



## English language teachers' views of WhatsApp affordances for language learning



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### ABSTRACT

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This study addresses the pressing need for a deeper understanding of the potential role of WhatsApp in the teaching and learning of English in the context of a foreign language at university level. Specifically, this study explores English language teachers' views on how WhatsApp can be integrated into the teaching and learning process to support the development of language skills and performance. To achieve this, data was collected through semi-structured interviews from 30 English language teachers during the second semester of the academic year 2021/2022 at a university in Saudi Arabia and it was analyzed using a thematic approach. The findings revealed that all the teachers in this study have an avid view of their experience with WhatsApp: it facilitates and supports the development of speaking and writing skills; it promotes informal learning and interaction, encourages the exchange of information, and offers emotional, informational and appraisal support to students. By understanding the potential of WhatsApp for language learning, this study hopes to contribute valuable insights to practitioners, aiding them in developing effective teaching strategies that can leverage the affordances of this digital platform. By harnessing WhatsApp's capabilities, teachers can enhance language learning outcomes and create an environment conducive to student engagement and success.

**Contribution/ Originality:** This research is unique in its exploration of English language teachers' perspectives on how WhatsApp can effectively support language skills development and enhance overall language learning outcomes. By shedding light on the positive views of teachers and uncovering the diverse ways in which WhatsApp can facilitate informal learning, interaction, and student support, this research expands our understanding of the potential of digital tools in language education.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Social media, which is originally created for socializing purposes, has been playing a crucial role in facilitating and supporting learning, especially during the recent COVID-19 pandemic (Nguyen et al., 2022; Schroeder, Curcio, & Lundgren, 2019). Using social media, teachers and students actively engage in an interactive learning process irrespective of distance, place, or time. Students interact with teachers, colleagues, and content in instant costless

ways (Ali & Bin-Hady, 2019) thus enhancing students' engagement, participation, collaboration, and communication (Almutairi, Simpson, Khan, & Dickinson, 2022), which leads to productive learning, and improved creativity (Minghui, Lei, Xiaomeng, & Potmješilc, 2018) despite the restricted movements implemented during the pandemic (Junaidi, Hashim, & Ismail, 2022).

In general, studies have reported that social media positively impacts how teachers communicate knowledge to students in the sense that it enables the integration of several learning styles to keep the students engaged and motivated (e.g., (Kadylak & Makki, 2018; Nguyen et al., 2022)). For instance, students who learn better through visuals are supported with visible materials such as videos and pictures through their social media counts on Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter, and those who learn better through reading or writing are supported with handouts and notes. Thus, students take more interest and retain more information (Greenhow & Lewin, 2016). It also enables teachers to share unlimited learning resources with students; teachers can share links to articles, lectures, textbooks, recordings, and clips, to facilitate students' learning (Had & Ab Rashid, 2019). Moreover, social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn provide diverse tools like quizzes, forums, surveys, channels, and groups that teachers can utilize to assess their students' comprehension of the material and receive prompt feedback from them. (Schroeder et al., 2019).

In the realm of social media affordances for learning, WhatsApp stands out as a valuable platform for English language learning and teaching due to its versatile communicative features. WhatsApp offers significant communicative affordances for English language learning and teaching. WhatsApp enables language learners to practice their English language skills. Students can engage in one-on-one conversations or group discussions with peers, enabling them to practice writing and speaking in English. Additionally, WhatsApp supports various multimedia formats, allowing teachers to share audio files, videos, and images as teaching materials or language exercises. WhatsApp's group feature facilitates collaborative learning, where students can participate in language-related discussions, exchange ideas, and receive feedback from their peers and instructors. The instant messaging nature of WhatsApp allows for immediate and interactive communication, promoting active engagement and quick clarification of doubts. Furthermore, teachers can create language-related quizzes, polls, and surveys to assess students' progress and understanding. Overall, WhatsApp's communicative affordances offer a versatile and dynamic platform that enhances English language learning and teaching experiences.

