

Utilizing WhatsApp Group as a Medium of Lecturer-Students Interaction in EFL Classes during COVID-19 Pandemic

Penggunaan Grup WhatsApp sebagai Media Interaksi antara Dosen-Mahasiswa di Kelas EFL selama Pandemi COVID-19

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate learners' perceptions and attitudes towards the interaction between lecturer and learners in WhatsApp groups regarding university's closure caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. This research employed a survey design, involving 60 university students who were required to complete a set of close-ended and open-ended questionnaires. The findings showed that the use of WhatsApp group discussion has benefited the students greatly to engage with their lecturer and their classmates. Around 55.17% of the respondents perceived the WhatsApp group discussion positively, 27.55% perceived mixed and 17.24% negatively. Generally, the respondents perceive WhatsApp group discussion as a tool for convenience, accessibility, speed and even self-confidence for classroom interaction. However, some of the respondents also reported the drawbacks of WhatsApp Group discussion, namely, the distraction during the discussion, overwhelmed by the volume of the message, and lack of speaking activities in the WhatsApp-mediated classroom. Future research which includes lecturers' perspective is needed to further explore the phenomenon of WhatsApp Group used in EFL classrooms.

Keywords: perceptions, interaction, learners, lecturers, pandemic

Abstrak

Penelitian ini dikembangkan untuk menginvestigasi persepsi dan sikap mahasiswa tentang interaksi antara dosen dan mahasiswa melalui WhatsApp grup sehubungan dengan ditutupnya universitas karena pandemic COVID-19. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain survey yang melibatkan 60 pelajar dari universitas untuk menyelesaikan satu set kuisisioner dengan pertanyaan terbuka dan tertutup. Hasil dari penelitian ini memperlihatkan bahwa penggunaan diskusi pada WhatsApp grup menguntungkan mahasiswa untuk sangat terikat kepada dosen dan rekan sekelas. Sekitar 55,17% peserta beranggapan penggunaan WhatsApp grup positif, 27,55% merasa bimbang dan 17,24% negatif. Pada umumnya, para responden beranggapan bahwa diskusi WhatsApp grup merupakan alat untuk aspek kenyamanan, aksesibilitas, kecepatan, dan bahkan kepercayaan diri untuk berinteraksi dalam kelas. Namun, beberapa responden juga menyebutkan tentang kekurangan dari diskusi dalam WhatsApp grup, yaitu gangguan selama diskusi, kewalahan dengan jumlah pesan, dan kurangnya kegiatan speaking di kelas yang dimediasi menggunakan WhatsApp. Penelitian selanjutnya yang mencakup perspektif dosen diperlukan untuk lebih mengeksplorasi fenomena WhatsApp grup yang digunakan di kelas Bahasa Inggris.

Kata kunci: persepsi, interaksi, mahasiswa, dosen, pandemi

1. Introduction

In response to COVID-19 pandemic, the Indonesian government has made various attempts such as physical distancing, stay at home, self-isolation, hygiene policy, and the restriction access in public places (Gedela, Januraga, Luis, Wignall, & Irwanto, 2020). These strategies were made to prevent the spread of COVID-19 viruses. In terms of activities and interactions, the COVID-19 pandemic has created many changes in almost all aspects of human

life, especially in the area of education. The Ministry of Education and Culture said that the COVID-19 pandemic affecting not less than 68 million learners starting from preschool education to higher education in Indonesia (Puspita, 2020). In addition, it required everyone to stay at home, dismiss school activities to be replaced by online learning and instruct people to work at home.

With the changing of models of traditional in-classroom learning to technology-based virtual learning, COVID-19 makes so many possibilities and difficulties for the educational facilities to reinforce their technological and infrastructure (Jena, 2020). In higher education like universities, different applications like Zoom, WhatsApp, Edmodo, Google classroom and Google meet are used as lecturers and students are expected to keep staying at home and still carrying out their roles. The most commonly used application for messaging by university learners is WhatsApp application (Alqahtani, Bhaskar, Elumalai, & Abumelha, 2018). Therefore, compared to other applications, WhatsApp is more popular.

The use of WhatsApp in today's society has become an essential component in almost every aspect of people's daily routine and the educational aspect is no difference, as WhatsApp has a positive value on the learning and teaching process. According to Lenhart, Madden, Smith, and Macgill (2007), WhatsApp is a messenger application that can be used on several platforms for free. Lenhart et al. (2007) also says that this application is greatly used among university learners to send multimedia messages like pictures, videos, documents, voices message as well as simple text messages. WhatsApp facilitates the learners to communicate, develop and share their ideas faster and easier, for instance, in a WhatsApp group. To draw the learners' interest and attention, WhatsApp group is one of the innovative teaching techniques that offers fun-based learning (Mistar & Embi, 2016). WhatsApp group makes the communication between teacher and learners more effective and efficient because it enables the group members to join the discussion on specific topics as it supports quick response within the group members.

