
Exploring the implementation of Whatsapp-assisted language learning of primary school in rural area

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ABSTRACT

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The study aims to investigate the implementation of WhatsApp assisted language learning in rural area. This research used descriptive qualitative research by using interviews and observation that focuses on the use of WhatsApp in teaching vocabulary. It used sociocultural theory as the framework to analyze the implementation of the Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) application. Some reasons related to the preference of involving WhatsApp-assisted language teaching lie in technical and pedagogical reasons. The simplicity of using the application is the main reason in terms of technical one while the educational reasons involved the sense of belonging, flexible interaction, and autonomous learning. In terms of assisting students to learn, the teacher is a material provider, while the parents take more role that is scaffolding. However, the role of the teacher in scaffolding is not significant, therefore the next research may focus on the suitable activity that the teacher can apply on online teaching particularly for young children.

1. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary life cannot be separated from the existence of technologies and the use of computers. In the educational field itself, the question arises no more whether to use computers but how. Online learning is starting to become a trend in the digital era and can be used as an alternative to learning in many situations. One of the fostering trends in online learning is the use of mobile devices which enable the learners to learn every time and anywhere. The prove can be seen from the increased number of research in this field especially those which focus on vocabulary (Duman et al., 2015). A study by (Liu, 1999) explored the programming capability of PDAs to create a scramble game to support the L2 English vocabulary acquisition of high school students (Hoven & Palalas, 2016). There are some researches concerns on teaching vocabulary through MALL (Chen et al., 2006; Thornton & Houser, 2005). Chen presents a personalized intelligent mobile learning system (PIMS) in teaching vocabulary while Thornton utilizes SMS. In the pandemic era, where online learning is a must challenge those school which is located in a rural area. It obligates the teacher to provide teaching and learning activity suitable for the condition of students, apart from the barriers they have. WhatsApp has been the most influential tool used among the teacher and students (Mwakapina et al., 2016). Some of the Research related to WhatsApp-assisted language learning has been conducted. Manan (2017) conducted research which focuses on the improvements of communicative learning skill with the use of WhatsApp. The study found that the students use the application as fun and relax activities without barrier and ashamed communication. It is noted that students can increase

their vocabulary mastery through the use of WhatsApp. In terms of its reliability, a study investigating WhatsApp tailored to support English language learning (ELL) activities (Yudhiantara et al., 2017). Using a case study, It revealed that WhatsApp increased idea contribution among students and provided faster and easier communication with their peers and its technical advantages, such as simple operation and low cost.

Even though a large number of studies conducted related to MALL, particularly in WhatsApp assisted language learning, a significant number of studies only focuses on the adult learner. These studies generally adopted quantitative research methods (Duman et al., 2015). Therefore there is a need to research the implementation of MALL that focuses its use in primary education. This research focuses on the reason for implementing WhatsApp as a tool for teaching vocabulary and to discuss the implementation of WhatsApp in teaching vocabulary.

2. METHOD

2.1 Research Participants

The total of participants in this study was forty students. Twenty-two from the Islamic primary school and 18 students come from the elementary school. It also involves the teacher with a total of two teachers from two primary schools. The students were about 10-12 years old. The participants' native language was Java. All of the participants were learning English as their foreign language. The participants' English level was elementary. The random sampling procedure was carried out in two primary schools in Tendas, central Java Indonesia during the first semester of 2020-2021 (pandemic era) where a virtual school was applied in all schools. Two students, their parents, and a teacher from each school were interviewed. The study involved two elementary schools located in Tayu Subdistrict, Pati Central Java, Indonesia. This location of the school can be considered far from the central town of Pati. It takes about 22 Kilometers from the downtown of Pati. Interviews were conducted with the English teacher of primary school in MI Islamiah Tendas, and SD Negeri 01 Tendas. In order to conduct the study, a descriptive qualitative method was involved as a research design.

2.2 Research Instruments

The instrument involved in this study is the interview guide and observation. The interview lists question is taken from the sociocultural principles in online teaching that include how the students assist the learners in reaching the learning objective in online teaching.

2.3 Data Collection Technique

The data collection procedure in this study is observation and interview as the teacher is only two, so in-depth interview seems to be the most appropriate one. The observation was conducted by involving the researcher in the WhatsApp group of the research's subject. The next step was observing the teaching and learning process through WhatsApp group. Another data collection technique used in this research is interview. Three teachers come from different schools as the subject of the interview. The study also involves an interview with the students and their parents. The researcher took a sample of five students from the two schools and their parents to be interviewed. The data gathered were described and analyzed to achieve the study's objective.