Although social media platforms are generally linked to positive learning experiences, they are not necessarily useful for learning, unless teachers and learners strategically use them to create a supportive learning environment. This paper puts forth the voices, views and recommendations of 30 English language teachers at a university in Saudi Arabia who have experience in using WhatsApp as a learning tool in their English language classroom. This paper argues that if used tactfully, WhatsApp can enhance and strengthen students' speaking and writing skills, foster positive attitudes toward learning and enable students to develop autonomous learning.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. *Technology as a Cognitive and Social Tool*

This study is grounded in the assumption that learning is a mindful, constructive activity comprising deliberate cognitive and social efforts. In this sense, technology is conceptualized as a cognitive learning tool and a social tool rather than as instructional media. Cognitive tools are technologies that support and facilitate learners' engagement in knowledge construction i.e., technology is a facilitator and engager of knowledge construction (Jonassen, Peck, & Wilson, 1999). Technology does not offer direct learning; it actively engages learners in the process of thinking which eventually supports learning. Learning, according to the cognitive tool perspective, takes place when learners actively engage themselves in complex learning environments that foster problem-solving and higher-order thinking skills. Technology, viewed as a social and cognitive tool, aligns with Vygotsky's perspective that learning is a social activity wherein social interaction plays a crucial role in cognitive development (Vygotsky, 1978). When

learners actively participate in co-constructing knowledge with their peers and teachers, their knowledge construction and comprehension are enhanced. This process is facilitated through social interactions mediated by the tools employed. Therefore, learners should be provided with tools that support their knowledge construction. WhatsApp, as one of these tools, can serve as a platform to augment the learning process. It enables the establishment of a learner-centered environment beyond the confines of traditional classrooms, offering numerous opportunities for cooperation and interaction among students and teachers. By leveraging WhatsApp, learners can engage in collaborative learning experiences that foster deeper understanding and knowledge acquisition.

The theoretical framework for technology as a cognitive and social tool is based on the idea that technology can be used as a tool to enhance human cognitive and social abilities. This framework suggests that technology is a tool that can be used to augment human memory, attention, and problem-solving abilities, as well as to facilitate communication and collaboration among individuals and groups. The framework also posits that technology can be used as a tool to create new forms of social interaction and organization, such as virtual communities and online social networks. Additionally, it highlights how people's interaction with technology is not neutral and is influenced by societal, cultural and individual factors. In this sense, it is justified for this study to put forth the views and recommendations of Arab teachers regarding the use of WhatsApp for language learning to expand the existing literature which is currently limited to other parts of the world, such as Malaysia (e.g. [Ali \(2022\)](#)), Indonesia (e.g. [Wijaya \(2018\)](#)), Africa (e.g. [Madge et al. \(2019\)](#)), and Hong Kong ([So, 2016](#)). As a whole, the theoretical framework for technology as a cognitive and social tool emphasizes the potential for technology, WhatsApp being a specific example, to empower and enhance human abilities, while also recognizing the potential for unintended consequences and the need for careful consideration of how technology is designed and used.

## *2.2. Recent Studies on WhatsApp Affordances for Language Learning*

Several studies in the context of Arab region have investigated the potential of WhatsApp in facilitating language learning, e.g., [Alshammari, Parkes, and Adlington \(2017\)](#); [Alqahtani, Bhaskar, Vadakalur Elumalai, and Abumelha \(2018\)](#); [Ali and Bin-Hady \(2019\)](#); [Alghamdy \(2019\)](#) and [Abubakar \(2021\)](#). These studies will be reviewed in this section as their findings serve as the backdrop for understanding the views of Arab teachers in this study.

In their study of WhatsApp in English as a foreign language (EFL) instruction with Saudi Arabian university students, [Alshammari et al. \(2017\)](#) employed focus group interviews to study the attitudes of Preparatory Year students and English language teachers toward using WhatsApp in teaching English as a foreign language. Findings indicated that WhatsApp is used as a tool in EFL instruction for language practice, language learning support, and information exchange. This is accomplished through autonomous learning instructional strategies, peer learning, and teacher-directed learning. They conclude that applications such as WhatsApp should be leveraged to develop learning communities, reposition instructors as facilitators, and encourage autonomous and peer learning. Though due to the nature of anywhere-anytime learning, this study recommended that there should be some guidelines for students regarding teachers contact hours and response times to ease teachers' fears and promote greater student autonomy.

In the study of WhatsApp as a platform for adult English language learning, [Alqahtani et al. \(2018\)](#) employed a quantitative survey to gauge students' practices and uses of WhatsApp in learning and their opinions on WhatsApp as an online educational platform. The responses from 300 respondents revealed that students consider WhatsApp as an online platform to assist their language learning. WhatsApp promotes effective communication, supports collaborative learning, increases students' confidence to read and write in English, and it offers innovative opportunities to learn. Their study concluded that WhatsApp is efficient in improving the capability of students and nurture positive learning attitudes.