The use of WhatsApp as a learning tool has become the focus of several studies. Alqahtani et al. (2018) stated that features in WhatsApp such as group chats, documents, voices, videos, and pictures in real-time communication between teachers and learners that provide the learners to continue in learning even outside the classroom. Alqahtani et al. (2018) also stated that WhatsApp, as one of technology-based tools, can enhance communication and interaction with an individual to other individuals besides learning the language. However, as WhatsApp features are in English in all its aspects, the learners should have the knowledge with English to utilize the application. The interaction and communication in this study was made in Arabic as the researcher claimed that it was somehow difficult for the learners to use English, as their English skills was quite limited outside the university walls.

Cetinkaya (2017) conducted a study about supportive technology in educational context about the use of WhatsApp and its benefit. The findings showed that there was an improvement in the achievement of the learners, both in the traditional setting which did not use WhatsApp and in the setting in which WhatsApp was used as a supportive in learning and teaching practices. However, based on the results of the two factor ANOVA analyses, it showed that the achievement of the learners who learned in the two difference settings has an influential difference. The result proved that both learning settings had different results on the improvements of the learners' achievement, and supports the traditional setting with

WhatsApp which has been more beneficial on the learners' performance. Correspondingly, this raises questions on its influence on English language learning and teaching practices.

In Saudi Arabia, Ta'amneh (2017) investigated the effect of utilizing WhatsApp application in English Language learning among university learners. The researcher randomly picked 40 learners to be placed in experimental and control group. The findings indicated that the control group which taught with the traditional or face to face approach did not perform better in English lessons than the experimental group that used a mixed between WhatsApp and traditional approach. The researcher stated that English classes can be taught more effectively by combining technological applications such as WhatsApp in learning English than the traditional approaches. The researcher also concluded that one possible justification for the positive result of using WhatsApp in English classrooms is that this way of learning may help learners together with lecturers to learn according to their own pace.

Mistar and Embi (2016) examined the utility of WhatsApp as a learning medium in ESL classrooms and how the WhatsApp is significant for future use in assisting the learners to improve their language learning. The researchers selected 20 PDT program (a two-year program) students at Kuala Pilah Pre-University students. Results revealed two essential findings of the use of WhatsApp in language classroom. First, WhatsApp was important in language learning among the learners as a useful device and second, WhatsApp increased the learners' participation in learning through WhatsApp discussions. The researchers also pointed out that WhatsApp should be used to support universities to ensure internet facilities as a top focus in nowadays' education, and to enable in WhatsApp as an approach to enhance learners' confidence in using and studying the English language.

The studies by (Alqahtani et al., 2018; Cetinkaya, 2017; Ta'amneh, 2017; Mistar & Embi, 2016) mentioned earlier indicate that the advantage of using WhatsApp discussion through smartphone in the educational context is the provision of the learners with bigger chance to communicate with their lecturers and classmates, which WhatsApp group helps their learning and helps them to overcome their learning problems. In this context, some of the example benefits about the use of WhatsApp group for learners' learning include: bringing new opportunities of learning, providing immediate messaging support, providing immediate feedback in learning, supporting flexible learning, collaborative learning, providing audiovisual media for learning, and facilitating communication between learners and lecturers.

According to Moore (1989) Learners-lecturer interaction is regarded as highly desirable by many learners, and as essential by many lecturers. Moore (1989) also stated that in learner-instructor interaction, distance lecturers attempt to achieve aims held in common with all other lecturers. First having planned or been given a curriculum, a program of content to be taught, the lecturer seeks to stimulate or at least maintain the learner's interest in what is to be taught, to motivate the learner to learn, to enhance and maintain the learner's interest, including self-motivation and self-direction. Second the lecturer makes presentations or cause them to be made. These may be demonstrations of skill, presentations of information, or modeling of certain attitudes and values. Third the lecturer tries to organize learners' application of what is being learned, either the practice of skills that have been demonstrated, or manipulation of information and ideas that have been presented. The lecturer organize evaluation to ascertain if the learners are making progress, and to help decide whether to change strategies or not. And last, the lecturer provides support, counsel, and encouragement

to each learner, though the extent and nature of this support varies according to educational level of the learners, the lecturer's personality and philosophy, and other factors.

Any learning discussion encourages the learners to share their knowledge. Besides, it also gives an opportunity to the learners to build effective communication skills. Xie and Ferguson (2006) stated that the main purposes for participating in online discussion are interaction and communication. To make a successful online discussion that is informational and interesting, a discussion should be well facilitated and guided. The researchers also say. According to Larson and Keiper (2002), talk from-side-to-side at a high affective and analytical level are required when learners and the teacher are having a discussion. In improving higher order cognitive skills such as skills that allows the learners to alter, analyze, manipulate information, and discussion is one of useful teaching techniques that can be used. Instead of simply recount, or retell, remembered data and details, learners are expected to explain their ideas and thoughts in a discussion. Instead of being inactive receivers of information that are sent from the teacher, during discussion learners should be active members. Engle Ochoa (1988, cited in Larson & Keiper, 2002) stated that, to teach learners in discussions, there should be significant interactions where the learners clarify their ideas with proof, where their ideas are subject to contradict by their classmates and the lecturer, and as well as where the lecturer's ideas are open for critique.