2.4 Data Analysis Technique

The data analysis includes coding, data reduction, and interpretation based on the framework use. The first step is coding after the data collected, the researcher places the data based on the need of each research question and subtheme needed in the research. The second step is data reduction, in this step, the data, which is irrelevant to the objective, is reduced, and the needed data is included. The third step is displaying the data. The data is displayed narratively and interpreted with the framework presented. Those are the theory related to the sociocultural theory in online teaching for finally could be found the result and conclusion of the research.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 RESULTS

3.1.1 The Underlying reasons for incorporating WhatsApp-Assisted Language Learning.

To answer the first research question, the researcher uses an interview with an English teacher in a primary school. Based on the answer from the teacher. The answer is then divided into two categories. Those are technical and educational reasons.

3.1.1.1 Technical reason.

The reason for using WhatsApp is mainly technical. Technically, the first reason lies in its simplicity to use. WhatsApp is simple to use rather than other application, such as Google Classroom or Telegram. Besides it is also supported that almost all people in this rural area already use WhatsApp, so it doesn't put pressure on them to learn for using it again. As this is in elementary school some of the students are controlled by their parents in using WhatsApp, even though some of them are already independently using it. The second reason is the easy availability and the ease to download it. Unlike zoom or telegram which require an email and a password to remember, WhatsApp only requires a mobile phone they use to register. The third reason lies in its affordable access. Compare to YouTube, zoom, or telegram. WhatsApp requires fewer data.

3.1.1.2 Educational Reason

Sense of Belonging

The educational reason got from the interview include, first the sense of belonging to the group. By using WhatsApp the teacher said that children may feel that they include in the class, so they do not feel that they learn by themselves.

Flexible interaction

Using WhatsApp allows the students to interact with each other and share the material they have. When the teacher gives material, the students can give questions and sometimes the other students answer it. Even the material mainly comes from the teacher because those elementary students still have less exposure to the material they choose for their learning sources. When the students feel that there are the instruction or the material given is not clear, students can easily ask in the group and the other can know it easily. As a result, the doubts are immediately cleared.

3.1.1.3 Learner autonomy

Another reason is Learner autonomy, In the instructional term, the reason for choosing WhatsApp-mediated language learning lies in its easy accessibility to the learning material. "although it is hard to promote autonomous learning in primary school, at least it occurs. Students can use an online dictionary in their device, or search it through google to look for

specific vocabulary, in that way they develop autonomous learning”. WhatsApp enables the user to easily share the picture, video, link, and file. Among all features mentioned above the teacher usually gives the material in the form of a voice note. The reason for choosing voice notes in giving material is that it requires less internet data than giving material with video. After giving the material the teacher, give the students exercise in the form of instruction, such as “ please do the exercise on page 11” or simply they made the exercise by themselves and send the picture in the group.

3.1.2 Implementing WhatsApp-assisted language learning

The procedure of utilizing WhatsApp in learning vocabulary can be separated into five steps. After conducting the interview, the following implementation of WhatsApp assisted language teaching in vocabulary learning. The following steps are adapted from Spreffoff (2016) in classifying the result of the interview.

The first step is creating a WhatsApp Group.

The merits of WhatsApp are that it enables the creation of a group of people. However, the teacher does not create a WhatsApp group for each subject, rather the whole subject in a group. This decision is because it eases the teacher and students to give the instruction and avoid confusion. As this WhatsApp-assisted language learning is implemented in primary school, it is highly unlikely to involve the students without the guidance of the parents. So the mobile phone included in the group is the parents of the students.

“First the school collects the mobile number of students (their parents), then we create WhatsApp group per class, not per subject, as it may make confusion among students”

The second step is to set the rules.

Here the teacher sets some regulations dealing with the use of WhatsApp. Those are, the students are not allowed to share or discuss the information out of topic, students must use the language politely. The rules are also addressed to students’ parents. They may involve in the teaching and learning process, but they cannot do the students’ tasks. The parents may help their children to complete the task, but not wholly. For instance, the parents can help their children to download an online dictionary and may teach them how to use it. “ the homeroom teacher give the rule, the main rule is the students are not allowed to discuss topic outside the subject, this is not so formal rule I guess”. Assign the task. Before assigning the task, the teacher gives the material in order to guide their students to be successful in doing the task. The next subchapter presents the implementation of WhatsApp-assisted language learning in teaching vocabulary.