[Ali and Bin-Hady \(2019\)](#) conducted a study investigating the attitudes, motivation, and anxiety of EFL students towards WhatsApp as a language learning tool. Their research utilized a closed-ended questionnaire to

assess the influence of WhatsApp on the enhancement of language skills among Saudi EFL students at the College of Arts. The study sample consisted of 55 male and female students. The findings indicated that WhatsApp exerted a positive impact on all four language skills, and students who integrated WhatsApp into their formal learning exhibited positive attitudes towards the tool due to its user-friendliness and enjoyable nature. Furthermore, the study revealed that WhatsApp played a significant role in motivating students to use the target language, and it also had a positive effect in reducing students' anxiety levels. As a result, the researchers recommended the implementation of WhatsApp at all stages of English language teaching and learning based on these encouraging outcomes. Alghamdy (2019) employed quasi-experimental design to investigate the impact of WhatsApp on the achievement of 48 preparatory year students. The results revealed that students in the experimental group who were taught via WhatsApp scored higher in language skills than the control group who were exposed to traditional teaching. The results also showed that students were excited to engage in English classes through WhatsApp groups.

Abubakar (2021) employed a descriptive survey research design to gauge students' perceptions of the adoption of WhatsApp for learning among university students. The results indicated that university students find it easy to use WhatsApp to engage in learning, and they had a positive attitude toward using WhatsApp in an academic context. The study concluded that WhatsApp may be accepted as an instructional tool in learning and teaching. It will play a significant part in supporting learning if teachers and students get to know its potential and utilize it as a learning tool. All the five studies reviewed above examined students' perception on the implementation of WhatsApp in learning. However, they did not account for teachers' perceptions on the adoption of WhatsApp in the learning process. Teachers are main constituent in learning process, and they have control and huge impact on students' learning. To fill in the gap, this study aims to gauge teachers' perceptions on the affordance of WhatsApp in promoting language learning and interactions.

### *2.3. Challenges in using WhatsApp as a Learning Tool*

Although WhatsApp is seen as a powerful learning facilitator, various studies discussed the challenges of integrating it in learning. For example, WhatsApp use has been reported as addictive, and it encourages cheating and plagiarism and increases distraction (Abubakar, 2021; Bhatt & Arshad, 2016; Irfan & Dhimmarr, 2019). Similarly, Aburezeq and Ishtaiwa (2013) reported several challenges in using WhatsApp in learning; for example, a lack of students' commitment to effective participation, distraction to learning, and unnecessary workload. In the same vein, in their psychological study about the impact of WhatsApp messenger on university-level students, Irfan and Dhimmarr (2019) revealed that WhatsApp is highly addictive and reduces students' concentration on studies, distracts students from achieving tasks, and negatively affects academic performance. They conclude that WhatsApp has a profound negative impact on youth and adversely affects their routine, behavior and education.

## **3. METHODOLOGY**

This study aimed to get an in-depth understanding of English language teachers' use of WhatsApp in a university in Saudi Arabia. A qualitative method using semi-structured interviews was employed for data collection. The following subsections offer detailed descriptions of the study context, sampling, and data analysis method.

### *3.1. Study Context*

This study was conducted at the Preparatory Year program of a university in Saudi Arabia. The university comprises several faculties such as Art and literature, Engineering, Computer Sciences, Applied Medical Sciences, and Business Administration. In Saudi Arabia, undergraduate students must undertake a Preparatory Year before they start studying their preferred discipline. Students at the Preparatory Year must study several courses e.g.,

English to qualify for their desirable field of study. The English Unit at the university employs 40 English language instructors who teach English courses at the Preparatory Year.

### 3.2. Sampling

All English teachers in the Preparatory Year were invited to participate in this study. In recruiting participants, a convenience sampling technique was employed, whereby English language teachers were approached and asked whether they would be willing to be interviewed. The inclusion criteria were a) those who consented to participate in the study, and b) those who were members of a WhatsApp group specifically for the English course they taught. During the data generation period, 30 English language teachers were recruited to participate in this study, which reached a saturation point at which new data ceased to shed any further light on the issue under investigation.

### 3.3. Data Generation and Analysis

Data in this study were collected through semi-structured interviews with 30 English language teachers in the Preparatory Year during the second semester of the academic year 2021/2022. Interviews with teachers were conducted face-to-face. Each interview session lasted for about 20-30 minutes for each participant. All the interviews were conducted in English as the participants were all English language teachers.

