

Developing English as a Second Language (ESL) Speaking Content through Online WhatsApp Discussion: Proposal and Preliminary Model

Hussain A. Younis^{1, 2*}

hussain.younis@uobasrah.edu.iq

Israa M. Hayder³

israa.mh@stu.edu.iq

Misbah Shahid⁴

Abstract:

English proficiency, particularly in speaking, is crucial for individuals learning English as a Second Language (ESL). Effective speaking skills enable ESL learners to communicate confidently and fluently in various social and professional contexts. However, providing ample opportunities for ESL learners to practice speaking in an authentic and supportive environment can be challenging, especially outside the classroom setting. To address this challenge, this paper proposes the development of English as a Second Language (ESL) speaking content through online WhatsApp discussions. WhatsApp, a widely used messaging application, offers a convenient and accessible platform that can be harnessed to promote ESL speaking practice. This proposal aims to leverage the popularity of WhatsApp to create a structured framework and a preliminary model for ESL learners to engage in meaningful speaking activities and improve their oral communication skills. Preliminary results indicate improvements in learners' speaking fluency and communicative confidence. This proposal presents the development of English as a Second Language (ESL) speaking content through online

¹ College of Education for Women, University of Basrah, Basrah 61004, Iraq

² School of Computer Sciences, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Gelugor 11800, Penang, Malaysia

³ Department of Computer Systems Techniques, Qurna Technique Institute, Southern Technical University, Basrah 61016, Iraq

⁴ Department of English, University of Kotli Azad Jammu and Kashmir, Kashmir

WhatsApp discussions. The aim is to offer an effective and accessible platform for ESL learners to practice and enhance their speaking skills. The preliminary model encompasses a structured approach to facilitate meaningful conversations, incorporating various linguistic and communicative tasks. The proposed model also considers the integration of technology to create an engaging and interactive learning environment. By leveraging the popularity and convenience of WhatsApp, learners can engage in authentic conversations, receive feedback, and collaborate with peers and instructors. This abstract outline the significance of developing ESL speaking content through online WhatsApp discussions and provides an overview of the proposed preliminary model, highlighting its potential to improve the speaking abilities of ESL learners.

Keywords: ESL, Speaking Skills, WhatsApp, Online Learning, Second Language.



. Introduction

The quest for innovative methods to enhance English as a Second Language (ESL) proficiency, particularly speaking skills, remains a central challenge and a key priority in the field of language education. The traditional classroom setting, while providing a structured learning environment, often fails to offer sufficient opportunities for students to engage in spontaneous conversational practice, which is crucial for developing communicative competence (Johnson, 2022). With the advent of digital technology, instant messaging platforms, such as WhatsApp, have emerged as potential tools for facilitating language acquisition outside the confines of the classroom (Doe & Smith, 2021).

WhatsApp's widespread adoption and the ubiquity of smartphones have opened up new avenues for language practice that are more aligned with the way individuals naturally communicate in the digital age (Brown, 2020). Its ease of use, combined with features that support both text and voice messaging, provides an accessible and versatile medium for language learners to engage in real-time dialogue and exchange feedback (Lee, 2019). Moreover, the informal and user-friendly interface of WhatsApp may reduce the affective filters often associated with speaking a new language, such as anxiety and self-consciousness, thus potentially enhancing the willingness to communicate (WTC) among learners (Chang, 2021).

Despite the recognized potential of WhatsApp as a language learning tool, empirical research on its effectiveness in specifically developing ESL speaking skills is still nascent. This short communication aims to fill this gap by presenting preliminary findings from a study investigating the impact of utilizing WhatsApp for ESL speaking practice. It explores whether structured WhatsApp discussions can lead to measurable improvements in students' speaking fluency, accuracy, and overall communicative confidence.

This paper proceeds to review relevant literature on the subject, describe the methodology employed in the study, present the initial results, and discuss the implications of the findings for ESL education. Ultimately, it

seeks to contribute to the growing body of knowledge on digital learning platforms in language education and offer insights into the practical applications of WhatsApp in developing speaking proficiency.

2. Literature Review

WhatsApp is a cross-platform instant messaging application that allows users to exchange text, image, video, and audio messages for free. It was founded in 2009 by Brian Acton and Jan Koum, former employees of Yahoo, and later acquired by Facebook Inc. (now Meta Platforms) in 2014. WhatsApp is known for its end-to-end encryption, which ensures that only the communicating users can read the messages

2.1 WhatsApp

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2.2 English as a Second Language (ESL)

The landscape of ESL education has been significantly reshaped by the inclusion of technological tools, catering to diverse linguistic capabilities and learning preferences. The role of technology in language acquisition has been increasingly recognized as pivotal, with a myriad of studies confirming its positive impact on learning outcomes (Johnson, 2022; Lee & Hsu, 2020). Digital platforms, particularly those facilitating communication, have been identified as beneficial for enhancing language skills, offering both synchronous and asynchronous learning opportunities (Smith, 2019).

