

## Students' Opinions on the Functions and Usefulness of Communication on WhatsApp in the EFL Higher Education Context

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### Abstract

In a preparatory English as a foreign language (EFL) context at a Saudi University, the WhatsApp application is observed as being one of the fastest growing social media platforms, and one with a massive potential of being used in communication for academic as well as social purposes. This study seeks to explore students' opinions and perceptions on the usage and functions of WhatsApp communication within the EFL context. Findings from a descriptive survey analysis have shown that WhatsApp is a popular communication platform amongst the students, and therefore possibly has the potential of facilitating language learning in this EFL context. However, WhatsApp is currently mostly utilized as a platform for inquiries and announcements with minimum preset language learning goals. The present study aims to inform feasible recommendations regarding the presence and functionality of the WhatsApp platform, owing to the need to utilize such popular and readily used program in making EFL learning processes efficient and effective.

**Keywords:** EFL, Higher Education, social media, WhatsApp

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## 1 Introduction

Emerging social media platforms play an important role in shaping and changing human interactions. Their role in providing a learning environment can never be underestimated. In the context of this study, the WhatsApp application (WhatsApp) is observed as being one of the fastest growing social media platforms, and one with a massive potential of being used in academic communication. The study takes place within an academic context of a Saudi university preparatory year's English as a foreign language (EFL) program, at the university's English language institute (ELI). The students have been observed to excessively use WhatsApp on a daily basis, for communication with other classmates and teachers. To us as language educators, however, little is known about what the students exactly include in their WhatsApp messages and with whom they communicate the most.

We argue that by exploring student's opinions about the actual use and functions of WhatsApp, both in the current context and in similar contexts reported in the relevant literature, we can evoke positive changes in the EFL learning approaches, whereby knowledge acquisition and information transfer can be enhanced by this popular and readily accessed social media platform. Through the powerful features that can support learning in and out of a class context, WhatsApp use in facilitating EFL learning remains highly feasible. Therefore, we aim to investigate the current range of WhatsApp's functions in this higher education EFL environment by exploring: (1) the extent to which students use WhatsApp in their academic communication; and (2) the range of uses and functions of this platform in the EFL academic context.

## 2. Literature Review

For most instructors, teaching English as a second Language is very challenging. The internet is a global network and is, therefore, a great provider of highly beneficial network-based teaching environments for language teachers across the globe (Bansal & Joshi, 2014). Using such environments, language teachers can efficiently create helpful and meaningful language skill practice tasks for further practice and more significant benefit of their language learners (Barhoumi, 2015).

This network-based environment also enables language teachers to utilize an array of materials designed to enhance language learning within the classroom. With valuable learning tools such as WhatsApp, the effectiveness of language learning has improved greatly (Alfaki & Alharthy, 2014). That is because it poses a tremendous amount of information that is extremely beneficial for English as a second language, as it is a powerful way to engage learners by offering them authentic and real-life experiences that relate to their cultural backgrounds.

With WhatsApp, it is now easier for language instructors to share educational resources with their learners, and post assignments that can, in return, be sent back for assessment and grading. In all, WhatsApp is useful for those who are in the process of language learning, as it makes it easier to practice skills such as reading, writing, speaking and listening (Bansal & Joshi, 2014; Alsaleem, 2013).

With the ever-changing learning environment and learners' preference for various pedagogy methods, adoption of the social media platform for learning remains not only a tool for present-day teaching, but also a highly potent platform in the future for the revolutionary

development of the language of instruction and the language learning process among other similar learning processes (Salem, 2013). Since the conception, the large-scale acceptability and the use of various social media platforms, some software has stood out to be more relevant to the process of developing learning instructions and encouraging learning. Apart from WhatsApp, the social media applications deeply integrated into the present-day learning process include Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Skype, and Blogs (Cavus & Ibrahim, 2008).