Giving learning material.

The learning material is given with WhatsApp in several ways. Often the teacher only gives the material to be read and then gives the task. Sometimes, they give it in the form of a voice note. The video they share is not authentic the teacher made, it rather than taken from other sources such as YouTube. It is because of the burden of the teacher’s ability in creating learning videos, and it also requires specific skills to edit.

“ I give explanation first, before assigning the task, usually in the form of a voice note or the videos from YouTube, and I send the link, but I don’t do it as always, sometimes I also directly give the task”

Assigning the task.

The task is given usually comes from the teacher, it means that the teacher made by themselves, or simply taken from the handbook. Because the focus is on vocabulary teaching, the teacher asked students only to translate it from English to Indonesia. The duration for doing the task is a week to give enough time for students to complete the task.

“The task is given usually comes from the teacher, it means that the teacher made by themselves, or simply taken from the handbook.

Scaffolding by parents.

Parents are the ones who will be in charge of whether their children complete the task or not. It is found that the parents have a great role. They are responsible for making their children understand the material and assist them to find out the meaning of certain verbs in terms of vocabulary tasks.

“I have to make sure that my child does the task well, so I assist them to finish it. My role as a parent now change to be a teacher but I can only explain the material as I can”

Other than parents the more knowledgeable others such as private tutor also contribute to the students' development.

“They give assistance to my child as she already has the private teacher”

Submitting the task

The task given is submitted through the WhatsApp group so that others will know who submit the first task and who becomes the least. It is aimed at motivating students to complete the task as soon as possible.

“Because all the teachers are here and all my friends included in this group, I have to be the first person to submit the task, so that the teacher and friend will notice that I do their children understand the material and assistant

Assessing the Task

The feedback is mostly given in the form of scores. Teachers are rarely giving the oral feedback such as suggestions.

“The assessment is mainly taken from the submitted assignment, so I rarely do oral feedback such as suggestion.”

3.2 Discussion

3.2.1 The Underlying Reasons for Implementing WhatsApp-Assisted Language Learning.

Some conclusions can be drawn from the preference of teachers in involving WhatsApp in language teaching and the implementation of it related to the sociocultural theory. The principles of learning as a social phenomenon is applied in this form of teaching as explained in the following discussion.

WhatsApp is the mediator tool in the learning environment. The technical reason for using WhatsApp in language teaching can bring benefit to the students. The benefits that students will get by using WhatsApp in online teaching according to the sociocultural theory are the linguistic benefits of group interaction. The technical reason for using WhatsApp lies in the easiness of applying it. WhatsApp group with its easy access can offer the students chances and practice in the target language. The sociocultural theory stated that there is a connection between the students' interaction and linguistic development. This also includes students'

interaction on WhatsApp or online. This reason can be supported with the explanation that the more students interact through WhatsApp they also have more chance to develop their skills in the target language, as a result, it will influence the other learner to involve in the group to develop their target language as well. Because communication required two or more people to be successful. However, this technical reason for choosing WhatsApp does not give many benefits to the students' linguistic development, as the researcher observed. The WhatsApp group is only used to share the learning material and the task. While the practice of the target language is hardly developed. Zhang et al. (2013) stated that there is a need of considering sociocultural theory in online and blended settings. It is because the social elements of classrooms may not be as present in online/blended settings. In the online classroom, where asynchronous and interaction is limited, social, linguistic development certainly needs to be considered carefully.

The educational reason is also accompanied by its advantage when applied in the EFL context, that is the development of social and personal skills from the learner. One of the reasons for choosing WhatsApp in language teaching is the sense of belonging in the learning process through WhatsApp groups. The sense of belonging of the students can increase their self-confidence as precious individuals and also improve their motivation, as a result, they want to contribute more with their knowledge. An example can be seen from the result of the interview which said that "because all the teachers are here and all my friends included in this group, I have to be the first person to submit the task so that the teacher and friend will notice me that I don't cheat anyone in the class and I do it by myself". Samaie et al. (2018) stated that the emotional and social presence increased students' willingness to practice and engage in the interactions due to the interaction that happened between students and teachers. The social connectivity between students and teachers in WhatsApp groups reflects the sociocultural theory, in which it is believed that cognitive development is not solely a result of the individual self but it happens as the result of social interaction (Hall, 2007; Johnson, 2006; Lantolf et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2013).

