preparing for foreign language exam (YDS) in Turkey: Case of WhatsApp in mobile learning. *Education and Information Technologies*. http://doi.org/doi.org/10.1007/s10639-019-09893-4 A

Shamsi, A. F., Altaha, S., & Gilanlioglu, I. (2019). The role of M-Learning in decreasing speaking anxiety for EFL Learners. *International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Translation (IJLLT), 2*(1). http://doi.org/10.32996/ijllt.2019.2.1.34