All the interviews were recorded and then transcribed for analysis. The names of participants were replaced by (T1, T2, T3 etcetera). Data in this study were analyzed inductively in accordance with Braun and Clarke (2006) thematic approach which comprises six stages: a) familiarizing self with data, b) generating initial codes, c) searching for themes, d) reviewing themes, e) defining and naming themes, and f) producing the report.

## 4. FINDINGS

The findings of this study are based on the thematic analysis of data taken from semi-structured interviews with 30 English language teachers. There were five themes that emerged: i) developing speaking and writing skills, ii) promoting informal learning and interaction, iii) encouraging exchange of information, iv) and obtaining necessary support. The participants in this study consisted of individuals from various countries who had the WhatsApp application on their smartphones, having utilized it for more than seven years. The participants' ages ranged from 25 to 45 years old. Among the participants, 57% were female, while 43% were male. Regarding academic qualifications, 30% held a Ph.D., while 70% had a master's degree. All the participants enthusiastically shared their perspectives on using WhatsApp in their teaching practices and expressed its effectiveness in managing students, activities, and instructional materials. Their overall attitudes towards utilizing WhatsApp for teaching English were positive, and each participant had a dedicated WhatsApp group specifically designed for the courses they were teaching.

### 4.1. Developing Speaking and Writing Skills

Speaking and writing are essential skills in learning a new language. Speaking and writing are productive skills that involve producing words, phrases, and sentences. Speaking and writing are indicators of language competence (Martirosyan, Hwang, & Wanjohi, 2015). All the 30 teachers reported that WhatsApp had helped them engage all the students in speaking and writing activities. The following transcript illustrates how WhatsApp supported improving speaking and writing skills.

Excerpt 4.1

*WhatsApp helps my students learning English especially speaking and writing. When we have a speaking or a writing exercise, I always ask the students to submit their responses through WhatsApp either in the assigned group or in private. Using WhatsApp enables all the students to work at the same time unlike traditional ways where I only*

*have chances to listen or read some of the students' responses. I mean traditionally I only have a chance to let four or five students speak due to time constraint, now with WhatsApp, all the students can record and share their voice talking about the assigned topic. (T 3).*

While participating in a learning activity is an important aspect of language learning, using WhatsApp helps engaging all students and enables them to work on assigned tasks at the same time. In language classrooms, active students and those who frequently participate are always the ones who speak and share their responses, other students like introverts or those who need more time to complete a task are left behind except in certain cases when the teacher call their names and ask them to participate. In this sense, WhatsApp serves as a stimulant to introvert and shy students (Astuti, 2021) as they have a chance to be active and take part in class activities.

Another teacher shared his insights on how WhatsApp facilitates writing and speaking skills and serves as a tool to keep track of classroom activities and documentation.

Excerpt 4.2

*In writing, my students find it easier to write through smartphones because they can type fast, use autocorrection features, voice recognition if they don't know how to spell a word, translation if they forget or don't know a word, you see these options keep them engaged and dedicated to learning. When they speak, students listen to themselves before submitting their recorded voice, it gives them confidence. I think technology in general and WhatsApp in specific is helpful in writing and speaking because of the things I see in my classroom; I mean the engagement of students and the improvement I notice as the semester moves on. One more thing, WhatsApp help me track and record the progress of my students. I can access students' answers all the time and they serve as a proof to my superiors as well. (T 15)*

As discernible in the excerpt above, allowing students to use their mobiles in learning ensures all the students are taking advantage of the resources around them. Autocorrection, replacement, speech recognition and the other features in WhatsApp or smartphones are helpful tools in writing and speaking; they can promote the quality of students output, foster confidence, enable students to complete the assigned task/s, offer alternative language forms, and encourage students' independent learning. These features are important in learning English, and they are in line with the autonomous learning approach.

WhatsApp is not only seen important in teaching, but also in documenting students' work. Teachers need to include samples of students' work in their course file and when the students work is submitted through WhatsApp, the teachers can access them at anytime, anyplace, and the chance of getting lost or ignored is decreased.

Below is another example of how WhatsApp use contributes to improved writing and speaking skills.

