Whatsapp Goes to Campus
Promoting Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) in Islamic Higher Education

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Abstract: One of the most favorable apps that is used by students in their mobile phone for chatting purposes is whatsapp (WA). There is a need to investigate this mobile application for MALL researchers in an effort to use WA that is geared toward education. This study is aimed at investigating WA which is tailored to support English language learning (ELL) activities. This study applied case study using observation as main instrument for gathering data. This study found that WA was significant in helping ELL activities since it was used by both students and teachers for ELL related activities. WA increased idea contribution among students and provided faster and easier communication with their peers. According to students, there were some advantages of using WA for their ELL activities: technical advantages, such as simple operation and low cost. These advantages enhanced learning opportunities outside classroom for students. To summarize, WA facilitated ELL activities as an effort toward MALL implementation which offers promising benefits in Indonesian Islamic higher education (IHE).

1 INTRODUCTION

WA has gained more attention from educational researchers because it offers technical benefits. It uses web 2.0 platform which may be used to establish conversation and relationship between teacher and students (Solomon and Schrum 2007), and performed better than conventional messaging service (Church and de Oliveira 2013). It can be considered as a communication platform with its characteristics that can be used as educational platform (Calvo, Arbiol and Iglesias 2014).

Several studies investigated WA use for education– related activities. WA was used to establish communication between teacher and students to support learning process (Bouhnik and Deshen 2014). It was deemed as the easiest platform to communicate between students and their teacher (Bere 2013). It improved student motivation and greater enthusiasm for reading activities in foreign language (Plana et al. 2013). It helped university students to improve their achievement in ELL (Ta'amneh, 2017).

To date, the studies concerning WA use in Indonesian Islamic higher education is rarely discussed. This study is intended to address this gap. This study seeks to explore how students and teachers use WA to assist ELL activities outside classroom.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Mobile- Assisted Language Learning (MALL)

The advancement of Internet and mobile devices have triggered mobile learning in educational institutions. Mobile learning is defined as the use of portable gadget in order to achieve educational objectives and the encouragement toward autonomous learner (Boy and Motteram 2013). In foreign language teaching and learning, researchers specifically have developed MALL which has been defined by many scholars. It requires the basic elements and characteristic in that the handheld device can be used anywhere and anytime to boost language learning (Ozdamlia and Cavusb 2011).

2.2 Whatsapp (WA) Application

WA has been a champion for messaging and texting service among worldwide users. It has several features, according to Cohavi (2013) that made whatsapp the strongest social media among other competitors. It gained 350 million users and deemed as the most downloaded application in 127 countries (Cohavi 2013).

There is a number of reasons why people adopt WA as their main communication channel rather than other applications (Church and de Oliveira 2013). WA offers low cost application yet it has the ability to send an unlimited number of messages. Moreover, Solomon and Schrum (2007) claimed that WA provides a conversation platform to everyone which allows the existence of a relationship among them (Solomon and Schrum 2007).

Some studies reported WA contribution for education. A Study revealed that the use of WA could help the students to share many things with the lecturer. In other words WA allows a two-way communication in a very short time (Hamidin, 2015). Other studies reported that WA encouraged learners to be active in their learning by maintaining interaction with their teachers (Cifuentes and Lents 2011). It cultivated sense of belonging and community and it overcame breakdown of teacher student social barriers (Doering et al. 2008). Other study reported that students tended to take writing assignments more seriously when they used WA to impress their peers (Sweeny 2010). WA has become a shared platform that enhances accessibility, encourages cooperation and intensifies motivation to take an active part in academic assignment (Chipunza 2013).

The above mentioned benefits of using WA has been made possible because of WA features. It has the following collaborative Features: 1) Multimedia; 2) Group Chat; 3) Unlimited Messaging; 4) Cross Platform Engagements; 5) Offline Messaging; 6) No Charges involved; 7) Pins and Users Name (Bere 2012).

2.3 Previous Research

A study examined WA use in South Africa and it reported positive feedback from students who claimed that WA helped to communicate with their teachers and the rest of the class (Bere 2013). In Spain, a study reported that student got better motivation and greater enthusiasm for reading in foreign language (Plana et al. 2013).