WhatsApp group as lecturer-learners communication may provide a good platform for classroom interaction during COVID-19 pandemic through forums, discussions and information sharing. WhatsApp may also develop the students' learning performance and motivation in their academic matters. It could be used to improve learners' language skills, as it gives the learners an opportunity to tell their opinions in an open forum. This is how the integration of WhatsApp group discussion can give opportunities to the learners to socialize virtually with their lecturers and classmates in facilitating their learning and resolve their learning problems during the stay-at-home policy. When lecturers effectively use mobile technologies in the teaching practices, they could create alluring learning settings, especially as nowadays learners have already relied on their mobile phones specifically for social interaction. WhatsApp allows students to communicate anytime and anywhere they go. Lecturers everywhere could use WhatsApp group discussion to assist the learners to study and set a real purpose for communication especially in English language learning.

In despite of these advantages, WhatsApp group is also seen by numerous educators only as medium for leisure activity and enjoyment and not for teaching (Alqahtani et al., 2018). For instance, Yeboah and Ewur (2014) in their study report that just 7% of the respondents using WhatsApp for study while the other 93% participants used WhatsApp only for conversation. In another study, Ramakrishnan and Johnsi Priya (2016), report that even though WhatsApp ranks highest among all the other applications, only less than 1 % of learners have chat with the lecturers and 96.33% of learners have chat with their classmates. In Indonesia, the use of WhatsApp is well-known within university learners. However, the accessibility and availability of WhatsApp is not necessarily proof the use of WhatsApp into the learning process will be very effective. Therefore, this study examined the use of WhatsApp, one of the well-known applications. It investigated university learners' use of WhatsApp and their perceptions regarding its possible integration for learners and lecturer in education context.

Based on the discussions above, this study intended to investigate the perceptions of EFL learners towards WhatsApp group discussion during the COVID-19 crisis with specific attention to the interaction between lecturer and learners in English. In line with the background of the research, the research questions are formulated as follows:

1. What are the benefits gained by EFL learners when using WhatsApp group discussion for lecturer-learners interaction?
2. How do EFL learners perceive the use of WhatsApp group discussion during COVID-19 pandemic for classroom interaction purposes?

2. Methods

The researcher employs a descriptive quantitative approach, especially survey design in order to provide an efficient experiential investigation. Creswell (2016) stated that with the purpose of generalizing from a sample to a population, a survey design gives a numeric or quantitative description of opinions, attitudes, or trends of a population by studying a sample of that population by using questionnaires for data collection. Perceptions take an important role as when learners have a good perception toward something in their learning, they tend to have a good attitude and have great motivation. So from perceptions one can slightly predict whether the use of WhatsApp groups as a medium of classroom interaction between lecturer-students in an EFL class can be beneficial or not.

The participants of this study were the eighth semester of undergraduate learners of the English Department Universitas Negeri Malang. They were selected stratified random sampling. It was conducted in June 2021. To make sure that the sample will be representative of the population, the researcher used random selection or sampling, so each individual in the population has an equal probability of being selected for the research (Keppel, 1991 cited in Creswell, 2016). In addition, it is stratified according to major within the subject. The researcher chose Universitas Negeri Malang as the research site because of the following criteria. First, the researcher was able to access the research participants as he was given permission by the head of English Department to conduct the study. Second, the study program of English Language Teaching is accredited A by the National Board of Accreditation, which means only participants whose study programs with A accreditation category level were included in the present study. The accreditation can reflect the quality of the study program and participants (Sanyal & Martin, 2006).

This study involved 60 participants, this number had fulfilled the requirements for obtaining the total respondents as (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2012) say usually it is common to sample 10% to 20% of the population for survey research and thus the findings were acceptable in the research setting. The participants that were involved had to answer a 19-item close-ended questionnaire that was adapted and adjusted based on the Dweikat (2019) concept. However, several changes were made to all the statements in detail to obtain the criteria of WhatsApp group discussion as lecturer-students interaction in EFL classes. The researcher also modified the original questionnaire comprising 28 questions to only 19 questions because the nine questions did not meet the nature of the topic under investigation. The researcher developed the close-ended questionnaire that contained three attributes or themes namely: 1) Perception on accessibility of WhatsApp group discussion to the learners, 2) Perception on classroom interaction in WhatsApp group discussion to the learners, and 3) Perception on confidence level in WhatsApp group discussion to the learners.