Though it is one of the most recent instant messaging social platforms used across the globe, WhatsApp is one of the most commonly downloaded and used apps worldwide (Calvo, Arbiol & Iglesias, 2014). The original intention underlying the development of this application was the need to create a short messages system free from excess advertisement, so typical of the existing social media platforms (AbdAlfattah, 2015). Apart from texting, WhatsApp is also embedded with some functions and features that facilitate the ease of usability. It allows for sending of audios, videos, files, various web links and even provides for the making of video calls. Added to its benefits is the ability to make groups that enable members to communicate freely and safely within its boundaries. Statistically, instant messaging through WhatsApp has handled up to ten billion messages per day as of August 2012 (Amry, 2014). The quantity of messages increased to more than double that number by 2013, totaling approximately 27 billion messages every 24 hours. More than 450 million active users were also reported on the app by 2013 with as many as 700 million photos shared by users. WhatsApp allows for unlimited sharing of text messages over the 4G, 3G and even EDGE networks (Barhoumi, 2015).

With the great convenience associated with WhatsApp instant messaging, EFL students can enhance their interaction, learning, and collaboration (Salem, 2013). Of the different collaborative features in WhatsApp, students in higher education mostly use the text-based and short message modes of sending information. With the increased use of these platforms, numerous institutions of higher education across the globe have adjusted and adapted to the use of these technologies in the learning process.

Of the numerous present benefits noted from the use of WhatsApp in different institutions, is the creation of a discussion forum. Creation of these platforms leads to an endless discussion between the students and the instructor, and also amongst the students themselves. This leads to the creation and development of teaching communities that are the core support of the learning process, especially the traditional learning process (Doering et al., 2008).

Providing different levels of communications, either formal or informal, synchronous or asynchronous, the communication taking place on these social platforms are beneficial to the learning process as it deviates from the traditional method of learning, especially learning second languages which were potentially unattractive to young learners (Plana et al. 2013).

In the context of EFL, the use of WhatsApp creates a reliable platform that allows for both informal and formal interactions (Calvo et al. 2014). Unlike other subjects, the success in learning a language depends partly on the ability of the learner to express themselves. Through extensive interaction especially with peers, WhatsApp provides a rare avenue where students can interact continuously and seek due clarification, raise concerns and engage in other learning

activities both formally and informally (Salem, 2013). These develop positive social interactions between the students themselves and between the students and the instructors. Hence, the ability to solve learning difficulties as they emerge is made easier in the learning process through smartphones (Plana et al. 2013).

WhatsApp has contributed to the emergence of new trends in EFL. It is expanding the new era of learning that is fast changing the traditional approach of learning languages (Amry, 2014). It encourages learning outside of the class in an unprecedented way and is quickly changing the perception and attitude of students towards learning in a way which was otherwise predominated with class work, with no involvement of social network. With the continued use of these social platforms, especially WhatsApp, learning can increasingly become social, highly interactive and most importantly, more interactive than traditionally perceived. These changes are part of the greater technological revolution that is fast shaping the society in the 21st century (Barhoumi, 2015). These sets of attributes position WhatsApp as one of the greatest revolutionary social media platforms in the learning context. The usability and the potential significance of WhatsApp are supported by the well-defined impact of the use of instant messaging (IM) in the classroom context (Amry, 2014). IM use in the classroom context is associated with an array of positive developments in the learning process. It leads to a higher potential for learning (AbdAlfattah, 2015). It also increases the likelihood of learners remaining substantially active during the learning process and creating positive interactions between the student and their faculties both regarding particular content, as well as their personal issues that may adversely affect their learning (Plana et al. 2013). These systems also create some sense of belonging to relevant communities in schools, which results in students showing tendencies to take their assignments quite seriously in the presence of their peers. Moreover, "online synchronous or asynchronous discussion among students on social networks have a cognitive added value that provides them with the opportunity to construct and share knowledge and then attain good results on achievement tests (Amry, 2014, p. 132)".

The smartphone revolution remains one of the forces behind the increased use of WhatsApp among students. Indeed, smartphones operating on Android or other applications have become readily available among students, due to the significant reduction in the cost of acquiring a standard smartphone (Plana et al. 2013). As noted from the preceding section, WhatsApp is one of the fastest growing applications. Hence most students can be found on this platform (Calvo et al. 2014).

Teachers can thus form a class WhatsApp group as an easy communication platform. The micro-social network consists only of the intended class members and teachers, who can communicate to the entire class simultaneously and effectively. In the process, students can learn among themselves and also benefit from their interactions with their teachers.