Excerpt 4.3

*Every time I ask the students to share their responses on WhatsApp, I get lengthier exchanges compared to paper-based writing and improvisational talk, and it is usually error-free and let me tell you it is not copying from the internet because I know my student. I know their level and I know what they are capable of. I also use the application to offer feedback to students. (T 9)*

Teacher Sami considers WhatsApp useful in promoting students' writing and speaking skills. Using WhatsApp to write or record talk stimulates more extensive verbal than what they say or write following conventional methods. Being able to write or speak in length is an indicator of language improvement and competence (Akkara, Anumula, & Mallampalli, 2020). The expert teacher knows students' level and their linguistic competence and can determine whether the constructed discourse is the student's original work, or it has been copied from other sources (see (Al-Smadi, 2020; Al-Smadi, Rashid, Yassin, & Saad, 2022)). Thus, the challenge related to the possibility that the students may use their smartphones to plagiarize their work is lessened.

WhatsApp is also believed to nurture constructive feedback. Offering feedback is an essential role of a teacher (Al-Smadi, 2020). Constructive feedback engages students into learning and increases their awareness about correctness of their responses and how to improve them. Feedback enables students to learn from their own mistakes and from other students. Constructive feedback is a tool to encourage students' contribution to class

activities and enables them to improve the quality of their responses, and thus sharpens writing and speaking skills (Plaindaren & Shah, 2019).

#### 4.2. Promoting Informal Learning and Interaction

Students' interactions with one another and with teachers in classrooms or outside classrooms are crucial in the development of their linguistic repertoire (Al-Smadi & Rashid, 2017). These interactions, formal or informal, provide students with language input which they can use in a desirable discourse (Al-Smadi & Rashid, 2017). Concerning WhatsApp, 83% of teachers in this study considered this application as a platform that facilitates students' informal interactions. WhatsApp enables students to interact with their peers and teachers in a prompt and costless manner. The following excerpt illustrates the role of WhatsApp in promoting informal interactions.

##### Excerpt 4.4

*Our WhatsApp course group is great, and I really enjoy chatting with my students. I have 30 students in this group. The group is not purely academic, all the students use it to share news, talk about sport, celebration, timely events, jokes, songs, and viral videos. As a group admin, I do not mind talking about these topics and share personal views or likes. The thing is I only use English to speak or respond to the students, and I have made it clear since the beginning of the semester that we all have to use English when we write or speak in the group. I have encouraged risk taking so students will not hesitate to write or speak or be afraid of misconception or prejudgment. From my experience, this way decreases the level of anxiety among the students and encourage them to be active members in the group. The group is active all the time and usually when I wake up, I see over a thousand message in the group which is all in English. (T 19)*

WhatsApp has the potential to host private and public interactions of group members. WhatsApp groups can host and nurture student/s-student/s interactions and teacher-student/s interactions. For example, humors and jokes create a pleasant atmosphere, encourage participation, and strengthen teacher-student/s and student/s-student/s rapport (Al-Smadi, 2020).

Students' engagement and responses to news, sport, celebration, timely events, jokes, songs, and viral videos are considered learning; students can practice previously acquired language, and they can learn from each other. Students' engagements in these topics help them build and sharpen their language skills (Rogoff, Callanan, Gutiérrez, & Erickson, 2016).

Turn-taking, exchange of ideas, negotiation of meaning, agreement, disagreement, and expressing feelings and personal views promote off-task and informal learning of students as they use several linguistic forms to engage in such activities (Al-Smadi, 2020). The use of these linguistics forms stimulates several cognitive and affective skills such as reasoning, remembering, responding, and valuing which all support learning and language improvement. Additionally, the number of messages in the group (*over a thousand*, line 12) indicates that the teacher successfully promoted interactions by hosting students' talk in the WhatsApp group. These interactions about a variety of topics not only help students expand their lexicon and style but also help students learn from each other and from teachers who can offer models on language use.

Encouraging risk-taking in learning a language allows students to practice the language in authentic settings beyond classrooms (Rhéaume, Slavkov, & Séror, 2021). The teacher in Excerpt 4.4 clarified that there are no bad assumptions about students' language in the group. This encouragement gave the students the liberty to talk and express their opinions and feelings and indeed maximize the group interactions.

#### 4.3. Encouraging Exchange of Information

WhatsApp with its features has made it possible for students and teachers to share different types of information related to teaching and learning. It also enables students and teachers to access information anytime, anywhere without being tied up to time or physical restraints. All 30 teachers in this study expressed that

WhatsApp is handy when it comes to sharing information and all of them use the application to disseminate information. The following transcript illustrates the role of WhatsApp in disseminating information.