Beside the 19 items, the questionnaire also included one open-ended question that asked learners to state further ideas or opinions that relevant with the topic of this study. The open-ended question provided the chance for the respondents to answer the question in their own words. The open-ended question was, “Can you please give me your free comments on the use of WhatsApp Group Discussion for online English classrooms interaction?”. The questionnaires were completed by the respondents through Google Form. To access the questionnaire, the participants just clicked the link that was shared by the captain of the class in their WhatsApp group class to start responding to the items. All of the participants were requested to respond to the close-ended questionnaire by choose the options of four-point Likert scale: 1) 1: strongly disagree, 2) 2: disagree, 3) 3: agree, and 4) 4: strongly agree. In other words, the highest point is 4 and the lowest point is 1 (Nee & Yunus, 2020).

The questionnaire was validated by two (2) experts from Universitas Negeri Malang (UM). The experts were asked to examined, validated, and provided comments or feedbacks for the purpose to enhanced the instrument of this study, and by that the instruments can be used as a result. The instrument was assessed by a panel of experts by using an evaluation sheet/expert validation form as the guidance for the experts to review. Each items are reviewed using the sheet and experts may provide qualitative feedback by responding directly on each item written in the validation form with the scales ranging from 4 to 1, where scale 4: Exceeds Expectation (EE), 3: Meets Expectation (ME), 2: Below Expectation (BE), and 1: Not Acceptable (NA). Therefore, there was quantitative and qualitative feedback which may be expected in the form. The expert’ review was used as a basis for the researcher to revise the items that are considered having weaknesses by that the researcher accommodated the experts’ judgments and their feedback to decide whether or not to add, drop and revise those items which were not clear and/or inappropriate for the research instrument.

After the data were collected, the researcher analyzed the close-ended questionnaire to answer the research problem of the study by using SPSS in the format of means and standard deviations (Creswell, 2015). For analytical purposes, the following scale was used to represent the calculation level of learners’ responses. 4.00 – 3.00: Very High, 2.99 – 2.00: High, 1.99 – 1.00: Low, 1.00 – 0.99 Very Low (Nee & Yunus, 2020).

For the open-ended questionnaire, the researcher analyzed it by using Thematic Analysis (TA). TA is used to methodically determining, arranging, and providing understanding toward, patterns of meaning (themes) throughout a dataset. With emphasize on meaning throughout a dataset, TA enables the researcher to perceive and make sense of collective or shared experiences and meanings (Braun & Clarke, 2012). First, the researcher read each of the respondents’ answers to the question. Then the researcher typed all of the respondents’ answers and did the analysis by calculating the percentage of respondents having similar preference over WhatsApp group discussion as lecturer-student interaction. After calculating the percentage, the researcher analyzed the respondents’ answers one by one and did the coding on each of the answers. After the coding was done, the researcher tried to find the themes which emerged from the coding.

3. Findings and Discussion

This research aims to investigate EFL learners’ opinion about the use of WhatsApp group discussion for lecturer-student interaction in assisting their English learning at Universitas Negeri Malang. To achieve these objectives, the quantitative results obtained from the 19-items

close-ended questionnaire will be presented first, followed by the quantitative results obtained from the open-ended questionnaire.

3.1 The quantitative results from the close-ended questionnaire

Results related to the first research problem “What are the benefits gained by EFL learners by using WhatsApp group discussion for lecturer-learners interaction?”, to answer this research problem, means and standard deviations were applied and the findings are presented into three themes: 1. The perceptions of EFL learners towards the use of WhatsApp group discussion accessibility in English classroom during COVID-19; 2. The perceptions of EFL learners towards WhatsApp group discussion use for lecturer-learners interaction to assist their English learning; 3. The perceptions of EFL learners towards WhatsApp group discussion use for confidence and ability for lecturer-learners interaction.

The perceptions of EFL learners towards the use of WhatsApp group discussion accessibility in English classroom during COVID-19

This aspect of the questionnaire deals with the EFL learners’ perception on the use of WhatsApp group discussion during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the result of the questionnaire, the respondents has very high level of positive attitudes of WhatsApp group discussion after experiencing its ability and capability for lecturer-learners interaction in English classrooms during COVID-19 pandemic. This might possibly as a result that learners were able to contact with their lecturer and classmates anytime and anywhere for educational purposes to learn collaboratively via WhatsApp.

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations of Perceptions of EFL Students Towards the Accessibility of WhatsApp Group Discussion in English Classroom During COVID-19 Pandemic in a Descending Order, according to the Means.