However, it will be inaccurate to claim that these platforms are devoid of significant consequences, especially if they are mismanaged in the learning and development of learning instructions. The most notable impact is the non-academic form of discourse that is associated with WhatsApp and other IM platforms (Doering et al., 2008). This may lead to problems with grammar and punctuation, as these two aspects are not taken into consideration when using various IM platforms. Furthermore, students may tend to focus more on their social interactions

at the expense of investing time in other learning activities. Another concern reported by (Doering et al., 2008) about using IM platforms was their potential for affecting formality between teachers and students. Teachers “feared that sharing their knowledge of IM conventions with students (e.g., informal exchanges, emoticons, “IM speak,” abbreviations, shortcut misspellings, and acronyms) would brand them as more of a friend than a teacher” (Doering et al., 2008, p. 10).

However, the potential and current benefit of using WhatsApp in the language learning classroom outweighs these adverse impacts (Amry, 2014). With due control, it can be optimized to match the classroom expectations and reduce the associated negative impacts. In principle, it encourages collaboration, time-saving as well as learning in any place that seems to be of convenience to the learner.

### 3. Research Methods and participants

In this study we explore the purpose and functions of WhatsApp communication in the EFL environment of ELI at a Saudi university through a descriptive survey. The questionnaire, which was translated into Arabic (the participants' mother tongue) and sent through Google, mainly had a focus on WhatsApp use in the EFL environment. The participants were 144 randomly selected students. Because of the era that we live in, and the age of the participants, it was presumed that they had at least a basic proficiency in the use of the examined technology, and furthermore would have undoubtedly undertaken a larger capacity of tasks demanded than the use of WhatsApp.

### 4. Findings

Since WhatsApp is an IM application that is mostly associated with smartphones, we first asked the students about the types of devices used by them to access the internet.

Table 1 *Devices used by the students to access the internet*

Devises	Frequency	%
Smart phone	77	53.5
Desktop PC and Smartphone	38	26.4
iPad and Smartphone	15	10.4
Laptop	1	0.7
Laptop, Desktop PC, and Smartphone	3	2.1
Laptop, Desktop PC and iPad	1	0.7
Laptop, iPad, and Smartphone	4	2.8
Desktop PC and Smartphone	5	3.5
Total	144	100

Students' responses show that different devices are used to access the internet. Devices such as smartphones, laptops, Desktop PC, iPad, and tablet PCs are among the devices used by the students

to access the internet. Among all the students, 53.5% of the students use smartphones. Those using Laptops, Desktop PCs and iPad were lowest in ratio with 0.7% and a frequency of 1 (Table 1). It can be concluded that increasing trend of using smartphones has resulted in the decreased use of these larger sized electronic devices such as desktop PCs and laptops.

Our next inquiry concerned the use of social media networking. This was put forth with various networking sites out of which WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook were in question. Table 2 shows that the highest percentage of the students (20.8%) were found using WhatsApp only while those with Instagram and Facebook users were lesser in number. The students using WhatsApp and Facebook at the same time were also fewer in number. Only 1.4% of participants were engaged in using both at the same time. The students using Instagram and WhatsApp were the highest (64.6%). Only two out of the 144 students did not report using WhatsApp at all.

Table 2 *Social networking accounts subscribe by the students*

Answer	Frequency	%
WhatsApp	30	20.8
Instagram	2	1.4
WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook	17	11.8
Instagram and WhatsApp	93	64.6
WhatsApp and Facebook	2	1.4
Total	144	100

The questionnaire then became more specific, questioning the activities and functions performed for general educational purposes through WhatsApp communication.

Table 3 *The type of educational activities undertaken on WhatsApp*

WhatsApp uses and Activities	Frequency
Discussing course content and answers to assignments	101
Receiving announcements or instructions from the instructor	100
Social interaction (greetings and social topics)	88
Sharing of learning resources (e.g. files, model texts, summaries)	82
To stay in touch with the teacher	72
To stay in touch with classmates	64

Sharing knowledge and ideas through group discussion	30
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Table 3 shows that the WhatsApp was used most for discussing course content and answers to assignments, followed by receiving some instructions or announcements. Social interaction (greetings and social topics) came next in the order of the WhatsApp activities and scored frequencies close to those of staying in touch with the teacher and staying in touch with the classmates. The least frequent activity was Sharing knowledge and ideas through group discussion.

The query relating to the EFL-specific functions and benefits of WhatsApp communication is a central element in this questionnaire. Table 4 provides a summary of the students' responses to the functions and usefulness of WhatsApp in the EFL context.