The reason for choosing WhatsApp lies in its advantage of developing autonomous learning. Allowing students to share files and access the material they need will train them to be autonomous. Learning through WhatsApp does not mean the students only use a single application. The use of an online dictionary to find out the meaning of a particular word and match the meaning with the context is the aspect of autonomous learning that students develop. That WhatsApp-assisted language learning fosters autonomy is in line with Ramamurthy and Rao (2015), however, learners have moved toward autonomous learning, and they are still reliant on the teachers to achieve their learning goals. Therefore when the teacher only gives the task without guidance it is hard for children to develop their autonomous learning by themselves.

3.2.2 Implementing WhatsApp-Assisted Language Learning

The implementation of WhatsApp-assisted language learning found that the students can develop their ability in their Zone Proximal Development (ZPD). ZPD emphasizes the more mature people to assist their learning. First, this study found that learning material is given, usually in the form of voice notes and/ or YouTube channels. The assistance that the teacher gives is in the form of teaching material. The sociocultural theory believes that the first step of learning is to learn the new signs, symbols, and concepts that the

learner will use in the learning context (Hall, 2007). Therefore the first activity should focus on the explication of these tools. Secondly, as the learners begin to use the learning material and internalize them under a certain activity or here the teacher give a task, the internalization process modifies the thinking process and the development of students cognitive skill. With the learning material provided, this student can then translate the given vocabulary into its specific context. Besides the learning material, the study found that there also The other ways found in this study is the support for the learners. Activities should be designed in a course with the right amount to support to help the learners gain expertise in using the new concept and tools. However, the study found that the teacher only gives the material in the initial work. Yet sociocultural approach stated that learning support involves not only the initial work in course design, yet the teacher should be active during the learning time and ensuring that the learners have the support they need. Dolittle (1997) as cited in Hall (2007) comments that this support from the teacher is important in ensuring the learners are working on the task, and that each student is both challenging and developing their work in their ZPD. However, the support of the teacher is less rather the role of parents. Those students can work in their ZPD, scaffolding can be given to students to support their learning. The researcher found that scaffolding in WhatsApp language teaching is mostly given by the individual's parent. This scaffolding is also supported by the theory from Brown, (2007) with his cognitive apprenticeship theory. In this approach, the more experienced one provides the scaffolding for learners to practice. Scaffolding is gradually withdrawn as the learner gains expertise. The support given can be in the form of modeling, coaching, and fading. In this study the more knowledgeable other (parent) usually give support in the form of scaffolding. Modeling concerns providing examples of expert behavior that include explanations. Thus teachers only give support in the form of modeling while coaching which concerns encouragement, diagnosis, and direction; and scaffolding which is the provision of structure or prompts in the learning environment is mostly given by the parents.

4. CONCLUSION

Some reasons related to the preference of involving WhatsApp-assisted language teaching lies on the technical and pedagogical reason. The simplicity of using the application is the main reason in terms of technical one while the educational reasons involved the sense of belonging, flexible interaction. Furthermore, some of the sociocultural approach found in this study, WhatsApp as the mediator tool in the learning environment and the students learn in their ZPD (Zone of proximal development). In term of assisting students to learn in the ZPD, the teacher takes a role as a material provider, while the parents take more role that is scaffolding. Therefore teachers need to consider more what activity can promote students' development rather than only giving material without scaffolding learning that can guide the students. The reason is that students come from different socio, economic background, which will also influence their understanding to reach the learning objective. By providing equal scaffolding learning, students may not rely too much on their parents and the learning objective could be achieved equally in all learners.

The result may give advantages for the educator for future teaching. The reason for choosing a particular application in language teaching should be considered not only related to the technical term but also the pedagogical one. This research will also give more consideration to online teaching that it is not only transferring knowledge but should see that children's development is also affected by their social environment. Therefore the teacher may give different treatment in online teaching to maximize their students' cognitive ability.

As this study only focuses on describing the implementation of particular teaching online teaching and analyze based on the sociocultural approach, there still many aspects that the teacher should improve. Thus, the next research can focus on what strategies should the teacher applied in online teaching particularly on young learners in the rural area, apart from the barrier the have

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