Rank	No	Statement	Means	standard deviations	Estimation Level
1.	1.	The WhatsApp group involves you and your lecturer to discuss in English.	3.39	0.26	Very High
2.	4.	The WhatsApp group is easily accessible to you, your classmates and your lecturer.	3.68	0.65	Very High
4.	2.	The WhatsApp group discussion supports you and your lecturer to access information.	3.57	0.53	Very High
5.	5.	The WhatsApp application enables you to use live phone and instant message communications with your lecturer and your classmates.	3.57	0.69	Very High
17.	3.	The WhatsApp group discussion encourages you to actively discuss in English.	2.93	0.72	High

As can be seen in Table 1, the statement numbers 1,2,3,4 and 5 reported has high until very high means. This result showed that the EFL learners consider WhatsApp group was beneficial because it was easily accessible for them, their classmates and also their lecturer. This result is in line with Hodges, Moore, Lockee, Trust, and Bond (2020) who stated that the courses given online in regard to a crisis or disaster are significantly difference with well-planned online learning. The main objective in this context is to deliver quick access to education to a certain extend is easy to establish and simply available at the moment of emergency or crisis. During the COVID-19 pandemic, in this study the learners and the lecturer used WhatsApp groups to communicate by using live phone and instant message. It shows that

learners were capable of communicating with the lecturer and their classmates anytime and anywhere for educational purposes to discuss in the EFL context. In this respect, the learners were academically engaged with their classmates and the lecturer by exchanging or debating one's ideas.

This result lends support to the activity theory since WhatsApp group has helped learners construct and share their knowledge and information easily. According to Barhoumi (2015) activity theory is defined as a meta-theory that researchers utilize to analyze and design interactions among group members and to find what aspects affecting the participation in the online discussion. In this study, activity theory assisted the researcher to reveal some aspects that affect learners' involvement in WhatsApp group discussion. Activity theory as a conceptual framework is used by researchers in the branch of technology devices such as computers and mobile phones to describe and analyze the design, development and factors of learning activities mediated by technology devices. Activity theory is also used to describe and analyze the factors that affect learners' involvement in online discussions mediated by technology devices. Activity theory is an applicable framework for-which to create, comprehend and enhance learning through online learning communities or in this case WhatsApp group. The results regarding the potentials of WhatsApp for learners to interact, construct and share knowledge aligns with the finding of Chan (2005) study. The results of this study based on activity theory support the value of implementing collaborative and whole-class learning activities, designed to provide opportunities for learners to share experiences and knowledge through discussion and comments on the WhatsApp group discussion.

The perceptions of EFL learners towards WhatsApp group discussion use for lecturer-learners interaction to assist their English learning

This aspect of the questionnaire deals with the EFL learners' perception on the use of WhatsApp group discussion for lecture-learners interaction. According to the result of the questionnaire, the respondents has very high level of positive attitudes towards WhatsApp group discussion for lecturer-learners interaction in English classrooms during COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, the total responses and the very high average of learners' perceptions show that the involvement in WhatsApp group discussion importantly affected the learners' understanding of the advantages of WhatsApp group discussion for remote communication. This can encourage the learners to use their language by raising a sense of community in the WhatsApp group.

One of the important advantages stated by the respondents was EFL learners' eagerness and stimulation to communicate with their lecturer as well as to collaborate with their classmates. Furthermore, WhatsApp group empowered and allowed learners to discuss in EFL classrooms during remote learning. For examples as shown in the high response to statements number 7, 8 and 12, these corresponding role appears to be in line with Setyawan (2015) who stated that classroom discussion makes teaching and learning activities more effective and efficient. In this study the learners are intended to have justifiable English skills with the purpose to cope with the subject, classroom discussion helps them to reduce the emotion of being overloaded with the process of learning English in the EFL classroom and stimulate better performance in communicative circumstances.

In this study, the WhatsApp group is being viewed as a component of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) as proposed by Lev Vygotsky (1978). This concept has been of

great importance to applied linguistics and socio-cultural theory. Vygotsky defined the term ZPD as being “...the distance between the actual development as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined by problem solving under expert guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers”. In this respect, the WhatsApp group in this study was intended as a tool through which the learners could seek to improve their actual development (current level of proficiency) through interactions with the lecturer and their own classmates. The hope was that through observing, erring, testing and contributing, learners would benefit on the assumption that what they can do with assistance today, they can do alone tomorrow (Vygotsky, 1978). This finding is in line with Cheung, Hew, and Ng (2008) who conducted a study on social interactions between learners who were learned online through mobile devices. The researcher identified social presence as one of the main aspects affecting learners’ motivation to participate in social interacts meant for creating and sharing knowledge. This research confirmed that online social presence is essential to make sure that the learners are more engaged.

Table 2. Means and Standard Deviations of Perceptions of EFL Students Towards WhatsApp Group Discussion Use for Lecturer-Learners Interaction to Assist Their English Learning in a Descending Order, according to the Means.