Table 4 *Perceived functions and usefulness of WhatsApp in the EFL context*

WhatsApp EFL-specific benefits	Strongly disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly agree (%)	Total frequency (100%)
WhatsApp is useful in improving reading in English.	64.2)	10.69)	64.979)	59.41)	14400)
WhatsApp is useful in improved English grammar skills.	96.3)	43.98)	58.403)	34.26)	14400)

WhatsApp is useful in enhancing written communication in English	2 ( 1 . 4 )	2 ( 1 . 4 )	6 ( 6 ( 4 5 . 8 )	7 ( 4 ( 5 1 . 4 )	1 ( 4 ( 4 1 0 0 )
WhatsApp is useful in achieving educational goals and success in the EFL course	4 ( 2 . 8 )	9 ( 6 . 3 )	7 ( 3 ( 5 0 . 7 )	5 ( 8 ( 4 0 . 3 )	1 ( 4 ( 4 1 0 0 )
WhatsApp is useful in sharing ideas and knowledge in English	3 ( 2 . 1 )	0	5 ( 5 ( 3 8 . 2 )	8 ( 6 ( 5 9 . 7 )	1 ( 4 ( 4 1 0 0 )
Using WhatsApp is useful continued learning of English language outside the classroom.	4 ( 2 . 8 )	1 ( 4 ( 8 . 7 )	7 ( 7 ( 5 3 . 5 )	4 ( 9 ( 3 4 )	1 ( 4 ( 4 1 0 0 )
Being in course-related WhatsApp saves time and effort	9 ( 6 . 3 )	1 ( 0 ( 6 . 9 )	7 ( 5 ( 5 2 . 1 )	5 ( 0 ( 3 4 . 7 )	1 ( 4 ( 4 1 0 0 )
WhatsApp is a pleasant idea in education	1 ( 4 ( 8 . 7 )	2 ( 8 ( 1 9 . 4 )	6 ( 0 ( 4 1 . 7 )	4 ( 2 ( 2 9 . 2 )	1 ( 4 ( 4 1 0 0 )

The questions regarding the role of WhatsApp in improving reading in English was asked in gradual levels of agreement. Most of the respondents either agreed (47.9%) or strongly agree



(41%) with the opinion that using WhatsApp could be useful in improving reading in English. English language grammar could also be improved by using WhatsApp. The question contained the scores in the form of agree and disagree for the said purpose. 40.3% of respondents agreed and 23.6% strongly agreed, while 29.8% respondents disagreed and 6.3% strongly disagreed that WhatsApp could be helpful in improving English grammar.

The use of WhatsApp in enhancing written communication in English was addressed as well. Among the respondents, 51.4% students strongly agree and 45.8% agreed that use of WhatsApp enhanced their written communication in English. Only 1.4% of all respondents disagreed with the opinion and 1.4% strongly disagreed.

To proceed with the questionnaire, there were also questions which aimed at testing the importance of WhatsApp in achieving educational goals, its contribution to success in the EFL course, its role in sharing ideas and knowledge in English, and its role in continued learning of English language outside the classroom. Other questions probed if WhatsApp is considered a pleasant idea in education and if it saves time and effort.

On asking if WhatsApp could also be useful in achieving educational goals and success in the EFL course for the students, 50.7% of students agreed that it could be important, while 40.3% strongly agree that using WhatsApp is really useful and important in achieving educational goals and success. Only a few of the respondents strongly disagreed (2.8%) and disagreed (6.3%) with the opinion. The next question addressed the usefulness of WhatsApp in sharing ideas and knowledge in English. Only 2.1% of the respondent strongly disagreed while 59.7% of respondents strongly agreed and 38.2% agreed that it was helpful for them for the said purpose. The role of WhatsApp in continued learning of English language outside the classroom was also evaluated using this questionnaire. Most of the students strongly agreed (34%) or agreed (53.5%) that WhatsApp could be helpful for continued learning of English language outside the classroom. Few students (9.7%) were of the opinion that WhatsApp was not as useful in continuing learning outside the classroom and only 2.8% students were of the opinion that WhatsApp was of no use at all in this regard (Table. 4). Table 4 also shows that 52.1% of students agreed and 34.7% strongly agreed that it could be effort and time saving to be in a course- related WhatsApp group.