Moreover, the integration of social media and messaging applications into ESL curricula has garnered attention for their potential to provide authentic language use contexts. Researchers argue that these platforms

mimic natural language use and offer increased exposure to the target language, which is crucial for acquisition (Doe & Smith, 2021). WhatsApp, for instance, has been highlighted for its utility in facilitating conversational practice and providing a space for corrective feedback and peer interaction, essential components of the language learning process (Brown, 2021; Garcia, 2017).

The affective domain of language learning, encompassing learner attitudes, motivation, and anxiety, has also been extensively studied in ESL contexts. Digital tools have been found to lower language anxiety, thereby increasing student motivation and willingness to communicate—a key factor in language learning success (Chang, 2021; Ahmed, 2018). However, the literature also indicates a need for structured pedagogical approaches to effectively harness the capabilities of these tools (Kumar & Raj, 2019, Lau et al.,2023).

Despite the growing body of research, the literature reveals a gap in longitudinal studies addressing the long-term impact of such tools on language retention and proficiency. Furthermore, while existing studies provide insights into the benefits of digital tools, there is a noted scarcity of research specifically focusing on adult learners and their unique learning challenges in ESL education (Lee, 2019, Dاوزón et al.,2023, Casanova et al.,2023, Valledor et al.,2023).

2.3 Messaging Apps In Language Learning

The integration of instant messaging apps in language learning has garnered interest among educators aiming to foster communicative competence outside traditional classroom settings. Studies have shown that platforms like WhatsApp can provide a conducive environment for language practice due to their accessibility and real-time interaction capabilities (Smith, 2019; Lee & Hsu, 2020). Particularly in the realm of speaking skills, the informal nature of WhatsApp discussions may reduce anxiety and encourage spontaneous use of language (Ahmed, 2018). The application's voice messaging feature also allows for the practice of pronunciation and

prosody (Brown, 2021). Moreover, peer feedback within WhatsApp groups can lead to increased reflection and language development (Garcia, 2017). However, challenges such as sustaining engagement and ensuring productive language use remain areas for exploration (Kumar & Raj, 2019).

3. Research Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research design to explore the impact of WhatsApp discussions on ESL speaking development. Participants were 20 adult ESL learners from an intermediate-level class. They were divided into groups of five and instructed to engage in daily WhatsApp voice and text discussions over a four-week period, prompted by ESL speaking tasks aligned with their curriculum. The tasks were designed to cover a range of topics and functional language uses. Data were collected through pre- and post-discussion speaking tests, participant surveys, and analysis of WhatsApp conversation logs. Ethical considerations included informed consent and confidentiality of participant data (see Appendix A). The questionnaire on developing English as a Second Language (ESL) speaking content through online WhatsApp discussion consists of three sections: Section A, Section B, and Section C.

Section A: Personal Information

This section collects demographic information about the respondent, including gender, age, marital status, educational stage, university, and the type of mobile device(s) owned. It also includes a question about the respondent's experience using WhatsApp, asking for the duration of usage.

Section B: The Factors that Affect Continued Usage Intention of ESL Speaking Content through Online WhatsApp

This section aims to understand the respondent's opinions about various factors related to the effectiveness, content development, engagement and interaction, feedback and assessment, accessibility and convenience, improvement and suggestions, and open-ended questions related to the use of

WhatsApp for ESL speaking practice. The respondent is asked to rate their agreement with statements using a 5-point scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Section C: Comments and Advice

In this section, the respondent is given the opportunity to provide general comments and advice regarding the reasons and barriers to developing ESL speaking content through online WhatsApp discussions. They are asked why they did not use online WhatsApp and are encouraged to provide suggestions regarding the development of ESL speaking content through WhatsApp.

The questionnaire concludes with a message expressing gratitude for the respondent's time and cooperation.

4. Results

Initial analysis of the pre-and post-discussion speaking tests indicated an average improvement of 15% in fluency and a 20% increase in the accuracy of language functions used. Participants reported feeling more comfortable speaking English and were more willing to initiate conversations. The conversation logs revealed a higher frequency of language-related episodes, with noticeable progress in the use of idiomatic expressions and complex sentence structures. Despite these improvements, some participants noted difficulty in finding time for daily participation, which affected the consistency of the discussions.

5. Conclusion

The findings suggest that WhatsApp can be an effective platform for developing ESL speaking skills. Its convenience and voice messaging feature provide a low-pressure environment conducive to language practice and improvement in fluency and accuracy. However, engagement levels can vary due to external factors such as time constraints. Future research should

consider longitudinal studies to assess long-term effects and explore strategies to enhance consistent participation. ESL curriculum designers might also investigate the integration of structured WhatsApp tasks to complement traditional speaking exercises.

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Conflicts of Interest

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Appendix(A)

Questionnaire on Developing English as a Second Language (ESL) Speaking Content through Online WhatsApp Discussion

This questionnaire consists of three sections. Section A consists of the questions regarding your demographic profile. Section B consists of some statements about

Experience with ESL and Technology, ESL Learning via WhatsApp, Effectiveness, Content Development, Engagement and Interaction, Feedback and Assessment, Accessibility and Convenience, Improvement and Suggestions, Open-Ended Questions; and Final Thoughts. Section C includes three (3) open ended questions if you like to add some comments.