Rank	No	Statement	Means	standard deviations	Estimation Level
3.	6.	The WhatsApp group discussion helps you to inquire about meetings and assignments.	3.57	0.56	Very High
6.	8.	The WhatsApp group discussion helps you to academically engage with your lecturer and your classmates in any time and any place	3.38	0.67	Very High
7.	7.	The WhatsApp group discussion supports remote communication.	3.35	0.73	Very High
8.	13.	The WhatsApp group discussion enables you to discuss ideas about the courses with your lecturer and your classmates.	3.30	0.67	Very High
10.	11.	The WhatsApp group discussion enables you to debate ideas and exchange opinions in English with your lecturer and your classmates.	3.23	0.70	Very High
11.	9.	The WhatsApp group discussion allowed for all time availability of your lecturer to facilitate immediate English learning discussion as asynchronous learning.	3.22	0.64	Very High
12.	10.	The WhatsApp group discussion helps you to get immediate feedback from your lecturer.	3.20	0.71	Very High
14.	12.	The WhatsApp group discussion helps you to learn collaboratively with your classmates.	3.10	0.73	Very High
19.	19.	The WhatsApp group discussion in the educational process causes you some social problems.	2.77	0.95	High

On the other hand, the finding for response to item number 19 “The WhatsApp group discussion in the educational process causes you some social problems.” was high (2.77). It is not in line with Dweikat (2019) who found that the response to this similar item was very low which scored (1.90). This might be due to the fact that issues such as cognitive overload (Church & De Oliviera 2013), potentially disruptive nature (Purvis, Rodger, & Beckingham, 2016), its limitations in terms of privacy and reliability (Church & De Oliviera, 2013) and its

importance of managing boundaries between personal and professional lives (Rambe & Bere, 2013) must be considered in teaching and learning during pandemic or usually called ERT (Emergency Remote Teaching).

The perceptions of EFL learners towards WhatsApp group discussion use for confidence level for lecturer-learners interaction.

This aspect of the questionnaire deals with the EFL learners' perception on the use of WhatsApp group discussion for their confidence level for lecture-learners interaction during the COVID-19 pandemic in English classroom. According to the result of the questionnaire, the use WhatsApp group discussion during COVID-19 pandemic has positive impact on learners' confidence for collaborative learning.

Table 3. Means and Standard Deviations of Perceptions of EFL Students Towards WhatsApp Group Discussion Use for Confidence Level for Lecturer-Learners Interaction in a Descending Order, According to The Means.

Rank	No	Statement	Means	standard deviations	Estimation Level
9.	16.	The WhatsApp group discussion helps you to reduce your shyness when communicating in English with your lecturer.	3.27	0.84	Very High
13.	15.	The WhatsApp group discussion enables you to feel comfortable when chatting in English with your lecturer.	3.18	0.83	Very High
15.	18.	The WhatsApp group discussion helps to increase your confidence level in learning English collaboratively.	3.08	0.83	Very High
16.	14.	The WhatsApp group discussion helps you to lower your anxiety during interaction in English with your lecturer.	3.05	0.93	Very High
18.	17.	The WhatsApp group discussion enables you to express your opinions and thoughts in English more freely than in face- to -face discussions with your lecturer.	2.92	0.96	High

The third aspect of the questionnaire explored the learners' confidence level. As can be seen in table 3, the statements "The WhatsApp group discussion helps you to reduce your shyness when communicating in English with your lecturer.", "The WhatsApp group discussion enables you to feel comfortable when chatting in English with your lecturer.", "The WhatsApp group discussion helps to increase your confidence level in learning English collaboratively." and "The WhatsApp group discussion helps you to lower your anxiety during interaction in English with your lecturer." has very high means. These results indicated that the interaction between learners and lecturer in the WhatsApp group reduce the learners' shyness and improves the learners' confidence level to collaborate or just to communicate with their classmates or the lecturer by using English language. In this light, when the less-active learners tend to be passive in the WhatsApp group class, do not respond lecturer's questions or rarely ask questions to lecturer although they do not understand the materials, and give less contribution to the class discussion. In this respect, the EFL learners believes using WhatsApp group discussion enables them to increase their social skill, confidence, while helping them to create positive relationships with their classmates and the lecturer.

The results of the third aspect in line with Kheryadi (2018) who found that many of the respondents in the study are aware to involve in classroom communication, but most of the respondents are considered passive in joining the class and pretend to keep silent. A good news come when Kheryadi (2018) established group communication among the learners through WhatsApp. Less-active participants attempted to be active join the conversation. Previously, they only read and/ or tried to write a comment in words or phrases. However, a couple of weeks later, they showed great improvement as they were able to write sentences. The learners contend that they are not afraid and embarrassed anymore to make any mistakes in grammar or vocabulary as they have classmates and the lecturer to help them write.