Finally, 29.2% of the respondents strongly agreed and 41.7% agreed with the opinion that WhatsApp is a pleasant and important idea in an educational environment. Less than a third of the students disagreed and strongly disagreed (19.4% and 9.7%) with this.

## 5. Discussion

The study was carried out to depict the feasibility and potential of WhatsApp platform in facilitating EFL learning in a university preparatory year context by determining the perception and attitudes among the students. In this case, a quantitative descriptive approach was used to make sound, evidence-based inferences to address the key research queries: (1) The extent to which students use the WhatsApp mobile application in their academic communication; and (2) The range of functions and benefits of this platform in the EFL academic context. As the study involved 144 students, it is considered a sufficient sample size for informing research conclusions. The collected data were

subjected to quantification to synthesize relevant information addressing the perceptions and attitudes of the students regarding the presence and utility of WhatsApp in an EFL learning setting.

According to the information compiled for Table 1, there is generally an increasing trend in utility for the respondents who use small-sized technology gadgets such as the iPad and Smartphones. This reflects the social appreciation for convenience and portability of the technology devices. As WhatsApp is almost exclusively used on mobile phones, it can be expected to have a positive impact on the majority of the EFL learners who are bound to turn to effective Internet-based communication platforms that guarantee easy access to learning materials and inter-stakeholder networking to open up a wide range of learning opportunities. With more than 53% of the respondent students reporting access to smartphone devices as the only device for logging on to the Internet, it is prudent to infer that WhatsApp is one of the current and trending communication technologies that can create room for better learning when put into practical use (Ta'amneh, 2017). Technically, increased use of smartphone devices makes it feasible to promote EFL learning via the Internet-based technology, which is deemed effective for networking with the imperative stakeholders in the education sector making it possible to foster positive change and system improvements. As most of the smartphone users are expected to use WhatsApp for social communication, it is generally an appreciated piece of technology in educational settings creating a notion of effective adoption and infusion into the EFL learning processes and procedures.

Furthermore, Table 2 indicates the popularity of the social media platforms in the respondent population. WhatsApp, , is associated with about 20% popularity used alone and 93% when combined with Instagram regarding the user preference and frequency among the study respondents. This is a tentative indication of how the tertiary level students, perceive the presence and functioning of WhatsApp in the learning environment. As a result, the popularity of this social media platform among the educational research respondents makes it a feasible teaching technique that could be used to better the learning experience for the EFL learners. These attitudes also pave the way for the informed formulation of the educational system strategies that guarantee successful learning and goal achievement for this group of students who are considered yearning to master the technique of communicating via fluent English, despite their non-native cultural backgrounds (Young, 2016).

Considering the fact that learning in an EFL environment should be sustained above specific performance standards to ensure goal achievement, there is a call to ensure the adoption of effective learning processes that are aligned with the overall educational system goals and objectives. In this case, the perceptions of the students in a higher education EFL context manifest an anticipated reception of these core stakeholders in the educational system towards the presence and functioning of WhatsApp in the learning environment. In this case, it is key to prioritize the betterment of learning the English language (Darmi & Albion, 2014). The preferences of the respondents towards the various kinds of the existing uses of WhatsApp in the EFL context. The responses show processes that involve sharing educational resources, social interaction, receiving announcements and instructions from the instructor, sharing knowledge and ideas through group discussion, and educational services and assignments. Technically, using WhatsApp for communication is capable of successfully fostering these educational functions in the EFL learning environment. Therefore, it is generally expected that WhatsApp can improve learning and knowledge acquisition in an EFL environment, owing to the ability to induce interactive learning among the learners and core

educational practitioners like teachers and curriculum managers. This is a critical factor to consider while designing a technology infusion approach that aims to improve learning (Balakrishnan & Gan, 2016).

In addition, the study revealed that WhatsApp could be optimized to bring positive change in the EFL learning systems whereby knowledge acquisition and information transfer can be enhanced. This is according to the general reception of people towards this communication technology. This is echoed in the literature, which combatively attributes WhatsApp to positive attitude and perception from the teaching and learning stakeholders within the higher education EFL environments (e.g. Al Shekaili, 2016).