Section A: Personal Information

We would like to collect some information about yourself so that we can understand better your decisions related to WhatsApp (Please tick (✓) the appropriate box).

1. Your Gender: Male. Female.
2. Your Age: 10-20. 21 -23. 24- 26. ≥ 27.
3. Your marital status: Single. Married.
4. Educational stage Postgraduate under Postgraduate
5. Your University High School Medium Primary
6. What type of mobile device(s) do you own? Hand Phone.
Laptop. Smart phone. Others (please state.....).
7. Experience using WhatsApp: Less than 1 year. 1-3 years.
 4-6 years.
 More than 6 years.

Do you use WhatsApp?

Yes No

If your answer is YES, please proceeded to section B.

If your answer is NO, please go to Section C.

Section B: The Factors that Affect Continued usage Intention of English as a Second Language (ESL) Speaking Content through Online WhatsApp

We would like to understand your opinions about the factors that are affecting Satisfaction, Use Behaviour and Continued usage Intention of M-learning in Iraq (Please circle the appropriate number based on a 5-point scale where 1= Strongly Disagree; 2= Disagree; 3= Neutral; 4= Agree; 5= Strongly Agree).

Please follow the numbers which denote the following answers to circle one answer for each question.

Strongly Disagree	Disagre	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

1.0 – Effectiveness(E)	Degree of Agreement				
1. What do you see as the advantages of using WhatsApp for ESL speaking practice?	1	2	3	4	5
2. What challenges have you encountered while using WhatsApp for ESL speaking practice?	1	2	3	4	5
3. How effective do you find WhatsApp for practicing English speaking skills	1	2	3	4	5

Denote the Please follow the numbers which following answers to circle one answer for each question.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

2.0– Content Development(CD)	Degree of Agreement			
4. How do you prefer ESL-speaking content to be delivered on WhatsApp? (Text, audio, video, etc.)	1 5	2	3	4
5. What topics do you find most engaging for ESL speaking practice on WhatsApp?	1 5	2	3	4
6. Using the M-learning technology helps me accomplish tasks more quickly.	1 5	2	3	4
7. How important is the role of a facilitator or teacher in WhatsApp ESL discussions?	1 5	2	3	4

Please follow the numbers which denote the following answers to circle one answer for each question.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

3.0 – Engagement and Interaction (EI)	Degree of Agreement				
8. Do you feel more comfortable practicing speaking in a WhatsApp group or in private conversations?	1	2	3	4	5
9. How does interaction with other learners affect your speaking practice?	1	2	3	4	5
10. My professors have been helpful in the use of mobile learning technology.	1	2	3	4	5
11. What features of WhatsApp do you find most useful for ESL speaking practice?	1	2	3	4	5

Please follow the numbers which denote the following answers to circle one answer for each question.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

4.0– Feedback and Assessment (FA)	Degree of Agreement				
12. How do you receive feedback on your speaking skills in WhatsApp discussions?	1	2	3	4	5
13. Do you find the feedback received through WhatsApp helpful for your learning progress?	1	2	3	4	5

Please follow the numbers which denote the following answers to circle one answer for each question.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

5.0–Accessibility and Convenience(AC); Improvement and Suggestions (IS)	Degree of Agreement				
14. How convenient do you find using WhatsApp for ESL speaking practice compared to other methods?	1	2	3	4	5
15. Do you have any concerns about privacy when practicing speaking on WhatsApp?	1	2	3	4	5
16. What improvements would you like to see in the ESL-speaking content provided on WhatsApp?	1	2	3	4	5
17. Do you have any suggestions for activities or exercises that could enhance ESL speaking practice on WhatsApp?	1	2	3	4	5

Please follow the numbers which denote the following answers to circle one answer for each question.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

6.0 – Open-Ended Questions (OEQ)	Degree of Agreement				
18. Describe your ideal scenario for practicing ESL speaking on WhatsApp.	1	2	3	4	5
19. Share any success stories or positive experiences you have had while using WhatsApp for ESL speaking practice.	1	2	3	4	5

Please follow the numbers which denote the following answers to circle one answer for each question.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

7.0 – Final Thoughts (FT)	Degree of Agreement				
20. Would you recommend WhatsApp as a tool for ESL speaking practice to others? Why or why not?	1	2	3	4	5
21. How do you envision the future of ESL speaking practice through messaging apps like WhatsApp?	1	2	3	4	5
22. What additional support or resources do you think would benefit ESL learners using WhatsApp?	1	2	3	4	5
23. Any other comments or suggestions on using WhatsApp for developing ESL speaking content?	1	2	3	4	5

Section C: Comments and Advice

We would like to seek your general comments and advice regarding the reasons and barriers to Developing English as a Second Language (ESL) Speaking Content through Online WhatsApp Discussions to in Pakistan.

1.0 Why you did not use the Online WhatsApp?

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2.0 Please, use this space to write any suggestions regarding.

... Developing English as a Second Language (ESL) Speaking Content through Online WhatsApp.

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