3.2 The quantitative results from open-ended questionnaire

To answer the second research problem, the researcher presents the finding based on the respondents' answer to the open-ended question concerning the learners' perception about the use of WhatsApp group discussion amidst COVID-19 pandemic for classroom interaction purposes along with their reasons. The data showed that out of 58 answers from 60 students (2 answers were not applicable), 32 students or 55,17% had perceived the WhatsApp group discussion during Covid-19 pandemic positively, 16 students or 27,59% had perceived the WhatsApp group discussion during Covid-19 pandemic positively and negatively, therefore to avoid the loss of information the researcher categorize these responses as mixed and 10 students or 17,24% perceived the WhatsApp group discussion during Covid-19 pandemic negatively. The comparison of those numbers is presented in Figure 1.

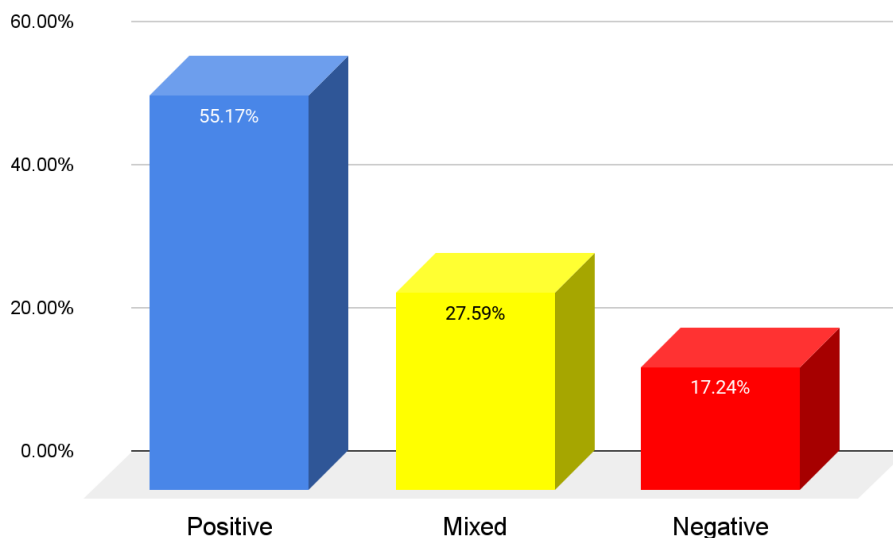


Figure 1. Perceptions of EFL Students Towards WhatsApp Group Discussion Use for Lecturer-Learners Interaction to Assist Their English Learning Based on the Open-Ended Question.

The findings from Figure 1 showed that those holding positive perceptions were higher then followed by mixed perceptions and the last were negative perceptions. Even so, the researcher thought that the number of the respondents holding mixed and negative perceptions was high as it was more than 44.83% in total. It was also found that the respondents had various perceptions for perceiving WhatsApp group discussion during

COVID-19 pandemic for classroom interaction purposes positively, mixed and negatively. Therefore, a deeper analysis of the reasons on why respondents had those perceptions was important to reveal. The analysis was made based on recurring themes following Gay et al. (2009) coding and classifying approach. The results are presented under the following themes: WhatsApp group discussion for classroom interaction, WhatsApp group discussion as second-class learning experience, the use of WhatsApp group in educational context.

WhatsApp group discussion for classroom interaction

Majority of the respondents from this research were positive about communication and interaction from the WhatsApp group discussion in the English classroom. The data also show a feeling of self-confidence was holding an essential part in the positive result of the WhatsApp group. This is in line with Rambe and Bere (2013) who reported that the utilization of WhatsApp engages the lecturer with the learners. They became more friendly, building up a feeling of trust and allowing shy students to engage. The result is also consistent with Dweikat (2019) who indicated that WhatsApp empowered learners and allowed them to interact with their classmates and their lecturer in the process of learning. The respondents expressed their ideas in the following statements:

“It enables us as students to collaborate and communicate easily. It also reduces the shyness to communicate with the lecturer on Whatsapp rather than face to face in the class.”

and another thought similarly:

“WhatsApp Group Discussion can be effectively used if the lecturer can give the material in an interesting and interactive way, and it can also encourage the student to participate in the learning process without feeling shy.”

The data also confirm the concern of the participants about less active classmates during the discussion noted by Rahmadi (2020). One respondent said:

“It's good to have WhatsApp for group discussion since it is easier to share information in the pandemic era. I find that typing is faster than hand-writing; I can give them links to any source on the internet to start the discussion. On the other hand, it has a negative impact for the rest of the group members if a member doesn't give her/his response in the discussion. It makes the other members upset.”