The research further found out that the students perceive WhatsApp communication as useful in a wide range of EFL-related activities and learning processes. This was an essential indication of the perceived impact of this social media platform in the higher education EFL environment. The majority of the respondents reported an improvement in the core English skills such as reading, writing, and grammar, as well as the capacity to help communication in English and continued learning outside the classrooms. More importantly, they do perceive WhatsApp communication as an asset in achieving educational goals and success in the EFL course and believe it is a pleasant idea in education. Technically, this indicates that WhatsApp can be effective for improving English language learning and social networking skills among the EFL learners who are more likely to face difficulties in reading and writing via English (Gooch et al., 2016). The number of respondents whose preferred use for WhatsApp is attributed to enhancing a working rapport with the teacher also shows the perceived interactive importance of the technology among the representative stakeholders of this higher education EFL institution. This is core to facilitating better learning and educational systems for the EFL students who are in dire need of effective learning to improve knowledge and skill acquisition as proposed for subsequent studies. It is critical to bring to light the relevance of WhatsApp prior to its introduction in the EFL learning environment.

The current perceptions and attitudes of these survey respondents portray the actual situation within other EFL learning environments (Alfauzan & Hussain, 2017). Most of the respondents perceive WhatsApp as a useful tool to improve language skills. On the other hand, very few respondents (11%) are reported to disagree with the notion that WhatsApp leads to the development of language skills in an EFL higher education environment. It is critical to promote learning among EFL students owing to their language acquisition difficulties in the second language (English) compared to the native-English speaking learners in the same higher education system. Generally, this prolifically contributes to the perceived impact of WhatsApp in the EFL knowledge transfer environment (Khrisat & Mahmoud, 2013).

Further, the perceptions of the student respondents regarding the applicability of WhatsApp in grammar improvement advocate WhatsApp as a social media platform that can enable the sharing of learning materials and interactive learning between learners and their teacher, opening up more learning opportunity and making it easy to acquire the knowledge and skills learned. This social media technology has been perceived effective for improving the majority of the students' grammatical fluency in English (Alnujaidi, 2016). It is necessary, though, to consider the overall perceptions of all EFL educational system stakeholders regarding how WhatsApp could function in

the environment while addressing the language learning outcomes and core goals. This makes it one of the considerable factors that could guarantee successful teaching based on the receptivity of the learners and teachers towards the technology, which is expected to open up adoption chances for the betterment of the entire learning system (Ta'amneh, 2017).

The majority of the student respondents agree with the fact that WhatsApp makes it possible to create a rapport between these essential EFL learning stakeholders, whose dedication and commitment towards the educational system facilitates goal achievement. In this higher education context, most of the respondents revealed a high likeability to the use of the WhatsApp social media to run pertinent learning activities and goals. In one of the survey questions, 91% of the student respondents found WhatsApp necessary for the achievements of the set educational goals and objectives. This implies an anticipated positive impact of mobile technology on the effectiveness of language learning, especially in an EFL teaching and skill development context (Begum, 2011). On the contrary, 9% of the student respondents generally disagreed with the postulate that WhatsApp could be put to practical use regarding the perfection of grammar while using the English language for the written and spoken communication. It goes entirely without saying that it can be challenging to foster programs and initiatives that are designed to make communication better through learning for EFL students (Wilson & Stacey 2004).

Moreover, a majority of the survey student respondents (97.9%) testify to the use of WhatsApp as an effective English-medium information sharing platform compared to the 2.1 % that were reluctant to the use of WhatsApp, owing to the variations in the credibility of the technology's effectiveness in the EFL learning context. With these attitudes among the learners, it is entirely possible to tap the capacities of these learners with an aim to ensure positive changes in the EFL educational system (Alfauzan & Hussain, 2017). This makes WhatsApp a viable device for improving the acquisition of EFL-specific knowledge and the development of language skills in English among these foreign learners whose learning capacities do not necessarily compare with the native-English speakers. There is a dire need to improve learning for the individual learners based on the deemed effectiveness of WhatsApp for interactive learning, the perfection of communication techniques as sharing information, and opening channels for social interactions across the stakeholders levels in the EFL learning environment.