Excerpt 4.5

*WhatsApp makes communications easy for me. I announce class timetable, dates of exams, quizzes. I send lectures material and videos with notes and explanations. My students also ask me several questions about misunderstood thought, dates, or any updates for the course. Also, it's easy for them to recheck chats and audio message and return to them as a reference when necessary. So, it's easy for me because I send the notes once instead of sending to each student. Also, I can check whether message delivered or recipient read it. (T 14)*

The teacher in this excerpt finds communication with students through WhatsApp easy and comfortable. WhatsApp can be used to notify students about schedules and examinations. WhatsApp can be used also to share course content and supplementary materials.

Similarly, WhatsApp is used by students to connect with their teachers and get clarification and confirmation about the course being taught. Sharing materials and notifications through WhatsApp allows students to access information effortlessly at any time. Beside sharing information, the Info feature of WhatsApp also facilitates the teacher's work as it enables the teacher to verify the delivery of information and announcement and even check who has seen the communicated text or audio. WhatsApp facilitates sharing course-related information and material and supports content communication in unconventional ways. Thus, it facilitates teachers' work and saves teachers' time.

Teacher 27 uses WhatsApp to keep students informed about updates and other administrative matters.

Excerpt 4.6

*WhatsApp enables me to share everything related to course I teach such as textbook, references, handouts, useful resources to practice English and it also enables me to share updates about any changes in scheme of work, urgent updates regarding students' attendance because sometime due to weather we convert to online teaching instead of physical attendance. WhatsApp also enables me to share important information and memos from the faculty, university, and academic advisor. (T 27)*

WhatsApp is used to share course materials and resources to support learning and practice of target language. WhatsApp is not only used for academic purposes, but also to share administrative updates with students. WhatsApp enables teachers to connect their students with those who do not have direct contact with them such as registrar, advisor, and other administrative staff who may need to contact students immediately and cannot wait to do so through formal channels. The instancy of communication through WhatsApp facilitates dissemination of information.

#### 4.4. Providing Social Support

Social support is the feeling that a person is wanted, appreciated, and is a member of a particular group (Abidah, Hidaayatullaah, Simamora, Fehabutar, & Mutakinati, 2020). Adequate social support helps students feel embedded in a group or a class and reflects the relationship between students and teachers. WhatsApp is thus a potential source of social support, increasing the sense of belonging within a certain community (Zhang, Kim, Silverstein, Song, & Burr, 2021). In this study, all the teachers used WhatsApp to offer informational support, while 73% of them used WhatsApp to offer appraisal support. On the other hand, 60% of teachers used WhatsApp to offer emotional support.

The following excerpt illustrates how WhatsApp was used to offer social support.

Excerpt 4.7

*WhatsApp improves students' relationships and bonds. From their communications in WhatsApp, students are always active and willing to offer instant help; for example, sharing their summaries of lessons, reminding each other of deadlines and assignments and sharing narratives on how they improved their English. Also, my students and I use*



*WhatsApp to praise students' work. Praise and encouragement are necessary to students' motivation to learn and excel. I always offer praise to all the students, and I frequently see the students praise their peers work too. Another thing, my students and I use WhatsApp to express condolence to any group member who has lost a family member. Being there to show care helps the students becoming good friends. (T 25)*

As shown in the excerpt above, the teacher and the students offer different forms of social support. For instance, *sharing their summaries of lessons, reminding each other of deadlines and assignments* (line 3) is an example of informational support (Rashid, Rahman, & Rahman, 2016). *My students and I use WhatsApp to praise students' work* (line 5) is an example of appraisal support. *My students and I use WhatsApp to express condolence* (line 8) is an example of emotional support. These forms of social support foster a sense of belonging to the group, help students build rapport, impacts students' mental and physical wellness and enhances students' management of stress and difficult conditions (Jolly, Kong, & Kim, 2021). Appropriate support improves attitude and attachment; thus, improve students' performance (Minghui et al., 2018).

## 5. DISCUSSION

Technology and social media applications such as WhatsApp offer teachers and students ways to engage in a positive learning environment. These applications can facilitate collaborative learning, interaction, and communication in ways that were not possible before. Due to its potential, for example, flexibility, popularity, interactivity and authenticity, WhatsApp is a learning tool that enhances teachers and students' engagement in a positive learning environment. WhatsApp offers students more opportunities to interact with teachers and colleagues outside classroom walls, thus advancing and assisting learning. These interactions nurture innovative learning strategies which stimulate students' cognitive and social skills.