WhatsApp group discussion as second-class learning experience

The results from this research indicate that the respondents specified on what was 'lost' from the WhatsApp group discussion compared to the traditional in-class discussion. One respondent said:

“It is true that using WA as the media to communicate with the lecturer makes me more confident, because I can reread what I want to ask/share or whatsoever before sending them. Also, in this COVID-19 outbreak, WA is super helpful to help me study everytime and everywhere. However, I think in terms of online learning activity, using online meeting video platforms like Google Meet or Zoom Meeting are more convenient than using WA.”

for some respondents, they perceived the use of WhatsApp lacks speaking activities. Their comments clearly reflect this:

"It's a good tool for online learning where you can communicate and collaborate with your teacher and friend. One limitation of WAG is we cannot exercise our speaking, thus using other tools such as Google Meet or Zoom Meeting is necessary."

on the other hand, one respondent compared the WhatsApp group discussion with face to face discussion, and also confirmed the finding noted by Maulina, Geelan, Basri, and Noni (2021) that WhatsApp can reduce the speaking anxiety:

"Sometimes I find difficulty during discussion through WhatsApp groups since there is such a limit of explanation where it will be more clear if I do discussion with face to face interaction. On the other hand, it also makes me more comfortable when I talk to my lecturer since I am not confident enough with my English-speaking skill."

The use of WhatsApp group in educational context

Respondents from this also research specified a lot on how they perceived the benefits of the WhatsApp group discussion in educational context. The finding of this study confirmed the study of Rahmadi (2020) that WhatsApp groups have potency for learning and learners have a positive attitude towards WhatsApp as a learning and teaching medium. This respondent expressed his/her positive attitude in the following statement:

"Whatsapp is just the best. It's fast and very easy to use. In learning English, using whatsapp chat rooms is probably the best idea."

Apart from this statement, another respondent strengthened the idea of WhatsApp group has positive values in the English classrooms:

"In my opinion, whatsapp is one of the most easily used applications in various circles. Through the use of the whatsapp group discussion for online English classroom interaction, students and teachers can communicate smoothly by taking advantage of features contained in the application, exchanging information, easier to engage in learning activities, disseminating learning materials, etc."

Equally however, the findings confirm the potential for distraction in WhatsApp group discussion noted by Purvis et al. (2016).

"While using Whatsapp there will be some distractions, and it allows me to choose for doing something else rather than keeping up with the lesson in the group discussion."

The finding also confirmed that sometimes the learners become overwhelmed by the volume of messages in the WhatsApp group chat noted by Bouhnik & Dreshen (2014).

"It's quite convenient and helpful to use Whatsapp Group during online class. However, sometimes it is also confusing especially when the lecturers have already talked about another topic of discussion but our friends still respond to the previous topic."

Overall, these findings have brought some insights about how university learners perceived the use of WhatsApp group discussion in EFL classroom as lecturer-lecturers interaction, especially in the English Department of Universitas Negeri Malang. As not all the respondents felt the same about the use of WhatsApp group discussion, the differences became clearer. This became important feedback and considerations for the researcher, EFL learners and the lecturer in communicating in the WhatsApp groups.

4. Conclusions

This was very small-scale research accomplished with one cohort of undergraduate learners completing two study programs within one institution (English Language Education & English Language and Literature in English Department of Universitas Negeri Malang) and as such the results of this study cannot be reflected generalizable. Despite that, the results of this study present a plenty source of data to learners and learning technologists searching to exploit the possibility of WhatsApp group discussion as lecture-student interaction during COVID-19 pandemic. Consideration of the findings emerging from the close-ended questionnaire drew the focus to the important of WhatsApp group discussion for learners' engagement in English classroom, and the data collected in the open-ended questionnaire shed further perspective on the learners' considerations about the advantages and disadvantages arising. It appears clearly that learners on these programs have helped significantly from using WhatsApp group discussion to engage with their lecturer and their classmates. Analysis of the results showed that the advantages affiliated not simply to the accessibility, suitability and practicality of the WhatsApp group discussion, but also improves the learners' self-confidence in learning collaboratively with their classmates and the lecturer.

While encouraging learners to utilize the WhatsApp group discussion might be headed into the directions of accessibility, suitability and practicality, issues such as distraction, volume of the message and speaking skill are less easily stated. Possibly, the "instantaneous" nature of answers on WhatsApp discussion in this study, viewed positively by several respondents, might rise the chances for misinformation and confusion. Nonetheless, the finding from this study reported that some learners prefer to use other applications such as Google meet or Zoom meeting for their discussion because they can use and improve their speaking skill. Moreover, the result showed the possibility for developing speaking activities in WhatsApp group discussion for the learners to enhance their speaking skills and also to solve the miscommunication during the interactions. The researcher suggests for lecturer should be supported to utilize WhatsApp audio tools such as voice note and/or group call in the WhatsApp group to allow learners to use it for the educational intention. Conducting larger research with increased respondents including cooperative teachers & supervisors is recommended to obtain more detailed results. Furthermore, the future research should not only explore WhatsApp application but also investigate different learning media applications such as Google meet or Zoom meeting used among undergraduate learners in Indonesia. Considering technology holds a gradually more essential role in nowadays learning and teaching, harnessing the technology is important as pedagogical innovations in classroom practices.

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