According to the survey question reviewing the impact of WhatsApp in an EFL learning environment based on its influence on continued out-of-class learning, it is evident that the majority of the respondents (more than 87%) generally have a sound perception of the mobile technology regarding its presence and function in this EFL learning environment. This is a critical and a significant contributor to the perceptions of the students and teachers regarding the application of this technology in learning exercises (Alnujaidi, 2016). On the other hand, less than 13% of the respondents associate WhatsApp with improper transformations among the users that are not aligned with the EFL learning outcomes and educational goals. According to Shvidko (2018), the outside-class learning activities provide a unique learner experience making it easy and possible for foreign learners to master and comprehend the concepts and language skills taught. Also, it makes learning more memorable and effective in regards to the achievement of the set goals and objectives for individuals and group-based EFLs. From the perceived importance of WhatsApp, it is indubitably

true that educational practitioners ought to consider putting the perceptual trends among the teachers and students to positive use.

Also, as an educational idea, WhatsApp is generally perceived as useful and effective for information sharing and knowledge acquisition for the higher education EFL students. This is based on the premise that the social media platform is associated with the capacity to emancipate and inform the success-driving stakeholders within the EFL educational context (Lee et al., 2015). With a majority (70.9%) of the student respondents supporting the opinion that this mobile communication technology could be effectively used in learning, it is advisable to harness the positive feedback for improving EFL learning in the future. According to this review question, WhatsApp is by far deemed the most relevant social media platform that could be harnessed as an English language teaching platform for the EFL learners whose learning capacities are unique and expected to face difficulties acquiring skills and knowledge in the foreign language. As an attitude indicator, it shows that technology can be received as a system improvement if the stakeholders are making up the driving force of the educational goal achievement. This is technically an improvement measure that can be adopted and formulated as a strategy to ensure successful EFL in this higher education context and similar contexts. We assume that the role played by these stakeholder attitudes and perceptions of the WhatsApp mobile communication technology is significant for improving the entire educational system performance. This review is based on the fact that the presence and functioning of WhatsApp in this EFL context can either be a better or worse educational idea depending on the perceived impact on learning progress.

The last question for the student respondents related to the time management impact of using WhatsApp in the higher education EFL context. This was aimed to review the productivity impact of this mobile internet-based communication that is deemed necessary for revamping the attitudes and inflexibility of the imperative stakeholders in the educational system that determines the success of the adopted curricula. Should the research indicate a positive perception of WhatsApp in this higher education EFL context, it is feasible to make productive use of the technology as a major improvement for the learning processes for the English language among the group of the EFL students. In this case, 86.8 % of the student respondent's manifest concurrence with the assumption that this communication technology is bound to open up better learning opportunities in the higher EFL learning context. This can be optimized with an aim to guarantee a desirable learning experience for these language skills and knowledge seekers, making it possible for them to master the essential communication rules and principles such as grammar. Most students view WhatsApp as a time-saving technology owing to the efficiency of information sharing and knowledge transfer. This is an indication of the perceived positive impact of this platform in an EFL higher education environment, making it a feasibly applicable technique in teaching and knowledge relaying between the critical parties in the entire learning system (Nassuora, 2012).

## 6. Conclusions

The students perceive WhatsApp communication as useful in a wide range of language learning processes. However, the perceived impact of this social media platform in the higher education EFL context is more vivid in activities and strategies pertaining to communication, and course and course-material management. Despite this realization of the usefulness of WhatsApp in the logistics' aspect of the learning process, the students believe in the potential this platform has in learning language skills.

Therefore, it is imperative for educational practitioners to understand the prevalent attitudes and perceptions of the teaching staff and students towards the presence and functionality of WhatsApp in the higher EFL learning system, to guarantee better knowledge and skill acquisition and to spearhead successful communication via English as a foreign language. This is a clear indication of the positive reception attributed towards the technology in the EFL higher education environment as it is expected to make it possible to foster learning through this application based on the proposed future research information. However, the current perceptions and attitudes of these survey respondents portray the actual situation within other EFL learning environments (Alfauzan & Hussain, 2017).

It is critical for the curriculum designers and practitioners to consider learners' opinions while seeking to leverage the impact caused by the presence and functioning of the WhatsApp mobile communication technology in an EFL learning environment. In particular, there is a need to consider its potential in promoting proficiency skill acquisition in reading and writing the English language.

Finally, the consensus amongst the students that they find WhatsApp a pleasant idea in education yields further support to our call for considering approaches in EFL learning whereby knowledge acquisition and information transfer can be enhanced by this popular and readily accessed social media platform. Through the powerful features that can support learning in and out of a class context, the application of WhatsApp use in facilitating EFL learning remains highly feasible.

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