Other study found that WA is used for several main purposes. The participants in the study found that WA use for learning was interesting and educationally useful. They mentioned that WA increased their social interactivity with their peers and teacher. Their attitude toward WA for learning was favorable (Bansal and Joshi 2014).

The above studies have not discussed WA in Indonesian Islamic higher education context. In order to fill in the gap, this study tries to investigate WA use among students learning in Indonesian Islamic Higher education context.

3 RESEARCH METHOD

This study applied case study and it investigated how WA application was used out of the classroom by students and teachers. Participants took a part in this study were students belonged to first year of Islamic religion education in Tarbiyah Faculty UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung. There were 22 female and 20 male students. They studied English 1 subject in semester two.

This study applied observation and interview. It observed how WA was used by the teacher and students throughout English 1 subject especially for their interaction outside class. Interview is conducted to some students to investigate their comments on using WA. The data gathered were described and analyzed to achieve the objective of the study.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study found that WA was used by students to support ELL activities. WA was helpful in providing communication platform, nurturing community sense and maintaining communication atmosphere among students and teachers. This section describes findings from observation and interview concerning students' activity in using WA to support ELL activities.

4.1 Encouraging File Sharing among Students

This application was used as a means for sharing file among students. This happened when teacher shared file for classroom assignment then students shared the files to their friends/group. The assignment were usually given in form of PDF file. Other files that they exchanged were images and video that supported ELL activities. A student commented as follows:

"WA helped me to share file to my friends and it is good for me to support English learning"

This illustrated how students perceived WA as helpful application that support their ELL activities.

4.2 Providing Learning Platform

This study found that students learned better English since the application facilitated them to interact among their classmates, collaborate concerning exercise and task that they studied in the classroom. WA allowed files sharing that enabled them to discuss and practice English learning outside classroom. This is in line with student's comment as follows:

"*I can use WA not only for chatting but also for learning purpose because material sharing and discussion can be done in this application*"

This excerpt showed students' view that WA was capable of providing sphere where they can interact and collaborate on ELL activities.

4.3 Increasing Idea Contribution among Students

The application provided group chat and this allowed participation among students in the group to happen. Idea sharing among members of the group can be exchanged through this application when they discuss the assignment. This is in line with students' comment:

"*Since i bring mobile everywhere, my friends and I can share any ideas i have concerning English assignment*"

This comment showed that mobile phone with WA application encouraged mobility for learning where student could exchange their ideas to accomplish assignment.

4.4 Providing Faster and Easier Communication

WA application facilitated communication between students. Since the application is designed for messaging instant and chatting, student got faster and easier channel to collaborate using the application WA in English language learning. A student commented as follows:

"Compared to other chatting platform application and conventional messaging, i prefer WA for my communication purposes"

This comment revealed that students preferred WA compared to other messaging services in dealing with communication to accomplish their assignment.

4.5 Discussion

This study investigated WA use among students in ELL activities. The findings of this study are in line with Previous studies showing that researchers have positive attitude towards the adoption of Mobile Learning application in educational situations (Bere 2013; Bouhnik and Deshen 2014; Cochrane 2012)

Students in this study used WA for sharing file concerning ELL material. WA served as chatting platform and encouraged file sharing among them (Solomon and Schrum 2007). It is in line with the previous study conducted by Norfaezah (2015). In other words mobile phone with its application offered benefits to seize by EFL teachers (Yudhiantara and Nasir 2017).

This study found that WA served as learning platform for students since it facilitated students to learn everywhere. WA encouraged learners to be active in their studies (Cifuentes and Lents 2011). It cultivated students' sense of belonging and it overcame breakdown of teacher student social barriers (Doering et al. 2008).

Idea contribution among students happened in this study because of WA assistance. It had collaborative feature that allow students to collaborate on their task and assignments (Bere 2012). Students had deployed WA for various educational purposes in trying to accomplish several tasks in ELL.

5 CONCLUSIONS

MALL has offered some benefits for EFL teachers and learners. This study investigated an application called WA for educational purposes. To summarize, there were various activities done by students to deal with ELL for example collaboration with their peers in accomplishing tasks. This study provides insight for teachers in EFL teaching to integrate their mobile phone and seize WA application to support their ELL activities.

This study is qualitative in nature. Future study may apply experimental to investigate the effectiveness of WA use to support ELL.

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