This study explored WhatsApp affordances for language learning as well as its role in promoting informal learning and interactions. This study identified four main affordances of WhatsApp in learning and teaching. First, WhatsApp affordances for developing speaking and writing skills. All the teachers involved in this study expressed that WhatsApp helped their students develop speaking and writing skills. WhatsApp engaged all students in learning, especially introverts and enabled them to write and speak at length. Through WhatsApp, students' individual differences and abilities were accommodated more easily than in traditional classrooms, thus students had more control of their learning, and they had more opportunities to showcase their achievements to class members. On the other hand, WhatsApp allowed teachers to track and keep records of students' progress, provide timely feedback, and monitor and facilitate collaborative learning activities. Thus, teachers could utilize the potential of WhatsApp as a learning tool.

Second, WhatsApp use promoted informal learning and interaction. Among the 30 teachers participating in this study, (83%) reported that WhatsApp helped promote students' interaction and informal learning. This finding may be explained by the idea that WhatsApp hosts student/s-student/s interactions and teacher-student/s interactions which are not always purely academic i.e., students use WhatsApp to talk and chat about news, sport events, jokes, and viral videos etcetera. These interactions by students result in new learning strategies that are consistent with the concept of social learning. It is in social interaction that information can become knowledge. Students' engagement in these topics enables them to exchange ideas, negotiate meaning, agree, disagree, and express feeling and personal views. Being able to engage in these activities requires students to use several linguistic forms and skills. The use of these linguistics forms stimulates students' cognitive and affective skills such as reasoning, remembering, responding, and valuing which all support learning and language improvement.

Third, WhatsApp use encouraged the exchange of information. All the teachers in this study agreed that WhatsApp was a handy and effective tool for sharing information. WhatsApp enabled them to share textbooks, handouts, supplementary materials, resources, and important dates to enhance and maximize students' learning potential. Using WhatsApp to share this data enabled students to access information effortlessly at their preferred

time. It also enabled teachers to connect with their students and ensure that important information is communicated and delivered to students; thus, saving teachers' time and effort. Fourth, this study made it evident that WhatsApp is a real source of social support. Social support is the perception that an individual is admired, cared for, and part of a mutually supportive network. In this study, all the teachers reported using WhatsApp to offer informational support, while 73% of them offered appraisal support, and 60% offered emotional support. WhatsApp can be used as a tool to improve students' social skills and create positive relationships with other students as well as teachers. WhatsApp is a tool to offer social support to students, thus promoting students' productivity, creativity, and mental and physical health. Students' social support is critical to reduce undesirable experiences and stress, enhancing the learning atmosphere, and reinforcing learning commitment and motivation, thus improving competence and performance (Burke, Aubusson, Schuck, Buchanan, & Prescott, 2015).

## 6. CONCLUSION

This study revealed how teachers perceived WhatsApp, the world's most used instant messaging app, as a tool to support learning and teaching. WhatsApp affords to improve language skills, particularly speaking and writing, it promotes informal learning and interactions, encourages the exchange of information, and serves as a platform to provide social support. WhatsApp saves teachers' time and enables them to offer instant feedback and support. WhatsApp also helps participants feel embedded within a group and provides students with opportunities to practice their target language, exchange ideas, engage in class activities and improve their language competence, especially introverts and those who need extra time to organize their thoughts to respond.

This study concludes that WhatsApp use enriches and boosts students' speaking and writing skills, nurtures positive students' attitude toward learning and empowers students to become independent learners. However, when using WhatsApp for language learning, there are several pedagogical recommendations to consider. Firstly, the teacher needs to set clear goals for what learners hope to achieve. This can help ensure that the conversations and activities on WhatsApp are focused and relevant to the learners' needs. Secondly, as WhatsApp conversations can be informal and unstructured, it is important to provide learners with guidance and structure to help them stay on track and achieve their goals. This can include providing learners with conversation prompts or questions or setting specific times for learners to check in with their conversation partners. Finally, while WhatsApp can be a great tool for getting real-time feedback and corrections, it is important to encourage learners to think critically and independently in the target language. Hence, giving sufficient wait-time and necessary support should be considered by the teacher so that learners can produce good output when interacting using an informal tool like WhatsApp.

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